

---

---

## Parental Involvement and English Language Teaching to Young Learners: Parents' Experience in Aceh

Shafrida Wati

IAIN Langsa, Jl. Meurandeh- Kota Langsa, Provinsi Aceh  
shafrida.waty@gmail.com

**Abstract:** The interest of teaching English to young learners increased rapidly since the language has significant influence in the modern world. English is strongly associated with social and economic power in globalization's context. Introducing English earlier offers opportunities to awaken the learners' enthusiasm and curiosity about the language, to achieve native-like accent, and to enable them to learn the language easily at further levels. However, there are controversies, particularly, about the age to start learning a new language. In Indonesia, English roles as a foreign language and the government have set up the policy to introduce English to students at elementary school. In order to support the language learning, parent involvement is extremely important to help the children learn and acquire the language. This study explores parents' perspectives toward English language teaching to young learners and further looks at their involvement in supporting their children learning the foreign language at home. An in-depth interview was conducted to parents with different educational backgrounds, professions, incomes, and gender groups in Langsa, Aceh province, Indonesia. Result revealed that parents have very positive attitude towards the language teaching to young learners. They enthusiastically support their children by helping them doing assignments, memorizing the vocabulary, providing learning medias such as English books, vocabulary pictures, English cartoon's films, puzzles, and asking teachers the topic they do not understand from their children's textbook. Lower education and lower income parents showed more enthusiasm in supporting their children.

**Keywords:** Parental involvement, English language teaching, young learners

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The interest toward early language teaching to students in primary schools grows rapidly in recent years. Many countries, as Butler (2003, p. 2) mentions, where English taught as a foreign language have begun introducing English at earlier grade levels in their curricula. This global phenomenon occurred due to the emergence of English used as a world language and it is widely spread in all countries across the globe. English has increasingly come to be seen as an international language which is used for international communication, transportation, commerce, banking, tourism, technology, diplomacy and scientific research (Brown, 2007). This indicates that to have the language is to have access to global communication and global access to knowledge (Seargeant, 2009). Learners can perceive more chances in higher education as they deal with TOEFL or IELTS as an entry requirement to universities or an access to scholarship to study abroad. It also enables them to get better employment opportunities.

Early language learning considers effective to achieve greater proficiency, as it widen

children's horizon and awaken their early enthusiasm and curiosity about the language (Pinter, 2006, 32). Moreover, children acquire huge advantages in learning both second and foreign languages. Studies analyse that younger learners perform better on phonology and have attainment of native-like accent (Mc Laughlin, 1987; Bongaerts, Planken & Schils, 1995; Singleton 1995; Nikolov, 2000; Sierra, 2011; Fathmann, 2006). Language learning also improves their cognitive abilities and influences their achievements in other disciplines (Stewart, 2005).

However, there are debates on regard of the hypothesis that the earlier the better. One of the arguments is dealing with the Critical Period Hypothesis (CPH) which describes a general phenomenon of declining competence over increasing age in which there is a certain age when a second language can be learned effectively (Nikolov, 2000). Similarly, Cameron (2001: 13) insists young children can learn a second language particularly effectively before puberty because their brains are still able to use mechanism that assists first language acquisition. Furthermore, children at a particular

age, between four to eleven years old, of what is called 'golden age' are in the most vital years of their development (Scott & Ytreberg, 1990). Therefore, activities children experience including learning a new language can contribute positively to that development.

In contrast, Lightbown and Spada (1999) quoted in Cameron (2001) argue what learners would achieve in language learning is depending on the factors of needs, motivation and context as they might have those different from one to another. On the one hand, when the goal of second language learning is to acquire native-like proficiency then learning the language at a younger age will be beneficial. On the other hand, when the aim is to acquire communication skills then to start learning at a later age may make the aims more achievable. A longitudinal study by Snow and Hoefnagel-Höhle (1978) show that children who learn second language before the age of puberty do not necessarily acquire the language as fast as successful as they learn their first languages. Older learners, as the research result suggests, perform well and achieve a better control of second language acquisition than younger learners do. In accordance to this view, Brown (2007) claims that the earlier the better for learning a second or a foreign language is only a myth, because adult learners have superior cognitive abilities and have more develop abstract thinking abilities to understand rules and concepts which ease them to learn a new language.

