

THE ROLE OF PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN ENGLISH SPEAKING ACQUISITION AMONG CHILDREN IN SUBURBAN SURABAYA

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Abstract: In the globalized era, English proficiency is increasingly crucial, yet children in suburban Indonesia often face significant challenges in acquiring speaking skills. This study explores the barriers to parental involvement, a key factor in language acquisition, in the suburban context of Kebonsari, Surabaya. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, data was collected via Google Forms questionnaires from 13 parents. The findings reveal a complex interplay of internal and external barriers. Internally, parents cited significant time constraints (46.2%) and limited English proficiency (15.4%) as major hurdles. Externally, the high cost of resources (30.8%), cultural prioritization of local languages (Indonesian/Javanese), and a lack of institutional support were prominent obstacles. The study frames these findings within Skinner's behaviorist theory, highlighting the lack of environmental reinforcement, and Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, pointing to a disruption in the Zone of Proximal Development due to scarce mediator interactions. The results underscore the need for practical, low-cost strategies and institutional initiatives to empower parents and foster effective home-based English learning environments, thereby addressing educational inequities in suburban settings.

Keywords: Parental Involvement, English Language Acquisition, Suburban Education, Barriers to Learning, Indonesia

INTRODUCTION

The role of parents as primary educators in a child's early development is universally acknowledged. While formal education is entrusted to schools, the home environment remains a critical arena for learning, particularly in language acquisition. Parental involvement extending beyond homework assistance to encompass the nurturing of curiosity, instillation of confidence, and fostering of a supportive learning atmosphere is a well-documented correlate of academic success (Centre for Child Well-Being, 2010; Cotton & Wikelund, 1989).

In Indonesia, a nation with a complex linguistic landscape, the acquisition of English as a foreign language presents unique challenges. The process is distinct from acquiring the national language (Indonesian) or local languages (e.g., Javanese) and is heavily influenced by environmental, cognitive, and social factors. Among these, parental involvement is paramount. However, the capacity for parents to engage effectively is not uniform and is mediated by cultural, socio-economic, and contextual dynamics (Delgado Gaitan, 1992).

This study focuses on the suburban area of Kebonsari in Surabaya. Suburban regions like Kebonsari represent a unique intersection of traditional values and modern influences, often characterized by more limited access to educational resources compared to urban centers. While the importance of English proficiency is recognized due to globalization, parents in these areas face distinct challenges in supporting their children's language learning journey. Existing literature highlights the positive impact of parental involvement (Astutik & Suryanto, 2024; Halommi & Stevens, 2023; Musengamana, 2023), but a gap remains in understanding the specific barriers faced by parents in suburban Indonesian contexts.

Therefore, this study aims to address this gap by answering the following research questions:

1. What are the barriers to parental involvement in their children's learning of English in suburban Surabaya?
2. How can these barriers be overcome?

By investigating these questions, this research seeks to provide practical

insights for parents, educators, and policymakers to enhance home-school-community partnerships and create more equitable English language learning opportunities.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Frameworks

This study is grounded in three pivotal theories that illuminate different facets of language acquisition and parental roles.

- **Behaviorist Theory (B.F. Skinner, 1957):** Skinner posited that language is learned through environmental interactions, specifically reinforcement, punishment, and contingencies. Verbal behavior is shaped by its consequences; for instance, a child's attempt to speak English is reinforced by positive feedback or successful communication. Parental involvement, from this perspective, is critical for providing consistent modeling and reinforcement. When parents lack the proficiency or time to provide this feedback, the learning process is impeded.
- **Cognitive Development Theory (Jean Piaget, 1950):** Piaget's theory emphasizes stage-dependent learning. The majority of children in this study (46.2%) were aged 7-12, placing them in the concrete operational stage. Children at this stage reason logically about concrete events but struggle with abstract concepts without tangible aids. This underscores the need for structured, interactive, and hands-on learning materials, which may be inaccessible to parents facing financial or resource constraints.
- **Sociocultural Theory (Lev Vygotsky, 1978):** Vygotsky argued that learning is a social process. Cognitive development occurs through interactions with "more knowledgeable others" (MKOs) within the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)—the gap between what a learner can do alone and what they can achieve with guidance. Parents are natural MKOs. However, if they cannot scaffold learning due to linguistic limitations, time poverty, or a lack of resources, the child's ZPD for

English remains underutilized, hindering acquisition.

Parental Involvement and Language Acquisition

Previous research consistently affirms the significance of parental engagement. Epstein (1995) outlines its multifaceted nature, including creating a positive home environment and maintaining communication with schools. In the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), studies by Halommi & Stevens (2023) and Natasha Ch'ng Duan Hsing & Nor Hafizah Adnan (2022) found a strong positive correlation between parental involvement and learner proficiency, highlighting home-based support as particularly crucial. However, as Delgado Gaitan (1992) notes, the manifestation of this involvement is deeply shaped by cultural and socioeconomic contexts, a factor critically relevant to the suburban Indonesian setting under investigation.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach to comprehensively describe and analyze the barriers to parental involvement

(Creswell, 2013). The research was conducted in the urban village of Kebonsari, Jambangan District, Surabaya, a location chosen for its representative suburban socio-cultural and economic dynamics.

The primary data source was 13 parents from the community. Data was collected through a structured online questionnaire distributed via Google Forms. The questionnaire consisted of closed-ended questions to gather demographic data and quantify perceptions, as well as open-ended questions to collect rich, qualitative data on parents' experiences, challenges, and needs.

