

**The Role of Parents in Enhancing Children's English Skills:
Evidence from Indonesia**

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Abstract

In the globalization era, English has been an international language spoken by people throughout the world. To deal with this, English teaching has been conducted in educational sectors. Besides, parents play a main role in enhancing students' English skills. The present study aims to elaborate on the role of parents in developing students' English skills. This study is anchored in a qualitative case study method. The data were collected through semi-structured interviews with five Indonesian mothers aged 34 to 39 years. An interview guide was used as an instrument of the study to assist the authors during the process of the interview including support and roles provided by the parents in enhancing their English learning and some challenges they found. The findings reveal that Indonesian parents particularly mothers have roles in helping the success of their children's English learning including facilitating children in accessing English learning resources, introducing English through daily interaction, facilitating children with English courses, and accompanying children in learning English at home. However, they also experienced some barriers to doing their roles such as the lack of knowledge in English, lack of English exposure in the community, and the need for being up to date with technological advancement. This study presents an implication that the need for parents to provide simultaneous efforts for enhancing a better linguistic environment at home and the need for collaborations from all aspects including school and society.

Keywords: challenges, educational sector, Indonesian parents, English skills

INTRODUCTION

Due to the crucial role of English in global communication, it becomes the universal language up to the present time (da Silva, 2014; Ilyosovna, 2020). In addition, some countries have positioned English as their second language after the national language. In the Indonesian context, Indonesia is a country that uses English as a foreign language. Indonesian students have been officially taught English since they were in elementary school to higher education. However, the curriculum of English in Indonesian elementary schools has not been mandated by the government. In other words, teachers have been allowed to set up the curriculum of English subjects in the elementary school context. Nonetheless, English is categorized as one of the subjects examined in the national examination at secondary school levels.

With regard to it, Indonesia has been trying to introduce English to its generation as a foreign language (Lauder, 2008). Nevertheless, Indonesia is still ranked 80th among 100 countries and provinces according to English Proficiency Index (Ilyosovna, 2020). This shows that the English language skills of Indonesian people need improvement. There are several factors influencing this fact. These include various languages spoken by Indonesian people, lack of exposure to English, lack of facilities, lack of confidence, and so forth (Wahyuningsih & Afandi, 2020; Wahyuningsih & Maisyanah, 2021).

In responding to these challenges, educators have played a pivotal role in enhancing English students' skills through several efforts in the process of teaching and learning in the classroom. This can be conducted by providing a better learning environment in English language teaching, providing sufficient English materials from various sources, using appropriate teaching methods and media, and giving more exposure to using English (Wahyuningsih & Afandi, 2022). Apart from teachers, parents have roles in developing children education particularly in English ability since the duties of educating children needs support from several aspects. In addition, the involvement of parents in children's education plays a meaningful impact on the success of students (Robles-Goodwin et al., 2023). More importantly, teaching children at an early age may promote more positive benefit and develop awareness of multicultural communication including introducing a foreign language compared to older ones (Lucas et al., 2021). Moreover, using various learning methods and approaches are badly needed to trigger children's motivation to learn English (Lipka & Siegel, 2007).

Numerous studies in line with the parents' involvement toward the children education have been undertaken by some previous scholars. Warde (2007) compared the role of English-speaking Caribbean parents and African-American parents in caring their children's education. The finding of the study reveals that there were no any apparent differences between these parents regarding their voices towards the parents' responsibilities on children's education. Likewise, Zellman et al. (2014) in their study elaborate on how parents in Morocco perceive their voices related to the responsibility in enhancing the children's success in education. Their findings depict that they position themselves as nurturers for children. However, they did not play more as a teacher or educator for the children. In responding to this finding, they need to emphasize on their role as the first teachers for the children's education in the family context. Furthermore, Atzaba-Poria & Pike (2005) examined on how children from Indian ethnicity in Britain show more challenges than their friends viewed from parents' involvement resulting that parental involvement and social enhancement play a pivotal role on children's internalizing challenges. In a more specific way, Butler (2015) investigated the impact of parental involvement towards children's English learning motivation in China. The

findings demonstrate that parents play a great role in triggering motivation of the children in English. Interestingly, parents with high social status tend to promote more chance for children to utilize English outside compared to parents with low social status.