In the context of Indonesia, English role as a foreign language and it includes as one of school subjects. In the mid of 1980s English was only taught to students at certain levels from junior high school up to higher education. However, since the revision of the national curriculum in 1994, English has been set up as a subject for pupils in primary schools (Kam, 2002). It was highly expected that the revised curriculum contribute to improve the learners' English proficiency to deal with this internationally most spoken language easily in the future. To support the implementation, it is considerably important to facilitate professional supports, such as pre-service and in-service training, for primary school's English teachers to avoid the misconception that teaching children does not require some English proficiency (Musthafa, 2010), to provide

appropriate materials, media and textbooks (Supriyanti, 2012) and to allocate sufficient time in the curriculum (Edelenbos, 2006). Another important support that this research will shed a light is parental involvement.

Parent can provide positive influence on their children's learning as family is the most effective system for fostering and for sustaining their long-term improvement (Pugh, 1998). Particularly in Indonesia, students are not immersed in an English environment. They also may not have immediate needs to use and to learn English; nevertheless parents seem to recognize the benefits of learning English. Therefore, parents' participations may help their children learn the foreign language effectively. Numerous studies demonstrate parent involvement in their children's education contributes their success in school (Docking, 1990; Epstein, 1995; Alexander, 1997). Similarly, studies conducted by Jeynes, 2007; Sui-chu & Willms, 1996; Fan, 2001; Sehee & Hsiu-zu, 2005, Hosseinpour, Sherkatolabbasi, & Yarahmadi, 2015 reveal that parent involvement contribute positive influence on their children academic growth. Thus, parents hold a significant role in their children achievement.

Jeynes (2005) Quoted in (Hornby, 2011) defines parental involvement as parental participation in the educational process and the experience of their children. It includes school-based parental involvement and home-based parental involvement. School-based parental involvement covers attending parent education workshop and attending parent-teacher meeting. Other activities include contact with school to share information, participation in school events and participation in the work of the school (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003). While, home-based parental involvement involves the provision of a secure and a stable environment, intellectual stimulation, supervision of homework and parent-child discussion. Additionally, some of many ways in which parents can participate in their children foreign language learning learning, as Young (1994) Quoted in Bartram 2006) suggests, are discussing the subject with the children, helping them with homework, encouraging them to read material written in the foreign language and solving the problems their children experience in learning the foreign language. Parents also

can develop their children's understandings of the importance of the foreign language includes the status and its utility which these then develop their enthusiasm to learn the language (Barthram, 2006). Providing such supports and encouragement enable the children to not only engage in the language and learn effectively but also to develop interaction with their parents. Interaction between parents and children at home can create a cognitive socialization which contributes to children's basic intellectual development (Ryan, 1995).

This study explores home-based parental involvement in their children's foreign language learning in Aceh, Indonesia. The aims of this study are to find out parents' account for their attitudes and engagements in their children study and to figure out features of their involvement. This research firstly identifies their perspectives toward English language teaching to young learners. The study centred on the following focused questions: What do parents' think about English language teaching to young learners in Aceh? What do parents think about their role in supporting their children's foreign language learning? What parents actually do to support their children in learning English at home?

## 2. METHOD

This study was a qualitative research and the main method used to collect the data was a semi-structured, in-depth interview. The aim of in-depth interview is to find out informants' experience and thought about a related issue discussed in the study. In this research, the first step in identifying the sample was choosing the informants by using purposive sampling. The informants were parents, who were having children learning English at a primary school in Langsa, Aceh Indonesia. They should come from various gender groups, professions, incomes and educational backgrounds in order to provide a broad range of views. Some of them are teachers, lecturers, traders, housewives, civil servants, meatball sellers, fishermen and pedicab drivers. Their educational backgrounds were universities undergraduates, post-graduates, diploma, senior high schools and primary school graduates. After selecting the informants, the researcher designed a list of questions to find out their perceptions towards English language teaching to early age pupils at schools

particularly in Aceh context, their opinion about parent roles in supporting their children's learning and their contributions in supporting their children's learning at home. Then, the researcher arranged the appointment and conducted the interviews. The researcher recorded the interviews in order to obtain original data.

## 3. RESULTS

### 3.1 Parents' Views of English Language Teaching to Young Learners.

The public interest toward English for young learners has developed significantly in a number of districts in Indonesia including Aceh, since the government put it as a school subject for pupils at early levels. Jalal & Musthafa (2001) Quoted in Musthafa (2010, p.120) mention the decentralization of education in Indonesia has encouraged local governments to make their own decisions relative to some portion of curricular space in the form of the use of some learning hours for what has become known as '*local content*'. Thus, pupils start learning English from year two to get early exposure to the foreign language. Currently, English encompasses a compulsory subject which is learned once in a week for 90 minutes. A parent, who is a teacher, points out:

To start learning English since the first year of primary school is better as children will learn the most essential part of the language which is vocabulary. Children naturally have good memory. This enables them to learn the language step by step, which I think is more systematic. They will develop the vocabulary in year two and build sentences in year three. Therefore, they might have a thought that English is not a tough language to learn at further levels.

