

## Parental Action to Support Children's English Vocabulary Acquisition

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**Abstract:** Parental support is an essential factor contributing to children's acquisition process. This study aimed to investigate the action of parental support in children's English vocabulary acquisition. This study was designed as a descriptive qualitative study. Five parents from different educational backgrounds and professions and five-year-old young learners were chosen as participants in this study. Interviews and observation were employed to obtain the data. The data was collected through one-on-one semi-structured interviews and field notes. The data collected was then analyzed using five steps of qualitative data analysis proposed by Creswell and Creswell. The results showed four parental actions to support children's English vocabulary acquisition. Parents from different educational backgrounds and professions provided various ways to be involved in their children's English vocabulary acquisition. They were motivating the children to learn English, providing media exposure, monitoring the children using digital media, and assisting the children at home. It is proven that parents can support their children in acquiring English vocabulary in a variety of ways; therefore, it is suggested that all parents who have young learners support their children's English acquisition process.



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## INTRODUCTION

English as a universal language has an essential role in global society as it is used by people around the world as a tool to communicate with worldwide residents. Due to the fact that English is universal language, it is essential for children to acquire English from an early age in their childhood. Steinberg and Sciarini (2006) make it clear by arguing that children are better than adults in acquiring a second language in a natural situation. Therefore, English is essential for children to acquire in their childhood. Many factors can influence the process of second language acquisition. Steinberg and Sciarini (2006) divide those factors into psychological and social categories. Psychological factors deal with the process inside the children, or, in other words, the process that occurs in their brains, such as memory, motor skills, motivation, attitude, etc. On the other hand, social factors deal with the environment, family, culture, and the conditions in the school. The focus of this study is parental factors involved in the natural situation and the children's motivation to acquire the

English language. Parents are the child's first teachers because they are the people who engage and interact mostly with the child (Safwat & Sheikhan, 2014). Children must have input and knowledge about their acquired language to comprehend it. According to Pasaribu (2021), children learn about the language from their immediate environment, including their family, the community, and their peer group. In other words, parents can support their children's language acquisition process.

This study specifically investigated parental action to support children's English vocabulary acquisition. Vocabulary is one of the important aspects of the language acquisition process. Linse and Nunan (2005) defined vocabulary as the collection of words that an individual is familiar with. Children cannot communicate well with others if they don't have the required vocabulary to express their ideas. Rafiq (2017) stated that someone with a limited vocabulary has a limited understanding of four basic English skills, making it difficult to express their ideas, thoughts, and opinions at a higher level. It means that children are required to have a lot of vocabulary in order to be able to communicate well with others. Vocabulary acquisition can be started at an early age of children. Al-Harbi (2020) argued that childhood periods are the best time for children to acquire language because the language acquisition device is very active in the early years of life.

Parents can take action to support their children's language acquisition. Parental support can be seen as parents' actions towards children that purpose to help children in their development process, including the language acquisition process. According to the literature explained by Steinberg and Sciarini (2006), regarding the factors that influence second language acquisition, two things can be included: parental action to support children's vocabulary acquisition, motivation, and natural situations. Steinberg and Sciarini (2006) said that the natural situation was related to where and with whom language exposure occurs, which in this context refers to parents in the home environment since this study focus is limited to home-based parental support. In addition, Chavez et al., (2023) found that parents can support children's language learning in a way that encourages their children to read and provides language exposure to the children. In summary, according to some literature that explains parental support in children's language acquisition, it can be concluded that four forms of parental action support children's English vocabulary acquisition.

Firstly, motivating children to learn English is crucial since it is a form of desire to learn or acquire a language (Loan & Phuong, 2022); when children desire to acquire a language, they must acquire that language. Furthermore, Anjamshoa and Sadighi (2015) argued that with the support of external environmental factors, second language learning at home is relatively easy, even automatic.

