Building Confidence through Intrinsic Rewards: The 'ASYIK' Model in Early English Education

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Abstract

This study examines the implementation of an intrinsic reward model, "ASYIK," in early English education to address low motivation and confidence among young learners in Indonesia. Conventional teacher-centered approaches and reliance on extrinsic rewards often limit engagement and long-term self-motivation in early childhood classrooms. Conducted at TK Kristen Caritas Ambon with 15 children aged 5–6, this qualitative descriptive study employed participatory observation, video documentation, and structured field notes. The ASYIK model was applied through three stages: Motivation (stimulating enthusiasm through rhymes and mini projects on prepositions of place), Action (interactive language practice), and Reward (self-praise in English such as "I can, I'm great, I succeed"). Thematic analysis focused on behavioral and linguistic changes. Findings show that the ASYIK model significantly enhanced children's confidence, intrinsic motivation, and mastery of prepositions of place in contextual and playful ways. It also fostered positive classroom interactions and socio-emotional growth. The study's novelty lies in integrating intrinsic self-praise expressions into English learning within a structured Motivation – Action – Reward framework. Theoretically, it contributes to education, language studies, and linguistics by linking intrinsic reward speech acts with character education, linguistic self-regulation, and affective engagement.

INTRODUCTION

English language learning for early childhood has gained increasing attention, particularly in developing countries that recognize the importance of early foreign language acquisition as preparation for globalization. However, field realities show that English instruction for children aged 5–6 remains largely dominated by conventional approaches emphasizing rote vocabulary memorization and one-way teacher instruction. These practices often position children as passive recipients rather than active and creative learners. As a result, children tend to lack confidence when asked to use English and even perceive the foreign language as a burden rather than a space for intellectual play. This issue becomes more critical because, at an early age, self-confidence and intrinsic motivation are in a formative stage that profoundly influences character development and language competence in later years (Laor, 2019; Ramdini & Yaswinda, 2021).

In Indonesia, reward patterns in early childhood education tend to emphasize extrinsic rewards such as physical gifts, stickers, or verbal praise from teachers. While these strategies may temporarily increase motivation, research indicates that long-term reliance on extrinsic rewards can undermine children's self-motivation (Hidayat et al., 2023; Shonfeld & Magen-Nagar, 2020). Children become accustomed to learning for the sake of rewards rather than for the joy of learning itself. Educational psychology has long emphasized the importance of intrinsic motivation as the foundation for sustainable learning (Bessa et al., 2021; Hong et al., 2023; Printer, 2023). Unfortunately, there has been little innovation in English language instruction for young learners that explicitly seeks to build intrinsic reward mechanisms through structured pedagogical strategies, particularly in Eastern Indonesia, such as Ambon, where related studies remain scarce.

Previous studies have made significant contributions to explaining the relationship between motivation, reward, and language learning. Gottlieb et al. (2022) and Rogaleva et al. (2019) affirm that motivation is a fundamental component determining the quality and outcomes of children's learning. Within the field of foreign language learning, Ach and Pollmann (2022) and Chereau and Meschi (2021) demonstrate how motivation shapes willingness to communicate and long-term success. Other studies by Avonts et al. (2023) and Pečiuliauskienė (2023) emphasize that English learning for early childhood must integrate cognitive, emotional, and social aspects, as children acquire languages through meaningful experiences involving bodily, emotional, and social interaction. Therefore, learning strategies that emphasize self-appreciation and internalized positive reinforcement are particularly relevant to develop.

Research on rewards in education also reveals diverse findings. Bello et al. (2023) and Murayama et al. (2019) explain that specific, sincere, and internalized praise fosters intrinsic motivation more effectively than general, externally oriented praise. Meanwhile, Carillo et al. (2023) and Riener & Wagner (2022), through their meta-analyses, show that excessive extrinsic rewards may actually decrease intrinsic motivation. These studies highlight the need to design reward models that not only motivate children in the short term but also build confidence and independent learning habits.