Having a look at the above elaborations, studies on examining parents' role as mediator and nurturer for children have been conducted by some previous scholars. However, studies reporting the roles of parents in enhancing children in learning English particularly in the Indonesian context have not been portrayed yet. Therefore, the present study elaborates on parents' role in enhancing children's English skills in Indonesia and its challenges.

METHOD

The present study mainly attempts to explore the role of parents in enhancing children's English skills in the context of Indonesian families. This study is anchored in a qualitative case study method. Creswell (2009), reported that the qualitative case study deals with the approach which emphasizes on an experience, place, setting, time and others by adopting inductive ways in obtaining, analyzing and interpreting the data in accordance with the roles of parents in Indonesia in enhancing their children English learning and challenges they experienced during accompanying them learning English.

Data from the study were gathered through semi-structured interviews with five mothers from Indonesian families identified as Mother 1, Mother 2, Mother 3, Mother 4, and Mother 5. Adopting semi-structured interviews, we could gain in-depth data through the open-ended response from the Indonesian mothers. They are all around 34-39 years old. They were selected for the sake of availability, accessibility, and openness. For the educational background, Mother 1, Mother 3, and Mother 4 are graduates, and Mother 2 is Bachelor. Meanwhile, Mother 5 is a high school graduate. We used an interview guide as the instrument of this study which functions as guide when conducting interviews related to the parents' role in fostering children's English learning and the challenges. Before undertaking the interviews, we gain the permission from the participants by explaining the purpose of our interview related to their role in enhancing the children's English learning.

Interviews were used to collect data from February to March 2023. Their names have been changed to protect their privacy. As a result, to gather more information, we sent a WhatsApp message requesting additional information. We transcribed the recorded interview data as they analyzed the data to improve the process of data reduction and coding. We were constantly reviewing the transcription of the interview data while they conducted a deeper analysis to reach the main conclusion.

Furthermore, the data analysis process employed Widodo (2014) recommended strategies such as multiple listens to a recording, accurate transcription by multiple readings of interview transcripts to gain a thorough understanding of the participants' stories, data interpretation by interpreting each participant's words, communication about whether the data accurately reflect the participant's intent, and engaging data credibility by soliciting participant feasibilities.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The Role of Parents in Enhancing Children's English Skills

Besides teachers, parents have responsibilities and roles in enhancing their children's education including English skills. The findings in this research showed that the roles of parents in enhancing children's English Skills are to facilitate children in accessing

English learning resources, to introduce English through daily interaction, to facilitate children with English courses, to accompany children in learning English at home. Having interviewed five Indonesian mothers, the role of parents in fostering their children's English skills includes the following points.

Facilitating children in accessing English learning resources

English learning sources are one of the crucial elements in enhancing children's English skills. Therefore, some parents in Indonesia provide facilities for their children in accessing learning resources. Based on the interviews, they reported that English learning sources can be accessed from various ways including the internet, YouTube, video, books, songs, and so on. In addition, they provide internet connection for their children to access English materials from the internet. As has been proven through the following excerpts:

Mother 1:

"I always support my students in learning English. This could be done in several ways including providing internet connection and English materials like conversation with my girl. She is 17 years old. So, she can access English sources from the internet. Meanwhile, my boy is an elementary school student. So, I accompany him to study English from books, YouTube, Videos, songs, and so on"

Mother 3:

"I facilitate my children in accessing English sources. For instance, I always accompany my children to study English on the internet like YouTube, and English nursery rhymes. We sing English songs together and learn English vocabulary".