Secondly, several studies have discussed that exposure to children significantly affects children's language development. A study conducted by Al-Zoubi (2018) revealed that exposure to English language significantly impacted the learner's knowledge (vocabulary) of the language. Therefore, providing media exposure to children is essential in their language acquisition process. Providing media exposure to children was aimed at promoting the English language as well as helping children learn that language (Fata et al., (2022); Chavez et al., (2023)). In addition, providing engaging media exposure to children can accelerate the process of English vocabulary acquisition (Anggraini et al., 2022).

Thirdly, parents' role in children's language acquisition is not simply providing media exposure to children. Parents should also take part in the use of those media, especially digital media because digital media such as smartphones offer the magic of YouTube videos that allow children to access numerous videos they want. Therefore, parents' control over the content accessed by children through the media is essential. Lee et al., (2022) stated that parents play a critical role in deciding the media to use by their children since parents are the actors who spend time with the children and build a home environment associated with media exposure. In their study, Alrosanty et al., (2021) found that a mother monitors her child's learning activity when the child uses media exposure to ensure that the content of YouTube videos is suitable for her child's age.

Furthermore, Dinçer and Topçu (2022) underlined the fact that the internet is easily and uncontrollably accessible and can negatively affect children's cyberbullying, sleep patterns and self-image perception for those who lack a psychological development process. They also mentioned that digital media can provide access to harmful content that results in psychological problems such as stress, anxiety, and cognitive problems. Therefore, parents must monitor their children's use of the media.

Lastly, parents can take action to support children's English vocabulary acquisition by assisting their children in the learning activity at home. Parents' role in assisting children at home is crucial because children live and spend most of their time with their parents. Liu et al., (2020) mentioned that parents are the first teachers of their infants, and this role continues to become active in their children's education and lives. Parents can assist their children at home by answering the children's questions regarding the vocabulary meanings they didn't understand. It is just simply to tell them what the words mean.

Some researchers have already investigated the topic of parental action to support children's language acquisition. Rajudin (2018) in his research discussed the process of children's English vocabulary acquisition at a private elementary school in Palangkaraya and the parents' contribution to that process. The result showed that parents suggest children use English at home and become their friends in speaking English. The parents are also giving their children private courses and providing media exposure to learn English vocabulary through social media and TV. On the other hand, the study conducted by Haikal and Rozi (2022) found that there are several practices done by both parents and teachers to support the children's early language acquisition, such as providing language sources, ensuring language accuracy, conducting parent-child interaction, applying multimedia learning tools, employing teaching aids, and presenting rewards.

Referring to those previous studies, the writers were inspired to conduct a study on the related topic but have differences to fill the gap. The writers did not mention specific conditions (the participants' educational background and profession) in the previous studies. The participants of this study come from different educational backgrounds and professions. This is essential to analyze because the educational background and profession, which are parts of socioeconomic status, can influence children's language acquisition. Parents with high education have more success in providing cognitive and language abilities to their children that support early academic achievement (Marzulina et al., 2018). High educated parents have more knowledge that affect the various way they used to support their children's vocabulary acquisition. Furthermore, a study conducted by Rintaningrum et

al., (2022) claimed that parents who have different occupation and educational background provide different assistance in helping their children to learn English.

Employing descriptive qualitative research through interview and observation, data was collected from five parents from different background and profession. The data was then analyzed following the steps purposed by Creswell and Creswell (2018). This study was conducted to answer the research question "what did the parents do to support children's English vocabulary acquisition?". The findings revealed four parental actions to support children's English vocabulary acquisition. They were motivating the children to learn English, providing media exposure, monitoring the children using digital media, and assisting the children at home.

The result of study can be a bridge between teacher and parent in educational setting to promote children's English vocabulary development. This research result provided the ways or actions that parents can do to support children to acquire their English vocabulary. Beside parents can share their experiences and inspire other parents to get more information about the parental action in children's English vocabulary acquisition, they could also collaborate with teacher by fostering open communication.

