

How Are Indonesian Families in England Involved in Their Children's L2 Acquisition?

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Abstract

This study investigates the way families of Indonesian scholars who live in England support their children to be bilingual, particularly when the children start studying at an English school. The data on parental involvement was obtained through semi-structured interview and observation. The result suggests that parental involvement remains important although children receive a massive exposure to English from the L1 community. The findings indicate that parents support their children to acquire English in some ways. In the beginning, parents put a great emphasis on vocabulary enrichment in order to help the children to read the literature and communicate with their friends. To support their children to be able to interact with L1 speakers, parents allow the children to play with their friends who are native speakers and join after-school clubs. Parents also show that building communication with the teachers to gain the information about their children's language development is essential. Finally, it is suggested that parents, especially the dependants, should learn the culture related to the language in order to support the development of children's cultural knowledge.

Keywords: Parental involvement, language development, second language acquisition

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Introduction

In recent years, there has been an increasing number of Indonesian scholars coming to England to pursue higher degree accompanied by their family members. This is a good opportunity for the children to enrol in a school in England. On the other hand, it could be challenging for them to study at the school where English is the medium of communication. Accordingly, understanding how the children acquire their second language has become more critical. Research on that area is essential to investigate the way parents provide support for their children. This is an interesting topic since the children could not speak English well when they come to England for the first time. Surprisingly, after several months their language proficiency increased significantly, and some of them have a native-like accent. However, there might be certain challenges and opportunities that need to be revealed.

An area of language learning that needs to be taken into account to support immigrant children is parental involvement. There might be a correlation study on the connection between family literacy program and school practices is needed (Dixon and Wu, 2014). This study investigates the way how parents support their children to acquire English as the second language, especially in language and literacy development. Generally, parents play an important role towards children's language development. Therefore, the involvement and intervention of parent in second language literacy is absolutely crucial (Kummerer & Opez-Reyna, 2009; Sheridan, 2011; Wei & Zhou 2012).

Many studies on parental involvement in the L2 acquisition are conducted in the country where English is not the first language. Therefore, in this study, I investigate parental involvement in L2 acquisition in Indonesian families who live in England. This study explores the ways parent support their children to acquire English as the second language. Hopefully, the results will benefit Indonesian scholars who plan to study in England accompanied by the family member.

Theoretical Framework

This study adopts the sociocultural theories which involved social development theory (Vygotsky, 1978) and language socialisation theory (Ochs and Schieffelin, 1984). In social development theory, Vygotsky (1978) argues that language development occurs mainly from social interaction, and in a supportive environment, novices could do more than what they can do independently, which is named the zone of proximal development (ZPD).

Ochs and Schieffelin in language socialisation theory (2011, p. 1) state that 'language is a fundamental medium in children's development of social and cultural knowledge and sensibilities.' In addition, Garrett (2008) states that a key aspect of language socialisation is the development of communicative competence, which involves acquiring the language proficiency as well as the culturally based knowledge in order to use language in culturally socially appropriate ways.

Studies on Parental Involvement in Second Language Learning

In the process of reviewing some studies related to parental involvement in second language learning, there are some issues that need to be taken into account. The first issue is about the strategies that are commonly used by the parent to support children's L2 acquisition. Forey et al. (2016) investigated how Hong Kong families support their children at the age of 5 to 8 in English learning. They find that parents commonly support their children to learn English through vocabulary enrichment, using memorising and drilling words' technique. Ciara et al. (2017) in their attempt to search the factor behind children's vocabulary development find that successful vocabulary building could also be related to parents' education level and concern in language development. Huang (2013) in his ethnographic study explored the use of 'Literacy Bags' (LBs) to encourage parental involvement in English literacy learning of Chinese children. Interestingly, this project changed parents' attitude to be more positive towards English literacy development of their children. However, parental involvement could not be merely related to the linguistic point. Parents also can help their children by controlling children's homework, setting good learning condition, giving advice and providing feedback (Hurtado and Castaneda, 2016). Considerably, the most important thing in assisting the children in learning English is that should be fun (Castillo and Camelo, 2013). In addition, it is suggested that the parent should not be dominant. The dominant involvement from parents might not be better for children's development because children play a leading role in parental involvement (Pomerantz, 2007).