Mother 4:

"I accompany my son to learn English when he had homework from school. I helped him translate English sentences into Indonesian. Then, I asked him to answer the questions given by his English teacher. In addition, I gave some reviews of English materials given by his teacher at home to know whether he understands or not".

The above elaborations reveal that parents have played a paramount role in enhancing students' English learning. In this matter, the collaboration between parents and teacher's role is crucial for improving English ability among students (Vuorinen, 2018). In addition, the finding of this study is strengthened by the study conducted by Lefevre et al., (2002) reporting that parental role and participation played a crucial role in children's learning including learning English. In more detail, parents' involvement in enhancing and facilitating children learning is badly needed by children in early childhood education, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Introducing English through Daily Interaction

One of the ways to enhance children's English skills is by interacting with them using English in daily conversation. Most of the Indonesian mothers reported that they introduced some basics English expressions to interact with their children. This is proven by the following excerpts.

Mother 2:

“I sometimes practice speaking English using basic English expressions like greeting: good morning, good afternoon, good evening, good night. In addition, I also used expressions of gratitude and apology like ‘thank you, thanks, sorry, and so on. Moreover, I also asked my children to mention numbers in English”.

Mother 4:

“I somehow use English conversation with my daughter. She is a high school student and she likes speaking English. She likes listening to English songs and movies. Therefore, I sometimes speak English with her in daily conversation”.

The above elaborations show that building daily interaction using English is beneficial for enhancing children’s English learning. They can learn how to pronounce English words and mention English vocabulary. Furthermore, they can practice speaking English. In this matter, the practice of learning English is the first learning experience by children where parents especially mothers are the first teacher of their children. In other words, the home is a children’s earliest learning environment, in which parents or guardians serve as the children’s first teachers and play a significant role in student academic performance (Robles-Goodwin et al., 2023). More importantly, building better communication with children will develop their motivation and pursue them to be more encouraged to learn English (Mustafa & Ahmad, 2017). As a result, finding a strong relationship between parental contribution and children’s motivation is needed (Sugita-McEown & McEown, 2019). This can be done by building interaction with children by learning basic greetings like hello, good morning, good evening, and so on (Lucas et al., 2021).

However, it may not be easy for children to build English interaction with their peers and neighborhoods since they have acquired their mother tongue and few English skills. This challenge is experienced by children in China children tend to use their mother tongue in interacting with their friends in the community (Hu et al., 2014). Therefore, the role of parents and teachers for children in learning language cannot be neglected. Children tend to be responsive to the environment and they can learn various languages. Thus, teachers should utilize this chance and have appropriate methods, approaches, and strategies to promote successful learning (Mustafa & Ahmad, 2017).

The need to provide English facilities is strengthened by Sulistiyo et al. (2020) portraying English teaching and learning in the context of Indonesian elementary schools. Their findings offer the implication for the need to have an official curriculum in Indonesian elementary schools and improve English teaching quality. Likewise, Ng (2016) elaborates on the implementation of reforming English in Japanese elementary schools resulting that several factors hinder the process of reforming English in Japanese elementary schools including lack of time in the English curriculum, lack of teachers’ confidence in teaching English, and lack of sociolinguistic community support in learning English. In similar context, Slapac (2021) reports the ways of developing the global competency of students in Romania through empowering English learning.

Facilitating children with English courses

Based on the result of interviews, some Indonesian mothers pinpoint that facilitating children with English courses has played an essential role to support English

children's skills. Most of them sent their children to some English courses both private and public courses. This is evidenced by the following excerpts:

Mother 1:

"I have facilitated my children to access English courses. I supported them to study English with an English tutor around my home since I realize that I am not an English teacher. So, I need to support my children to study English with a tutor".

Mother 3:

"Facilitating an English course is one of the ways to enhance my child's English skills. I support her to join the English course provided by the school. I also ask her to study English with the English instructor living near my house. The materials include grammar, speaking, and listening".