Another parent demonstrates a similar idea that young learners have a great enthusiasm in learning new things. Taking her child as an example, she describes her son has ability to memorize 150 vocabularies during the first term of his first year. Even though other pupils can do more, she insisted. The ability leads her child to develop his enthusiasm in learning English. Basically, children learn more effectively when they enjoy the learning process. Some factors to engage students and to improve their capability, as Brown (2007, p. 1102-103) suggests, are providing fun, lively, and interesting activities

since language lesson can at time be difficult for children, doing *repetition* in order to get their brain and ear to cooperate and peppering the lesson with physical activity as children need to have all their five senses stimulated. Children can develop their proficiency through such learning experience. Language skill is one of tools to get access to knowledge because massive literatures are written in English and Arabic. Arabic is another important language in Aceh setting. Students learn it at *Madrasah* (Islamic schools) and a lot of people at all ages learn to read *Kitab* (classic book with Islamic content) which mostly written in Arabic. A parent, who is a lecturer, expresses: English is an important subject. I agree that the government put it as a lesson for pupils because it is a subject being tested when they enter higher levels of education. Nevertheless, I personally more prefer the policy maker to put both English and Arabic as foreign languages to children, to make them familiar with Arabic to access Islamic literatures when they need them in the future.

Some parents convince that to have language competencies enable their children to find jobs easily include working overseas.

It is important to learn English from now on and I want my son to gain that skill. If he could acquire the skill he would have chance to work in Malaysia...

Malaysia is one of the countries which Acehnese is more familiar with. It is geographically nearby Aceh and, historically, it is a country where some Acehnese exodus to save their lives during The Dutch and The Aceh war. Most Acehnese live in '*Kampung Yan*' which is located in Kedah, Malaysia. It is also the country where some Acehnese run to save their lives when Aceh was in conflict (Hasan, 2015). Therefore, for some Acehnese, it is a place where people may go to work and to stay, absolutely with some skills and requirements they should have.\

### **3.2 Parents' Views towards Their Roles on Their Children's Foreign Language Learning.**

The way parents view their role in their children's education is crucial. Parents who believe that their responsibility is only to get children to school, which then takes over responsibility for their education, will not be

willing to be actively involved in either school-based or home-based parental involvement (Hornby, 2011, p. 12). Parents will participate more when they noticed that they have big influence on their children's progress. A parent, who is a house wife, highlights:

Parents hold a significant role in their children's education... To me, parents are determiners for their children's improvements because they only spend half days studying at schools while the rest are at homes. Therefore, parents have many opportunities to interact with them to advise and motivate them.

In addition, parents need to motivate their children because they tend to do what their parents asked them to. A meat-ball seller parent expresses:

Parents need to control and encourage their children to learn because children... like my sons are at primary school age; they tend to obey what I said. Most kids tend to ignore their parents' advice when they get older. This indicates supervision as well as advice is important to lead the children aware of their duties which one of them is learning. Children, as Dunn (1983) notes, until about the age of eight are still dependent on adults' support for much of what they do. Therefore, parents need to take this chance to motivate their children to be active in learning. Parents, in addition, have greatest influence on children particularly in early years. What parents do at home with their children has a major impact on social, emotional and intellectual development (Wheeler & Connor, 2009).

### **3.3 Parents' Involvement in Supporting Their Children Learning English at Home.**

Parents highly support their children in learning at home. Even though some of them admitted that they do not know anything about what their children learn at school but they considerably pay attention to it. Interestingly, one of the parents, who is a civil servant, mentioned that she has a strong commitment to assist her child to learn by allocating about 30 minutes every evening except Saturday night to help her son reviewing the lesson, doing assignments, and memorizing vocabulary. To me, education is the priority. I have a strong commitment to assist my child to learn. I

allocate about 30 minutes every evening except Saturday night to accompany her reviewing the lesson. I usually ask my child what she learns during the day, what works she should do and what vocabulary she has to memorize. Then in the evening, I help her with all of that.

Some parents concerned about facilities they need to provide for children in order to get enough exposure to English. They also think that their children need to acquire not only English skills but also have an ability to recite The Quran. Therefore, they provide both supports for the foreign language learning and The Qur'an recitation. A parent, who is a trader, expresses:

I provided some pictures of English vocabulary in my children's rooms to help them memorising the vocabulary and bought English story books for them to read. Their father also bought them English DVD cartoons which he said that was good to improve their listening skill. My husband and I could not speak English very well; therefore we wanted our children to be better than us. I also take my son to an English course. To me, skills are important therefore I try to make it balance that my son will not only improve his English but he also can recite the Quran. I also take him to practicereciting the Quran at a mosque in the town.