In the context of English language learning, several studies have highlighted the use of games, music, and movement as effective strategies. For example, Rosander et al. (2021) and Y. Zhang et al. (2019) show that songs and rhymes play a major role in helping children remember vocabulary and language structures. Aboramadan et al. (2019) and Krishnamurthy et al. (2022) add that combining physical and linguistic activities strengthens children's emotional engagement, making them more confident in using a foreign language. On the other hand, studies by Ferriz-Valero et al. (2020) and Gaalen et al. (2021) indicate that young children learn foreign languages more effectively when instruction focuses on positive experiences and small successes celebrated in class. However, most of these studies remain limited to playful or creative aspects and rarely link them to a coherent framework of intrinsic reward.

Indonesian studies, such as those by Aningsih et al. (2022) and Sari (2020), have mostly highlighted structural challenges in early English education, ranging from teacher competence and material availability to inconsistent education policies. While these issues are significant, such a focus often overlooks the psychological and pedagogical dimensions of children's motivation. Some local studies that attempt to address motivation in language learning, such as those by Hampp et al. (2021) and Mutiah et al. (2020), still emphasize external rewards such as prizes or inter-student competitions. Therefore, there remains a wide-open space to explore intrinsic reward as a pedagogical strategy.

These observations point to an underexplored research gap. While many studies on motivation and reward in early education exist, most still focus on extrinsic aspects or on fun activities without systematically connecting them to an intrinsic reward framework. Moreover, local contexts such as Ambon are rarely examined, despite having distinctive educational dynamics, limited resources but rich in potential innovation. This is where the present study situates itself: to introduce an intrinsic reward model that is simple, enjoyable, yet meaningful for young children, particularly in English language learning.

The "ASYIK" model proposed in this study aims to bridge this need. Drawing on the Motivation–Action–Reward framework (Mike, 2014), children are encouraged to build self-confidence through self-praise expressions such as "I can," "I'm great," and "I succeed." Rather than relying on external rewards, they learn to celebrate their achievements internally, in the target language they are acquiring. This approach addresses not only linguistic dimensions but also psychological and socio-emotional aspects.

Accordingly, this study aims to describe the implementation of the ASYIK model in early English language learning, analyze its contribution to enhancing children's motivation and confidence, and identify behavioral changes that emerge. These objectives affirm the study's contribution to offering a new approach in early childhood English pedagogy, an approach not only oriented toward cognitive outcomes but also toward building character, confidence, and intrinsic motivation that endure throughout life.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach because its primary goal was to understand the learning processes and participants' experiences in a natural context, rather than to measure experimental effects. A qualitative approach enables the researcher to capture linguistic, affective, and social nuances of children's interactions that are often overlooked by quantitative instruments, a need consistent with methodological recommendations for educational and child development studies (Bryda & Costa, 2023; Eichstaedt et al., 2021).

The research was conducted at TK Kristen Caritas Ambon (KG-2 class), intentionally selected as it provided access to a critical age group (5–6 years old) in Eastern Indonesia, a region with limited prior research, thus allowing for observation of culturally and practically distinctive English learning practices. Collaboration with teachers and parents at the school also enabled ethical and sustainable participatory observation during the research period in

January 2023.

The main participants were 15 children aged 5–6 years in the KG-2 class. The number and selection of participants were purposive, as the focus was on describing classroom dynamics rather than statistical generalization. In addition to the children, the classroom teacher and two parents served as supporting informants, providing contextual perspectives on behavioral changes and attendance during the intervention. Participant selection was based on several criteria: appropriate age, consistent attendance during the observation period, and parental/teacher consent for participation, an approach consistent with purposive sampling principles in qualitative research (Abfalter et al., 2021; Salah et al., 2023).