Children's motivation in learning English will be the second issue that needs to be explored. Motivation within every learner may vary, and it depends on the context such as age and social economy. Wadho et al. (2016) find that there is a correlation between L2 learners' motivation and the positive attitude of parents and teachers in Pakistan. This finding is in line with the study conducted by Morris et al. (2013) in South Korea which find that parents interest is correlated with children's motivational variable. In addition, previous findings are in line with Butler's (2015) study on the influence of socioeconomic status (SES) toward the children's motivation in China family. The finding contends that children of higher SES parents are more motivated to learn English than lower SES parents'. It happens because lower SES parents sometimes fail to support their children. Although parents' motivation could influence children's motivation, there might be a possibility for children to gain motivation from the teachers or peers at school.

The next issue is about schools' respond towards parental involvement. Although it is common that that parent is a valuable resource for their children to support children's language and literacy development (Reese, 2010), it would be more effective if schools provide assistance for the parents. It is common that not all parents have good English proficiency. To overcome the lack of knowledge in language learning, it is better to provide a dialogue between parents, schools and community (Al-mahrooqi, Denman, Al-maamari, 2016). In addition, Panferov (2010) argues that there should be two-way communication between schools and parents to succeed in parental support at home.

In the context of learning English in an English-speaking country, there will be many English communities that will benefit L2 learners to practice communication. Wenger

(1999) find that learning is a social process that is called legitimate peripheral participation (LPP). In this process, new learners engage in the community of practice where they have an opportunity to learn from experienced members, moving from the peripheral to full participation. The L2 learner will engage with the English expertise who will provide scaffolding. Collaboration between less competent children with adults or more skilful peers is an effective strategy to develop skill and competency. In this zone of proximal development, a beginner will receive valuable assistance to accomplish the goal (Vygotsky, 1978 cited in Lightbown and Spada, 2017).

In the process of L2 learning, parental involvement in children who study in the country of origin may be different for children who study at the L2 speaking country. The study outlined below investigates how parents support their children for the first time attending a new school where English is the medium of communication. The challenges of the parents to support their children in the L2 acquisition will also need to be given important consideration.

Discussion

In this study, I have investigated parental involvement in children's L2 acquisition from sociocultural perspective theory. Data were obtained from two Indonesian families through a semi-structured interview and observation. To answer the question, I need to consider carefully how language, parents, home-literacy environment and school were connected. In general, the data shows that both parents play an important role in children's second language development, especially for the first time attending school in England. Both families consider vocabulary enrichment as the main area that needs to be supported at the beginning. While family A perceives that vocabulary enrichment is the biggest challenge, family B find it easy to support their daughter's vocabulary development. Rina, the daughter of family B, was supported by her father through picture books and scrabbles. Her father bought them regularly. It seems that the father creates a supportive environment for his daughter (Vygotsky, 1978). In addition, home literacy activities that is conducted regularly could give a positive impact on vocabulary development (Hammer, Farkas, Maczuga, 2010).

I found that communication between parent and teacher is also essential. Let us take the example of bullying experienced by Budi when he could not speak English. Although it appeared many times, he did not report it directly to his teachers. Susi, the mother of family A, reported:

My son tended to be silent... Last year my son experienced bullying... He reported it to me. Then I informed it to his teacher... After that, I asked my son why he was completely silent. He said that he was confused because he could not speak English. I said to his teacher about that then the teacher suggested him to use gesture as a means of reporting his bad experience (Susi, December 16, 2017, translated from Bahasa Indonesia into English).