## **METHOD**

This study employed descriptive qualitative study design to investigate the topic of parental action to support children's English vocabulary acquisition. Creswell and Creswell (2023) defined qualitative research as a method of analysis where the researcher keeps close to the data, use constrained frameworks and interpretation to explain the data, and organizes the data into themes. As the primary data source, this study engaged five parents from different educational backgrounds and professions in Sintang Regency, West Borneo. The parents have five-year-old young learners who were the object of this study. The first step to determine the participants was doing observation and looking for parents who have five-year-old children. The children should have good English vocabulary mastery. This study also required parents from different educational background and profession in order to collect more various data. Finally, there were five mothers who are ready to be the participants of this study. The first participant (MN) is an English tutor in a private course in Sintang. She was graduated from Senior High School. The second participant (SM) is a social worker at an international Christian foundation. She graduated from a public university in Pontianak, majoring in Chemistry Department. The third participant (IJP) is a housewife who did not get into university. The fourth participant (YR) is a housewife who graduated from the Public Administration Department at a university in Kalimantan. The last participant (AA) is an experienced nurse in a hospital in Sintang.

Purposive sampling was applied to select parents that required to be participants in this study. According to Creswell and Guetterman (2019), in purposive sampling, the researchers select individuals and sites purposively to learn or comprehend the main phenomenon. The reason for choosing the parents as the source of information is that the children spent most of their time with their parents and based on the pre-observation conducted by the researcher, it was found that the parents also involved in the language acquisition process of their children. Since parents are primarily responsible for their children's upbringing, the parents are the ones with whom their children have the closest

relationships, making them the best sources of information for the researcher regarding the learner's activities.

After selecting the participants, a list of questions is prepared to get the information from the participants. Semi-structured interviews and observations were employed to collect the data. Interview guideline as the instrument of this research was containing a list of open-ended questions related to the topic of this study that being asked to the participants. On the other hand, field notes as the supporting data instrument contained two aspects, including the activities done by the parents and children and media used when the children acquired English vocabulary. The data of this study are the interview results from the parents supported by observation results. In conducting the interview, the audio recorder was used to record the interview process.

There were some aspects that the researcher asked to each parents such as parents' educational background and profession, the process of children's vocabulary acquisition, the learning activity at home, the use of English language in communication with the children, and the parents' action to help the children acquired vocabulary. In addition, observation was conducted twice for each participant to get more information supporting the data obtained from the interview results. The researcher had observed the activities when the children acquire English vocabulary along with their parents' action to check if it was suitable with the data that researcher get from the result of interview with the parents. This observation was also be used to check any additional information which missed from the interview. After all the data had been collected, the five-step qualitative data analysis by Creswell and Creswell (2018) was applied to analyze the data obtained in this study which involved organizing the data, reading or look the data, coding, generating descriptions and themes, and representing the description and themes.

The researchers realized that this qualitative research may give the bias result and being too subjective. Therefore, to avoid this case, the researchers did some ways in order to reduce bias in this research. Researchers have ensured that the questions being asked to interviewee is not tend to be too subjective. The researchers employed open-ended questions to allow the participants to give various answers without being limited. Furthermore, the participants in this study were unaware the certain of this study details, such as the good or bad way to support their children to acquire English vocabulary. The researchers asked them to reveal the actual condition. In addition, while doing observation, the researchers asked the participants to act naturally as it usually happens to avoid the bias result. Moreover, the instruments of this research were designed with specific criteria to answer the research questions. The exclusion criteria for research questions was minimized to avoid long-unimportant information gained. The instruments have also been validated by the expert, who are lecturers.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

The findings of this study provide valuable insights into parental action to support children's English vocabulary acquisition. Five parents from different educational backgrounds and professions were interviewed to obtain information for this study. As a result, the writers found that there are four actions of parental involvement that have been

done by the parents in their children's English vocabulary acquisition process. Parents motivate their children to learn English, provide media exposure, monitor the children in using digital media, and assist them at home.