Data collection procedures were designed to capture actions, utterances, and emotional expressions in a multimodal manner. Participant observation served as the primary method, allowing the researcher to engage in classroom activities, record natural interactions, and occasionally mediate activities when necessary, in line with educational ethnographic practice (Naeem et al., 2023; Stutterheim & Ratcliffe, 2021). Video documentation (class recordings via Zoom and parental submissions) preserved visual–auditory evidence for reanalysis of nonverbal behaviors and language repetition, while structured observation sheets and anecdotal notes captured key moments, response changes, and examples of self-praise utterances. Semi-structured interviews with the teacher and brief confirmations with parents supplemented the data with reflective perspectives on continuity of learning at home. The combination of these techniques was chosen to minimize single-source bias and enrich qualitative insights (Grossmann et al., 2023; Macintyre et al., 2019).

Data were analyzed thematically, following procedures of open coding, thematic categorization, and interpretive meaning analysis (Bryda & Costa, 2023; Phillips, 2023). To enhance credibility, triangulation was implemented through several strategies: (1) data source triangulation (children, teacher, parents); (2) methodological triangulation (observation, video documentation, interviews, class documents); and (3) analyst triangulation through peer debriefing with fellow researchers to discuss emerging codes and themes (Eichstaedt et al., 2021). Additionally, the researcher applied reflexivity, documenting positionality and influence during observation to ensure interpretations remained both rational and ethical.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Enhancing Children's Self-Confidence

Self-confidence is one of the most crucial dimensions in early childhood language learning. The findings from TK Kristen Caritas Ambon clearly demonstrate that the implementation of the ASYIK model, emphasizing self-praise expression, brought significant behavioral transformation among children in their use of English during classroom interactions. Initially, most children tended to remain silent when the teacher asked simple questions such as "Where is the toy?", responding only through gestures or by pointing at the intended object. However, after several cycles of the motivation–action–reward process, a

notable transformation occurred. Children began confidently articulating new vocabulary items such as on, in, and under, often without waiting for the teacher's assistance. Some children who initially repeated words in a low voice started pronouncing them aloud, signaling the internalization of self-confidence.

This transformation became more evident when children were encouraged to engage in self-praise using expressions such as "I can, I'm great, I succeed." Field observations revealed visible pride in their facial expressions while uttering these sentences. For instance, one child (initial N), who often looked down and avoided speaking during the first few days, gradually lifted their head and smiled while performing self-praise in front of classmates. According to the classroom teacher, this simple expression allowed the children to feel appreciated by themselves rather than merely validated by the teacher. This statement confirms that self-reward exerts a distinct psychological effect compared to externally provided rewards.

Further observations indicated that the children did not simply repeat the self-praise phrases as a routine but began to internalize them into their daily attitudes. During one session, after successfully answering a question, a child spontaneously tapped their chest and smiled proudly, even without the teacher's prompt. This behavior suggests the formation of a positive self-relationship, a condition that Lan and Hew (2020) and L. Zhang et al. (2022) identify as essential to affective engagement. These scholars emphasize that affective involvement and self-belief constitute the foundation for sustained participation in learning. Within this study's context, the ASYIK model provided space for children to experience joy from their achievements, thereby reinforcing self-confidence.

Self-confidence was also closely tied to children's willingness to communicate. Generally, young learners acquire language not merely through memorization but through interaction and the courage to speak. Confident children tend to take more initiative to communicate, even with limited linguistic resources. This finding aligns with the willingness to communicate framework, which highlights self-confidence as a key affective predictor of readiness to use a foreign language (Annamalai et al., 2023; Noels et al., 2019; Trigueros et al., 2019). In this study, after several motivation–action–reward cycles, children not only waited for turns but began volunteering to answer questions. Some even practiced new vocabulary while playing with peers outside formal sessions.

Interview excerpts with the classroom teacher corroborate this trend. The teacher reported that previously passive children began showing noticeable progress. For example, a child (initial R), who used to respond only when called upon, started eagerly volunteering answers. The teacher reflected that the simple act of self-praise empowered children to feel they were their own source of validation rather than relying solely on adults. This experience is critical, as early childhood is a period of active self-concept formation. Hence, the ASYIK model positioned children as active agents in affirming their own abilities.