The elaborations depict that facilitating children with English courses has benefited children to improve their intellectual confidence and pursue them to have a relationship with friends and other members. As has been reported by Smith (2010) that English learning communities can be realized through courses.

Accompanying children in learning English at home

Some Indonesian mothers having children aged 7 -10 years old in elementary schools accompanied their children in learning English at home. This can be done by accompanying their children to learn English at home. This is proven by the following excerpts:

Mother 2:

"I tried to accompany my son to learn English at home. For instance, I always check the materials of English given by his teacher. Besides, I help him do his English assignment at home".

Mother 3:

"I accompany my children to study English at home. This can be done by facilitating English learning platforms from the internet like English videos, and English songs from YouTube and other social media. By accompanying them, I can introduce them to some English vocabulary including numbers, fruits, parts of the body, kinds of professions, and so on".

Meanwhile, Mother 5 reported that she had difficulties accompanying her children due to business. She did not have much time to monitor or accompany her children to study English since she had to work full-time and her limited knowledge of English. Therefore, the quality of time accompanying her children to study at home is less effective. This is evidenced by the following excerpts:

Mother 5:

"I do not have much time to accompany my children to study English at home since I have to work in a factory full-time. Besides, I have no English knowledge background. Thus, it is difficult for me to accompany and guide my children to study English at home. However, I support their study by providing internet sources for learning English through videos, songs, and so on".

The rapid development of technology has urged parents to adopt it in accompanying their children's learning. They should increase their awareness of the importance of learning English in today's era with the help of technology. As strengthened by previous scholars that technology nowadays has a major role to support learning (Wahyuningsih & Afandi, 2022; Wahyuningsih & Afandi 2023; Wahyuningsih, 2018). However, it may not be easy for parents to utilize technology and access English learning sources due to their lack of knowledge of English particularly for mothers whose educational background is not English. Therefore, the need for providing some training like workshops and seminars to parents provided by educational institutions and the government.

Challenges of Parents in Developing Children's English Skills

Some Indonesian parents have challenges in developing their children's English skills. These challenges include a lack of English knowledge, a lack of English exposure in the community, and the need for being up-to-date with technological advancement.

Lack of English knowledge

Having a look at the various educational background of participants, some Indonesian mothers whose educational background is not English lacked English knowledge. As reported by Mother 5 she had difficulties facilitating their children when learning English due to her limited knowledge of English. In line with Mother 5, Mother 1 and Mother 3 reported that they lack of English knowledge, especially for advanced English levels. Meanwhile, Mother 2 and Mother 4 do not have barriers to English since they are English teachers at Indonesian schools. It is evidenced by the following excerpts:

Mother 1:

"My educational background is not English. Therefore, I somehow have difficulties teaching English to my children especially materials in advanced English. However, it may not be difficult for me to help my children in early childhood education do their English homework and assignment".

Mother 3:

"My educational background is in counseling. I lack English knowledge, especially for complicated English materials for high school students. However, I still understand basic English conversation and I help my child at kindergarten do his English homework".

Mother 5:

"I am a high school graduate. I do not have any background in English. Therefore, it is not easy for me to help my children do their English homework due to my limited English knowledge".

The above elaborations show that parental involvement and participation have impacts on their children's success in English acquisition since the home is the first place to get an education for children. Therefore, the parent's role is badly needed by their children. This can be achieved by having a better quality for parents' academy. More importantly, Robles-Goodwin et al. (2023) advocate that parents' academies consisting of parents, teachers, and school staff play an essential role in meeting children's needs in learning English. In addition, macro social structures, public discourse, and national

language planning influence parental language ideology and planning actions in the home domain (Yang & Curdt-Christiansen, 2021).