**Table 1.** The Parental Action to Support Their Children in Acquiring English Vocabulary

No	Participants	Motivating Children to Learn English	Providing Media Exposure	Monitoring the Children in Using Digital Media	Assisting Children at Home
1	MN	looking at her child’s teacher	digital and non-digital media	✓	Playing game, arrange the letter-shaped toy
2	SM	based on the things that the child likes	digital and non-digital media	✓	Playing vocabulary game such as “Guess Who am I” game
3	IJP	-	digital media	✓	Watching television with the child
4	YR	go abroad	digital media	✓	Accompany the child at home
5	AA	looking at her child’s teacher	digital media	✓	-

***Motivating Children to Learn English***

According to the interview results, the researcher discovered that each parents has a way of motivating their child to learn English. MN and AA did the same to motivate their children. They motivate their child by looking at a teacher who teaches in the kindergarten where their child lives. The teacher just came back from his holiday abroad. His photo during the holiday was posted on the school's wall. Therefore, the children also knew their teacher was just back from abroad. MN and AA told their children that if they (the children) wanted to go abroad, they must learn English. This kind of motivation is the same as the result of a study conducted by Demirbulak and Zeyrek (2022), where mostly the participants of their study who were primary school students learned English to go abroad and work there as well as get friends from another country.

On the other hand, participant SM, YR, and IJP have different ways of motivating their child to learn English. SM gave motivation to her child based on what her child saw and liked at that time. For example, if the child saw animals abroad on television, she told her child that she could go abroad to see those animals if he learned English. SM was motivating her child in the context of a holiday abroad. Her family went abroad several months ago; then she told her child that if she (the child) would like to return there again, she (the child) must learn English. YR did not motivate her child directly as other participants did. She was giving her child an English course, which directly motivated the child to learn English more and more because, unlike at home, the child should learn English at the English course with other friends. The motivations given by all participants to their children were not only once. They did the same way continually at every chance they

had. As a result, their children become more interested in English. Therefore, they acquire more and more English vocabulary.

### ***Providing Media Exposure to Children***

The media exposed to the children were digital media, such as mobile phones, tablets, computers, and television, and non-digital media, such as flashcards, posters, and books. Based on the interview results, it was found that participant one and two were providing both digital and non-digital media exposure to their children. Interestingly, MN's non-digital media exposure to her child was made up by herself. She made flashcards from English posters, where she cut the posters and made them into pieces like flashcards. She also provides toys that match the flashcards, so the child imagines things through the picture and can see how they look physically.

On the other hand, participant YR and AA were only providing digital media to their children. The digital media they expose their children to are television and smartphones. In addition, IJP also provided digital media, such as a tablet, to her child. Through these digital media, children can acquire more English vocabulary through content such as animation videos. They also used the media to play games that required English language to access.

### ***Monitoring Children in Using Digital Media***

All parents in this study provided media exposure to their children and monitored their children's use of the media. This is important because most children at their golden age are highly curious about certain things they are interested in. Therefore, the parents' role in monitoring them is crucial to ensure that the children get a positive impact from the media. They monitor their children using digital media by accompanying them in their activities, such as watching television or videos through YouTube. They always ensure that the child gets suitable learning material from the media they use, especially when watching YouTube videos on a smartphone or films on television. This is in line with Pertiwi et al. (2022), who argued that parents could assist their children in using gadgets to watch YouTube by directing them to watch appropriate and suitable content. It was also supported by Gentile et al. (2014) mentioned that the monitoring of children's media use by parents included communication with the child about the media content and limiting the content or amount of the media use. Furthermore, AA confirmed that she monitors her child using digital media, not directly sitting down with the child to accompany her. However, she still monitors her child by ensuring that the content being watched by her child is appropriate for kids.

### ***Assisting Children at Home***

While doing learning activities at home (acquiring English vocabulary), the children sometimes need help from their parents when they want to know about something, for example, the things they saw in the media, and they would ask their parents to answer their questions. The parents would help their children when their child asked them the vocabulary that the child didn't know the meaning of. This is in line with Scott & Ytreberg (1990), who mentioned that children's world differs from adults', where adults seldom admit when they

do not know something. Children ask their parents or friends when they do not know something.