Classroom observation also revealed that the physical and emotional environment contributed to confidence building. The room, decorated with mini furniture created by the children, fostered a sense of ownership toward the learning space. When asked to respond

to "Where is the toy?" while pointing to their handmade objects, an emotional link emerged between the child, the object, and the language. For example, one child proudly pointed to a small cardboard chair they had made and replied, "The toy is on the chair." The sense of ownership over the object reinforced self-confidence because the context was personally meaningful.

Data analysis suggests that behavioral transformation was not merely the result of repeated activities but stemmed from consistent affective reinforcement. Grasse et al. (2022) and Makransky & Petersen (2021) explain that affective engagement encompasses emotional involvement, motivation, and self-efficacy that collectively foster meaningful participation. The present findings substantiate this framework in practice: when children were given the opportunity to celebrate their success through self-praise, their positive emotions increased, self-belief was strengthened, and their learning engagement deepened.

Moreover, the self-confidence developed through the ASYIK model extended beyond English sessions into broader classroom dynamics. Several children who initially avoided speaking in front of peers began to do so voluntarily, receiving supportive responses from classmates. According to the teacher, this created a cheerful and inclusive classroom climate where children encouraged one another in expressing intrinsic rewards. This suggests that individual confidence growth also produced positive social ripple effects, generating a collaborative and joyful learning environment.

Fostering Intrinsic Motivation in Language Learning

One of the key findings in this study concerns the observable shift in children's motivation, from dependence on external rewards to deriving internal satisfaction through intrinsic motivation. Initially, children awaited praise or tangible rewards such as stickers before feeling proud of their achievements. Yet, as the ASYIK model was implemented, they began exhibiting genuine joy and pride after successfully pronouncing new vocabulary or answering correctly without help. This was clearly visible when a child smiled widely after saying "on the table" aloud, then spontaneously exclaimed, "I can!" without looking toward the teacher for approval. Such moments signify the internalization of learning motivation that no longer depends on external validation but arises from authentic self-accomplishment.

This observation aligns with Barrable and Arvanitis's (2019) theory of basic psychological needs, competence, autonomy, and relatedness. In early childhood language learning, competence emerges when children feel capable of using new words correctly, while autonomy appears as they initiate language use without explicit instruction. A participating teacher confirmed that children seemed to enjoy the learning process more when given opportunities for self-praise. The teacher remarked that the inner sense of satisfaction made children "learn not for the teacher's stars, but because they felt proud to speak English correctly." This finding indicates a dominance of intrinsic motivation, which forms the foundation for long-term engagement.

Field observations support this interpretation. During one activity involving toy placement games (e.g., "on the table," "under the chair"), after correctly answering "Where is the toy?", a child confidently said, "I'm great!" Interestingly, even without applause or

tangible rewards, the child smiled proudly. The same behavior was later mirrored spontaneously by peers, creating a lively classroom atmosphere. The environment became joyful not due to promised external incentives but because the children found happiness in their own accomplishments. Such moments demonstrate that intrinsic motivation can generate a warm, enthusiastic, and positively charged learning climate.

This motivational shift, from extrinsic to intrinsic, marks a critical point in understanding sustainable early English education. While extrinsic rewards are effective at initial stages for building habits or attracting attention, their influence tends to fade once rewards are removed. Intrinsic motivation, conversely, is rooted in the joy of learning and a sense of mastery. When children derive personal satisfaction from pronouncing new words correctly, they become self-driven learners, continuing to practice even outside formal settings. One parent noted that their child often used English vocabulary during playtime at home and even exclaimed "I succeed!" after completing a block-building task. This suggests that self-satisfaction transcends classroom boundaries and becomes integrated into everyday life.