However, other parents do not allocate particular time to help their children to learn but they take their children to courses. While some other parents, due to lower income, does not afford her child to an English course but she helps her child reviewing topics that the daughter will learn and provides some drills for general understanding.

Even though I do not quite understand English, because I did not study at a university, but I usually help my daughter reviewing the lesson that she will learn at school. For example, when she will learn about preposition, I teach her about the topic and ask her to do exercises from the textbook. I also invited her to review the lessons she learnt. Sometime, when I found the lesson difficult to understand I asked the teacher to explain it to me (laughing)... Then I explain it to my daughter.

A parent, who is a fisherman and an elementary school graduate, expressed his enthusiasm to encourage his son to learn

English. When the researcher interviewed him he was sewing his fishnets. He said that he used to be very happy when there were a Non-governmental organization team from the capital city came to provide English course for children held at *Meunasah* (a place where villager gather to pray or to conduct meetings) about a year ago. He encouraged his son, his neighbour's children to come to learn. Unfortunately, the activity has halted as the volunteers have returned to their city. Surprisingly, he encouraged the researcher to meet the head of the village and the head of the youth organization to talk about continuing such activity as he, the fisherman, thought that the researcher came to offer such agenda and the researcher was an English teacher volunteer.

I do not know anything about English even I have never heard English but I believe it is very important today. Children need it because they learn it at school. Perhaps, by having that knowledge they can improve the quality of their lives and get better job. I was happy because there used to be an activity here at *Menasah* where children learn English after school held by some volunteers from Jakarta. I asked my son and all boys here to join. Such activity is very important and absolutely positive. I hope it can be continued. Another interesting support demonstrated by those who do not have any experience learning English but they concerned about the significance of having the skill. Even though the parents are low-educated but they have positive attitude toward their children's learning and tend to support them. Parent, who is a pedicab driver, mentions:

I take and pick up my son everyday to school. I sometime ask what he learnt at school on the way home. At home, I asked her sister to help him with any difficulties he may had on the lessons.

Generally, parents show both their enthusiasm in their children's study and describe a great deal of supports. Moreover, parents are not only support their children in learning a particular subjects like English but also other subjects like math, science, and other subjects.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Regarding to parental involvement and English language teaching to young learners in Aceh context, a number of conclusions from the

research is visible. First, parents have positive attitudes toward early foreign language learning. According to them English is a pivotal subject because it is one of the requirements to pursue further education, to apply for jobs, to gain knowledge, to access information and to communicate easily when their children go overseas. Early exposure to the target language contributes to develop children's enthusiasm and improve their proficiency in English. Second, parents, in various levels of education and incomes assert if they have responsibility to their children's development both at home and at school. Therefore, they provide assistance as well as encouragement for their children in study. Third, parents provide a range of involvements such as helping their children review the lesson, doing homework, memorizing vocabulary, taking them to an English course and engaging them to learn. Some parents cannot afford to foreign language learning facilities, due to lower-income, but they enthusiastically encourage their children to learn and involve others to help them. All in all, parents of elementary school students in Aceh support the foreign language learning and tend to involve in assisting their children. However, the supports for the foreign language learning to young learners at school need to be improved. Taking parents' perspectives toward the language learning and their involvements into account, considered to be a significant input to educators and the authorities to put parents as partners in improving pupils' academic achievements. The policy maker then may develop communication between home and school which parents can participate in.

## 5. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I would like to thank all parents who took part in this study for the time and contribution they gave to this research.