Lack of English exposure in the community

Building English exposure in the community plays a crucial role in fostering students' or children's English skills. This can be done by interacting using English with children in daily communication at home through basic English conversation like greeting "Good morning, good afternoon, good evening, good night", gratitude like "Thank you, thanks", an apology like "sorry", and so on. However, children lacked English exposure with their peers and neighbors in the community. As reported by some Indonesian mothers in the following excerpts:

Mother 1:

"I realize that exposure to using English for communication is needed. Unfortunately, children lacked English exposure in the community. There are some challenges to using English in the society. These include most of the people in the neighborhood who cannot speak English. My children speak Javanese or Indonesian when they communicate with their peers and friends in the community".

Mother 2:

"We live in a village where most people speak Javanese and Indonesian to communicate with others in daily interaction. Most people do not have English skills. Therefore, they never speak English with society".

Mother 4:

"Although I somehow speak English with my children at home, the English skill particularly the speaking skill of the children have not improved yet. This is caused by the lack of exposure to speaking English in the community. They speak using Javanese or Indonesian in daily conversation".

The above elaborations show that community in society plays a paramount role in improving children's English skills. This means that the involvement of parents, society, and school is beneficial for children's success in learning English (Wahyuningsih, 2022). This finding is strengthened by the study undertaken by Scarpino (2019) that input and exposure to language have impacts on children's language skills. The importance of fostering literary works in English as one of the ways to exposure aspect has been emphasized by Chin (2007) reporting that Singapore and Malaysia have produced English literary works as an effort to promote English utilization in global world. Considering the importance of exposure of using English outside the school, family and environment are suggested to foster the use of English in the Indonesian context for improving the children's English ability. For those in early childhood, parents could introduce basic vocabularies including numbers, fruits, animals, parts of body and others. In addition, they can sing English songs to their children.

The need for being up to date with technological advancement.

The advancement of technology has led parents to stay up to date with it including in the context of learning English. Based on the interviews, one of the challenges experienced by Indonesian mothers is the need for being up-to-date with technology.

They are demanded to adapt it in facilitating their children's access when learning English such as some online learning platforms including YouTube, movies, TikTok, Instagram, and others. More importantly, they should help their children learn in online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. As reported by some mothers below.

Mother 3:

"I was challenged by the development of technology in supporting children's English skills. As a mother and educator, I was burdened by many tasks at the office and at home. Therefore, I should upgrade my technology knowledge to enhance my children's English abilities".

Mother 5:

"I have enough time to accompany my children to learn English at home since I work in the factory every day. I find difficulties upgrading the technology usage. Therefore, I ask some educated people in the community about technology usage and learning platforms of English learning like YouTube, video, and so on".

The findings of the study promote an implication on the need for providing training or knowledge regarding technology usage in English learning for Indonesian parents to support children's English ability. It is believed that technology is beneficial to foster students' or children's motivation in learning English. This is in line with the study conducted by Wahyuningsih & Afandi (2023) reporting that English language teaching needs to be integrated with technology development. Moreover, through the implementation of English teaching, Wahyuningsih & Afandi (2022) pinpoint some strategies for incorporating English language learning including creating fun teaching by utilizing social media and learning platforms like YouTube, Instagram, and Facebook. Finally, the findings of the present study present an implication that the need for parents to provide simultaneous efforts for enhancing a better linguistic environment at home and the need for having collaborations from all aspects including school and society.

CONCLUSION

The present study concludes that parents' involvement has played a crucial role in enhancing their children's English abilities. As reported in the interviews, Indonesian mothers have roles in helping the success of their children's English learning including facilitating children in accessing English learning resources, introducing English through daily interaction, facilitating children with English courses, and accompanying children in learning English at home. However, they also experienced some barriers to doing their roles such as the lack of knowledge in English, lack of English exposure in the community, and the need for being up to date with technological advancement. This study only recruited five participants in Indonesian family context. It is kindly recommended that future researchers conduct studies of the role of parents in triggering children's motivation in learning English viewed from numerous participants in Indonesia. By undertaking the study, readers would know more about the roles of parents in enhancing the children's English ability at home. This study presents an implication that the need for parents to provide simultaneous efforts for enhancing a better linguistic environment at home and the need for collaborations from all aspects including school and society.

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