Furthermore, the findings highlight the long-term relevance of intrinsic motivation for language development. Early childhood represents a critical stage of cognitive and affective growth, where enjoyable learning experiences form lasting linguistic foundations. When intrinsic motivation is nurtured, children learn not to meet external demands but to enjoy the learning process itself. Barrable and Arvanitis (2019) emphasize that fulfilling needs for competence and autonomy enhances consistent and deep engagement. In this context, engagement encompasses not just physical presence but curiosity, exploration, and the courage to make mistakes as part of learning.

Empirical observations reinforce this. During the final session, several children eagerly competed to answer the teacher's questions first, even without any offered reward. They displayed enthusiasm, frequently raised their hands, and showed no embarrassment over minor errors. The teacher noted in her observation log that "the children seemed more spontaneous in responding, no longer waiting passively for their turn." This finding confirms that intrinsic motivation not only fosters confidence but also drives sustained active participation. Thus, intrinsic motivation functions as a key mechanism that builds willingness to learn and strengthens willingness to communicate in second-language acquisition from an early age.

From a theoretical perspective, these outcomes underscore the importance of affective dimensions often neglected in traditional, structure-oriented approaches to language learning. As Power and Goodnough (2019) assert, affective engagement, anchored in self-belief and positive emotion, constitutes the foundation of meaningful learning. Children who are affectively engaged are more willing to take risks, try new things, and persist in the face of challenges. Through this lens, the ASYIK model demonstrates that nurturing self-confidence and intrinsic motivation is not peripheral but central to early language education that aims to shape lifelong learners.

Contextual Vocabulary Mastery (Prepositions of Place)

In the process of early childhood English learning, mastering contextual vocabulary emerges as both a challenge and an opportunity that can foster deep engagement. Findings from this study reveal that children were able to use prepositions of place such as on, in, and under in real-life contexts rather than merely memorizing the words in isolation. Through mini-furniture play activities designed by the teacher and the use of rhymes accompanied by physical movement, children not only learned to recognize the meaning of words but also understood their appropriate use in context. For example, when the teacher asked, "Where is the toy?", the child could spontaneously respond, "On the table," while pointing to the toy placed on the table. Such responses illustrate a direct connection between language, experience, and bodily action, leading to contextual rather than mechanical understanding.

The use of rhymes proved to be an effective strategy in helping children remember vocabulary. The teacher composed a simple rhyme such as "On the table, under the chair, in the box everywhere," while inviting the children to perform movements corresponding to the words. Observations showed that children were more enthusiastic when learning this way, with some even repeating the rhyme outside of class hours. When asked about the impact of rhymes, one teacher informant stated that children tended to recall words faster when accompanied by physical movements, as the experience felt enjoyable and memorable. The teacher added that children often mimicked the movements while repeating the words, even when not prompted. This finding aligns with the concept of embodied cognition, which emphasizes that the body, emotions, and language are interconnected in the learning process (Alessandri et al., 2020). By involving physical movement, children processed vocabulary not only cognitively but also kinesthetically and affectively.

Classroom observations during the implementation of the ASYIK model further demonstrated how contextual learning enhances children's engagement. In one session, the teacher divided the children into small groups to play with the homemade mini furniture. They were asked to place a small chair under the toy table and say, "Under the table." In a cheerful atmosphere, the children eagerly competed to answer aloud. The teacher noted that their facial expressions showed satisfaction each time they succeeded, without waiting for any external reward. Such learning experiences created a more natural and communicative environment in which language was learned not as a set of foreign words to memorize, but as a tool for interacting with real objects and situations around them.

One parent informant, Mrs. M., reported that her child often practiced the same vocabulary while playing at home. According to her, the child would put a toy into a box and exclaim excitedly, "In the box!" This testimony shows that the vocabulary learned in school transferred into daily life, strengthening the child's long-term memory. This finding also indicates that contextual learning is more effective than rote memorization, as children not only recall words symbolically but also associate them with recurring real-life experiences. Within the framework of embodied cognition, language memory becomes stronger when accompanied by concrete sensorimotor experiences because the brain processes language alongside bodily and emotional experiences (Oppl & Stary, 2022).