The data analysis technique followed the interactive model of Miles and Huberman (1992), which involves three concurrent steps:

1. **Data Reduction:** The process of selecting, focusing, and simplifying the raw data obtained from the questionnaires.
2. **Data Display:** Organizing the condensed data into a structured narrative and charts to identify patterns and themes.
3. **Conclusion Drawing and Verification:** Interpreting the displayed data to draw

meaningful conclusions about the barriers to parental involvement and potential solutions.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Demographic Profile of Respondents

The demographic data paints a picture of the typical caregiver in this context. The respondents were predominantly female (84.6%), reflecting the sociocultural norm of mothers being primarily responsible for children's education. A plurality (46.2%) were aged 41-50. Their educational background was mostly limited, with 61.5% having completed only junior high school. In terms of occupation, 46.2% were housewives, 38.5% were private employees, and 15.4% were teachers. Most families (53.8%) had two children, and the largest cohort of children learning English (46.2%) was aged 7-12.

Patterns of Parental Involvement

Parental engagement frequency varied: 38.5% helped 1-2 times weekly, 30.8% assisted 3-5 times weekly, 23.1% rarely helped, and only 7.7% did so daily. The most common supportive activity was using learning apps

(38.5%), followed by reading English stories (30.8%) and co-viewing English media (15.4%). Notably, direct conversational practice was minimal. When self-assessing their English skills, 53.8% of parents rated themselves as "Fairly good" and 46.2% as "Not very good"; none claimed to be "Very good."

Perceived Barriers to Involvement

- **Time Constraints (46.2%):** Cited as the primary obstacle, reflecting the competing demands of work, household management, and childcare.
- **High Cost of Courses/Resources (30.8%):** A significant financial barrier limiting access to structured learning support and quality materials.
- **Limited English Proficiency (15.4%):** Parents' lack of confidence and ability in English directly hindered their capacity to teach and model the language.

Required Support and Strategies

- **Free Learning Resources (61.5%):** A overwhelming majority requested access to affordable or free materials.

- **Intensive Communication with Teachers (15.4%) and School Programs (15.4%):** Highlighting a desire for stronger school-parent partnerships.
- **English Training for Parents (7.7%):** A small but significant group recognized the need to improve their own skills.

Qualitative Insights from Open-Ended Responses

The open-ended questions provided depth to the quantitative data, revealing four thematic barriers:

1. **English Proficiency:** Parents explicitly stated, "saya sebagai orang tua belum cukup menguasai bahasa inggris" (as a parent, I don't know enough English) and "Orangtua tidak begitu paham bahasa inggris" (Parents don't really understand English).
2. **Pronunciation and Vocabulary:** Parents expressed difficulty with the discrepancy between spelling and pronunciation ("penulisan dan pengucapan kata2 berbeda") and the meaning of new vocabulary.
3. **Child Engagement and Motivation:** Parents noted that children "kadang suka malas" (are sometimes lazy)

when asked to learn English, making engagement challenging.

4. **Resource Limitations:** One parent succinctly stated, "Media pembelajaran yang kurang memadai, walaupun untuk kursus juga perlu biaya yang besar" (Inadequate learning media, and even courses require a large fee).

Discussion

The findings reveal a complex web of barriers that can be understood through the theoretical frameworks.

From a **behaviorist perspective (Skinner, 1957)**, the lack of parental proficiency and time means children receive insufficient modeling and reinforcement for their English verbal behavior. The environment does not provide consistent consequences for English use, weakening the acquisition process.

The prevalence of children in the concrete operational stage (Piaget, 1950) explains the popularity of learning apps (38.5%), which provide the tangible, interactive experience these children need. However, the financial barrier (30.8%) prevents many families from accessing high-quality, developmentally

appropriate digital or physical resources, stifling cognitive assimilation.

Most critically, the sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978) illuminates the core issue. The combination of parents' limited English skills, time poverty, and the cultural dominance of Indonesian/Javanese at home means children have few or no "more knowledgeable others" to scaffold their English learning. Their Zone of Proximal Development for English is effectively empty. The minimal engagement in conversational practice (as shown in Chart 4.8 of the thesis) is a direct symptom of this. Parents resort to isolated tools like flashcards and videos (as mentioned by Parent 13) because they lack the ability for sustained, collaborative dialogue. This creates a cycle of disadvantage where limited parental input leads to limited child output.

The requested solutions align with these theories. Free resources address the financial and access barrier, enabling parents to provide better stimuli and tools. Training for parents aims to transform them into more capable MKOs, directly strengthening the scaffolding process within the child's ZPD. Better school communication

fosters the ecosystem of support necessary for holistic development.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

Conclusion

This study concludes that parental involvement in English speaking acquisition in suburban Surabaya is hindered by a synergistic combination of internal and external barriers. Internally, parents' limited time and English proficiency prevent them from providing consistent reinforcement and modeling. Externally, the high cost of resources, cultural prioritization of local languages, and lack of institutional support create an environment where English acquisition is not robustly scaffolded. These findings are effectively explained by behaviorist, cognitive, and sociocultural theories, which together highlight the absence of environmental reinforcement, developmentally appropriate stimuli, and, most crucially, effective social mediation in the learning process.

Suggestions

Based on the findings, the following suggestions are offered:

- For Parents: Prioritize short (10-15 minute), consistent daily English activities using free resources like YouTube educational channels or library books. Integrate English naturally into daily routines (e.g., naming objects, describing activities) to overcome time and budget constraints.
- For Schools and Policymakers: Develop and disseminate packages of free, high-quality learning resources. Establish parent workshops focused on basic English skills and strategies for supporting language learning at home. Create more structured programs that facilitate communication between teachers and parents.
- For Further Research: A larger-scale, mixed-methods study involving triangulation with data from teachers and children is recommended. Longitudinal research could also track the impact of specific interventions designed to overcome these barriers.

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