## 6. REFERENCES

- Alexander, T. (1997). Learning begin at home: Implications for a learning society. In B. Cosin., L. Heeman. & M. Hales (Eds), *Families, education and social differences* (pp. 77-88). London: Routledge.
- Bartram, B. (2006). An examination of perceptions of parental influence on attitudes to language learning. *Educational Research*, 48(2), 211-221.
- Bongaerts, T., Planken, B., & Schils, E. (1995). Can late starters attain a native accent in a foreign language? A test of the Critical Period Hypothesis. In D. Singleton & Z. Lengyel, Z. (Eds.), *The age factor in second language acquisition*, (pp. 30-50). Avon: Cromwell Press.
- Brown, H. D. (1997). *Teaching by principles: An interactive approach to language pedagogy* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed). New York, NY: Pearson Education.
- Butler, Y. G. (2013). Parental factors and early English education as a foreign language: A case study in Mainland China. *Research Papers in Education*. doi: 10.1080/02671522.2013.776625.
- Cameron, L. (2001). *Teaching languages to young learners*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Desforages, C., Abouchaar, A. (2003). *The impact of parental involvement, parental support and family education on pupil achievement and adjustment: A literature review*. DFES/Res: Research Report No.433. Queens's Printer.
- Docking, J. (1990). *Primary schools and parents, rights, responsibilities and relationship*. London: Hodder and Stoughton.
- Dunn, O. (1983). *Beginning English with young children*, London: The Macmillan Press Limited.
- Edelenbos P., Johnstone, R., & Kubanek, A. (2006). The main pedagogical principles underlying the teaching of languages to very young learners: Languages for children of Europe. Multilingualism policy report of the EAC 89/04, Lot 1 study EUROPEAN COMMISSION.
- Epstein, J. L. (1995). School/family/community partnership: Caring for the children we share. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 76(9), 701-712.
- Fan, X. (2001). Parental involvement and students' academic achievement: A growth modelling analysis. *The Journal of Experimental Education*. 70(1), 27-67.
- Fathman, A. (2006). The relationship between age and second language productive ability. *Language Learning*, 1(2), 245-253.
- Hasan, H. M. (2015). *Dari rimba Aceh ke Stockholm*. Jakarta: Batavia Publishing.
- Hornby, G. (2011). *Parental involvement in childhood education: Building effective school-family partnerships*. New York: Springer.
- Hosseinpour, V., Sherkatolabbasi M., & Yarahmadi M. (2015). The impact of parents' involvement in and attitude toward their children's foreign language programs for learning English, *International journal of Applied Linguistics & English Literature*, 4(4). 175-185.
- Jeynes, W. H. (2007). The relationship between parental involvement and urban secondary school student academic achievement: A meta analysis. *Urban Education*. 4(2), 82-110.
- Kam, W. H. (2002). English language teaching in East Asia today: An overview. *Asia Pacific Journal of Education*, 22(2), 1-12.
- McLaughlin, B. (1987). *Theories of second language learning*. New York: Routledge.
- Musthafa, B. (2010). Teaching English to young learners in Indonesia: Essentials requirements, *Educationist*, 4(2), 121-125.
- Nikolov, M. (2000). Issues in research into early foreign language programmes. In J. Moon & M. Nikolov (Eds.), *Research into English to Young Learners*, Agora Nyomda, Pècs: University Pècs Press.

- 
- Pinter, Annamaria. (2006). *Teaching young language learners*, Oxford: Oxford University press
- Pugh, G. (1998). Parents and professionals in pre-school services: is partnership possible? In S. Wolfendale. (Ed.), *Parental involvement: Developing networks between school, home and community*. London: Cassell Educational Limited.
- Ryan, A. B. (1995). *The family-school connection: Theory, research and practice*, London: Sage.
- Scott A, W. & Ytreberg, H. (1990). *Teaching English to children*. New York: Longman.
- Seargeant, P. (2009). *The idea of English in Japan: Ideology and the evolution of a global language*. Bristol: Cromwell press group.
- Sehee, H. & Hsiu-zu, H. (2005). Direct and indirect longitudinal effects of parental involvement on student achievement: Second-order latent growth modelling across ethnic groups. *Journal of Educational Psychology*. 97(1), 32-42.
- Sierra, A. G., Maritza, R. G., Paercaccio, C. R., Conboy, B. T., Romo, H., Klarman, L., Ortiz, S., & Kuhl, P. K. (2011). Bilingual language learning: An ERP study relating early brain responses to speech, language input, and later word production. *Journal of Phonetics*. doi:10.1016/j.wocn.2011.07.002
- Singleton, D. (1995). Introduction: A critical look at the critical period hypothesis in second language acquisition research. In D. Singleton. & Z. Lengyel. (Eds.), *The age factor in second language Acquisition*, (pp.1-29) Avon: Cromwell Press.
- Snow, E. C., & Hoefnagel-Höhle, M. (1978). The critical period for language acquisition: Evidence from second language learning, *Child Development*, 49(4), 1114-1128.
- Stewart, J. H. (2005). Foreign language study in elementary schools: Benefits and implications for achievement in Reading and Math. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 33(1), 13.
- Sui-Chu, H. E., & Willms, J. D. (1996). Effects of parental involvement on eight-grade achievement, *Sociology of Education*, 69(2). 126-141.
- Supriyanti, M. (2012). Challenges in providing trainings for English teachers of Elementary schools, *Journal of Education and Learning*, 6(3), 161-166.
- Wheeler, H., & Connor, J. (2009). *Parents, early years and learning: Parents as partners in the early years foundation stage-principles into practice*. London: National Children's Bureau.