Field observations support this data. Out of fifteen children in the class, ten showed significant improvement in mastering the vocabulary on, in, and under consistently. They were able to answer the teacher's questions independently, enthusiastically recite the rhymes, and use the vocabulary beyond the formal learning context. However, several children were unable to fully participate due to limited attendance during the pandemic period. The teacher gave them additional attention and support to prevent learning gaps. Although their progress was slower than the other ten, they still showed improvement over time. The teacher's observation notes stated that "children who participated regularly were more confident in using new vocabulary, while those who were often absent needed more encouragement." This finding highlights that regular exposure to contextual learning experiences has a strong influence on language learning outcomes.

This phenomenon underscores the fundamental difference between contextual learning and rote memorization. In memorization-based approaches, children are typically asked to repeat words multiple times without meaningful context, which often leads to boredom and disengagement. Conversely, when vocabulary is introduced through play and physical activities, children become emotionally and cognitively involved. They do not merely remember the words—they bring them to life through action. As one teacher noted, "Children love to learn while moving, singing, and playing. Memorization alone makes them quickly bored, and the words don't last long in memory." This statement reinforces the idea that language should be taught in lively and meaningful situations rather than abstractly.

From a theoretical standpoint, contextual learning that integrates rhymes, games, and physical movement represents a concrete application of embodied cognition. This theory rejects the notion that language is purely a mental process detached from the body; instead, it posits that linguistic meaning is formed through bodily experience, social interaction, and emotional engagement (Chen et al., 2021). Thus, when children point to a table while saying "on the table," they are not merely producing words—they are linking language to a tangible sensorimotor experience. Such experiences deepen vocabulary mastery, preparing children to use language more effectively in broader communicative contexts.

Positive Classroom Atmosphere and Socio-Emotional Growth

The classroom atmosphere shaped by the implementation of the ASYIK model demonstrated a distinctive dynamic compared to conventional teaching patterns. Teachers expressed joy in seeing children dare to answer questions, pronounce new vocabulary, and appreciate themselves. This joy reflected not only professional satisfaction but also an emotional connection with the children's learning process. In reflective interviews, the teacher described feeling "relieved and proud" when previously quiet children began raising their hands to answer. Such experiences strengthened the teacher's belief that intrinsic-reward-based approaches have great potential to transform classroom climate positively. The children appeared to share this sentiment. When they successfully uttered simple affirmations such as "I can, I'm great, I succeed," their faces lit up with smiles, their posture relaxed, and their voices grew louder. This behavior suggests that self-appreciation cultivates a deeper sense of fulfillment than external praise or tangible rewards.

This phenomenon created what can be described as a happy circulation between teacher and children. When teachers saw children perform confidently, they felt delighted, and that joy was reflected back to the children through positive responses. The children, sensing emotional support, became more motivated to participate, thereby strengthening emotional bonds within the classroom. Field observations captured these moments vividly. In one session, a typically shy child confidently said, "Under the chair," while demonstrating with a toy. The teacher smiled widely, and the other children enthusiastically echoed the response. The classroom atmosphere became vibrant, cheerful, and rich in positive interaction. In such conditions, participation arose not from obligation but from a sense of comfort and emotional safety.

The role of intrinsic rewards in creating a positive classroom climate proved crucial. Instead of relying on external rewards like stickers or candy, intrinsic rewards in the form of self-praise helped children internalize a sense of competence and self-worth. This aligns with the positive education approach, which integrates emotional well-being as an essential part of the learning process (H. Zhang & Huang, 2023). Positive education emphasizes not only academic outcomes but also character development, happiness, and healthy social relationships. In this context, intrinsic rewards serve as a medium to foster emotional well-being by allowing children to feel capable and valued from within. Teachers who recognized this significance noted that when children said, "I succeed," they were affirming a positive identity that forms the foundation of long-term confidence.