One out of five parents who is a social worker accompanied her child to acquire English vocabulary at home through various learning activities. The activities included playing a game called "*Guess Who Am I*," where the mother used flashcards and asked the child to guess the names of the things. She gave clues in the form of descriptions or even sounds. In addition, they also usually watch television together. Here, the mother's role in assisting the child was detected. The mother told her child about the animals or things on the television that the child did not know the name of. Therefore, the child's vocabulary mastery is increased. In addition, the learning activity was not only initiated by the parents. Sometimes, the child asked her mother to play or learn with him. This was supported by Scott and Ytreberg (1990), who said that five to seven learners can plan activities, which means that they can have ideas in their minds to play or learn and be accompanied by their parents.

The rest of the four parents also assisted their children at home. One of the parents, a nurse, clarified that she did not always accompany her child at home due to her nursing profession, which required her to spend most of her time at the hospital. The child independently acquired English vocabulary by herself. Furthermore, she was not assisting her child in acquiring English vocabulary because she didn't like English, and even her child was better than her.

On the other hand, the English tutor assists her child by, for example, correcting when her child wrongly arranges the letter to form the name of something. She also accompanies her child while watching television to ensure that what her child watches is suitable and valuable. In line with MN, IJP, a housewife, assisted and monitored her child at home the same way. She helped correct her child's mistake when saying the colour name. She also answered the question raised by her child when they watched television.

On the other hand, YR accompanied her child while acquiring English vocabulary through media. However, she did not comprehensively assist her child as the other participants did because she did not always accompany her child to learn, and her English vocabulary mastery is less than what her child might have.

#### Implication for Educational Setting

The result of study can be a bridge between teacher and parent in educational setting to promote children's English vocabulary development. This research result provided the ways or actions that parents can do to support children to acquire their English vocabulary. Beside parents can share their experiences and inspire other parents to get more information about the parental action in children's English vocabulary acquisition, they could also collaborate with teacher by fostering open communication. Parents could share their observation at home regarding the condition their children's vocabulary development. This can help teacher at school to take further action to strengthen the children's vocabulary development. Furthermore, parents could collaborate with teacher to ensure the consistency of vocabulary theme learned at school. For example, if the children were learning science vocabulary at school, parents could help by talking about those words at home and finding ways to incorporate them into daily routines. Parents could even bring their children to the real appearance of the vocabulary learned at school. For example, if the children were

learning about animals vocabulary at school, parents could bring their children to visit zoo or watching for animals around their home environment.

### ***Potential Barriers in Implementing the Parental Actions***

Some factors may be considered as barriers by parents while supporting their children to acquire English vocabulary. The initial factor is about time. Many parents lead busy of working lives where they spend less time at home with their children. Considering this fact, they may struggle to find time to engage with their children in learning activity at home. However, they still have the chance to use their short time at home by incorporating vocabulary into everyday activity. For example, during a drive, they can point out objects and discuss words related to their surroundings. Even small moments like discussing a word during breakfast or explaining a word in a TV show, can be helpful. Another factor is the limited English proficiency. Parents who did not speak English fluently may feel unsure to help their children acquire English vocabulary because they still learning that language too. To overcome this challenge, both digital and non-digital media exposure can be helpful. Both media exposure offer translations in English and Indonesian which ease the students to acquire and understand the language. In addition to those two factors above, limited knowledge of effective vocabulary strategies may be another barrier for parents. Some parents may not know the most effective ways to promote vocabulary acquisition, relying solely on rote memorization rather than deeper understanding. Due to this matter, parents can collaborate with their children's teacher at school to provide them with simple, research-based strategies of vocabulary teaching. Furthermore, parents can also find out the strategies through scientific sources to ensure its validity.

### **CONCLUSION**

This present study shows four actions taken by five parents from different educational backgrounds and professions to support their children's English vocabulary acquisition. These are motivating children to learn English, providing media for English exposure, monitoring children in using digital media, and assisting children at home. These parental actions are essential to be done by parents who have young learners to support their children's English vocabulary acquisition. As this study involved only five parents as the participants, it is suggested for other researchers who will do the future research related to the topic of this research to involve more participants so the data obtained will be richer and deeper. Furthermore, with the related topic, the future researchers are hoped to reveal more variables of the research in order to gain the diversity of data that may contribute specifically to educational settings.

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