As a new student at year-two class, he was not brave to speak English, and he found no one helpful at school. Therefore, he considered that his mother was the right person to receive his information. Another notable event is that Budi tended to be silent when the headteacher and some teachers greeted him with a friend in the morning. His mother encouraged him regularly to reply the greeting by giving an

example of how to do it. Those events reveal that although Budi gained immediate access to the L2 community, Budi still needs his mother to bridge him. This could be related to Vigotsky's (1978) theory that implies children need to be assisted by an adult. As Budi's teacher asked him to use gesture, there might be negotiation the meaning. It means that Budi also learned English from that process.

Budi's parent also gave him support to join after-school activities such as swimming, gymnastics and magic math class. Those activities provide many opportunities for Budi to participate and get many exposures from English language community. His mother said that he could learn English from the instruction given by his trainers or instructors. Additionally, his parent also allowed him to play with his friends who are native English speakers. Based on the interview data, his mother said that she recognised that Budi was confident to communicate when he was playing with his friends. It could be analysed that he practices his listening and understanding from the instructor's utterances.

One interesting point in the case of Rina, when she is at home, she gets many language exposures from TV programmes. This is under controlled by her father. After she heard a new word or sentence, she imitated the utterances that she heard. Then she practised it with her sister as well as his parents. Although both families have a different way to support their children, based on observation data their children have the same ability in speaking. This might also be argued that school is the place where both children get language exposure.

I found that cultural based knowledge is important. In B Family, for example, Rina complained to her mother that her father tended to respond using the same phrase when He noticed that Rina got a prize from the teacher. The father always says, 'that is good.' Rina expected that her father congratulated her on different phrases. It also happened with the family A. Susi's son reminded her because she was not queueing straight behind the person who stood in front of her. These examples suggest that to support children's language, the parent should learn the culture related to that language.

Interestingly, both families did not find considerable difficulties to support their children to speak English. Regular exposure to English community could be the reason. As I mentioned before, school is the main place where children get regular exposure to the L2 community. It could be the reason why teachers from different schools are confident to guarantee that their children will be able to speak English after 3-month studying.

This study also highlights that two-way communication between parents and teachers in the scaffolding process is necessary. Teachers' suggestion of using gesture as a means of reporting a violent act from the child's friend and teachers' suggestion of using vocabulary card to support child's L2 development is the illustrative examples. Teachers considered it as their responsibility to help Budi to improve language skill. In addition, Two-way communication is also perceived to be an effective home support for English language learner (Panferov, 2010). This can help both parents and teacher to find the solution towards children's problems.

Conclusion and Pedagogical Implications

After exploring parental involvement in the L2 acquisition, this study arrives at some conclusions. The first is that vocabulary enrichment is the main concern of the families to support their children's language and literacy development. Putting vocabulary cards on the wall, reading picture books, and playing scrabble are the ways chosen by Indonesian families. There might be many ways to help children to develop their vocabulary. However, the most important thing is that children feel comfortable in their ways to enrich the vocabularies. Secondly, building two-way communication with the teachers is essential. Family A finds it helpful to know their son's progress and to find the solution towards the problem faced by his son, particularly in language and literacy development. Two-way communication is also useful for the school to gain feedback from parents dealing with future development. Thirdly, to encourage the children to participate in the L1 community, parents do not only focus on communicative competence but also culturally based knowledge. This is important since a different country may have a different culture. Therefore, parents should learn the culture in order to support children to learn the language as well as the culture embedded in that language. Overall, parents find it easier to assist their children in learning English in an English-speaking country, compared to learning English in their country of origin. In the English-speaking country, their children can easily get access to the L2 community. The children get scaffolding from the native speakers through communication at school or at playing ground. Although the child gets direct access to the L2 community, parental involvement is required to link him with the community. The main implication is that there should be a certain training or workshop conducted by the school to assist parents who have children that start studying at a British school. It can be a workshop in assisting children to develop their literacy and language development or the workshop to make a creative media for children to practice English such as vocabulary cards. The second implication is that parents should provide access to the L2 community for children. This is useful for the children to develop their communication skill. Participation with native speakers allows the children to fully practice their language without any feeling of stressful. For further research, it is essential to investigate the relationship between parental involvement and family language policy. As language policy varies within families, there might be some different outcomes in children's language ability.

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