Further observations showed that the positive classroom atmosphere also contributed to children's socio-emotional development. They learned not only to appreciate themselves but also to support their peers. During one session, when a child answered correctly, others clapped and repeated the same word. This behavior reflected social growth in empathy, solidarity, and a sense of togetherness. The teacher reported that the children began to emulate this appreciation pattern outside language learning contexts, such as during playtime. Hence, intrinsic rewards not only enhanced linguistic competence but also cultivated healthier, more cooperative, and emotionally supportive social interactions.

Theoretically, these findings contribute to the development of motivation theory in early childhood education. The ASYIK model demonstrates that intrinsic motivation is not only relevant in adult academic settings but can be nurtured from an early age through simple language and daily practice. Thus, this study expands the application of motivation theory by emphasizing self-praise as an effective speech act supporting children's self-regulation. Linguistically, the study highlights that expressions like "I can" or "I'm great" are not merely sentence structures but pedagogical tools integrating cognitive, affective, and social dimensions. By using the target language (English) for self-appreciation, children simultaneously learn and construct a positive identity as language learners.

Practically, these findings strongly align with Indonesia's Merdeka Curriculum, which emphasizes meaningful learning, character development, and student well-being. The ASYIK model embodies these principles by providing opportunities for joyful, meaningful learning that supports both linguistic and emotional growth. Teachers in this model do not merely

teach language; they facilitate the development of confidence, empathy, and self-respect. This is vital for early childhood education, which aims not only to teach academic skills but also to build the foundation of character and personality.

At a broader theoretical level, this conceptualization relates to the discourse on language education for well-being, which asserts that language learning should encompass emotion, motivation, and positive identity formation (Buzinde, 2020). In other words, language learning success should not be measured solely by the number of words children master but by how learning enhances their emotional well-being and self-confidence. Within this framework, the ASYIK model plays a pivotal role as an innovation that bridges linguistic competence with affective development. The intrinsic reward of self-praise acts as a bridge between language mastery and positive identity formation, making learning more sustainable and meaningful.

Field observations during the final weeks reinforced this conclusion. Children not only mastered new vocabulary but also displayed greater confidence in interaction—they raised their hands more often, spoke more assertively, and appeared more cheerful during class sessions. Teachers, in turn, exhibited warmer and more patient attitudes. The classroom was filled with laughter, clapping, and mutual expressions of satisfaction. Such a learning environment illustrates how intrinsic rewards can spark a healthy, emotionally positive, and socio-emotionally supportive classroom atmosphere.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the implementation of the ASYIK model in early childhood English learning effectively addresses low motivation and self-confidence through more sustainable means than external-reward-based approaches. Through the Motivation–Action–Reward framework, children not only improved their mastery of contextual vocabulary but also developed confidence through self-appreciation. The self-praise process integrated in the Reward stage functioned as a linguistic instrument that supported self-regulation and fostered positive character, consistent with language education approaches emphasizing emotion and affective engagement. These findings indicate that the ASYIK model is not merely a pedagogical strategy but a conceptual contribution linking intrinsic rewards to language development, motivation, and socio-emotional growth. As such, it contributes to the advancement of motivation theory in early childhood education and aligns with the Merdeka Curriculum's orientation toward meaningful learning and character formation.

ETHICAL STATEMENT AND DISCLOSURE

This study was conducted in accordance with established ethical principles, including informed consent, protection of informants' confidentiality, and respect for local cultural values. Special consideration was given to participants from vulnerable groups to ensure their safety, comfort, and equal rights to participate. No external funding was received, and the authors declare no conflict of interest. All data and information presented were collected through valid research methods and have been verified to ensure their accuracy and reliability. The use of artificial intelligence (AI) was limited to technical assistance for writing

and language editing, without influencing the scientific substance of the work. The authors express their gratitude to the informants for their valuable insights, and to the anonymous reviewers for their constructive feedback on an earlier version of this manuscript. The authors take full responsibility for the content and conclusions of this article.

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