ENGLISH LEARNING ASSISTANCE BY PARENTS OF ELITE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN YOGYAKARTA

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Abstract

Although previous research has revealed that parental learning assistance can support children's English language skills, only a few of these studies have been conducted in Indonesia. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to describe (1) the motivation of parents in introducing English from an early age, and (2) the manifestation of assistance in learning English by parents. This research is a case study conducted in an elite elementary school in Yogyakarta where the students have good speaking skills and achievements in English competitions. Data were collected by using an open questionnaire given to 60 parents of grade III-VI, then it was analyzed through data condensation, data presentation, and drawing conclusions. The results showed that parents introduced English from an early age because of the belief that the younger a person learns the language, the easier it is to master and the hope that mastering English can support children's education and careers in the future. The manifestation of assistance in learning English is carried out to develop listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills.

Keywords: learning assistance, parents, English, elite elementary school

Introduction

Nowadays, the interest in English learning for young learners is increasing. It is because mastery of English is seen as necessary to meet the qualification in the era of globalization (Nunan, 2003). On the other hand, teaching English to children is not easy to implement, especially in countries where English is spoken as a foreign language, including Indonesia. English is only studied in a classroom context so that its use is less intensive in students' daily lives. Barriers to the implementation of teaching English to children are also shown in several research results; some of those are the limited learning time, infrastructure, materials, and large classes (Abrar, 2016); the difficulty of getting the students' interest in English learning activities, classroom management, development of teaching materials that follow student characteristics, and the use of mother tongue in learning English (Arikan, 2015). Moreover, other obstacles in teaching English for children are the lack of parental involvement and the discrepancy between education policy and the implementation of learning in schools (Araos, 2015).

One of the obstacles in learning English for children can be minimized by optimizing the role of parents. It is supported by several studies that show the positive influence of parents on the implementation of English language learning programs for children. Aro and Erdmann (2015) note that parental expectations are the most influential factor among various external factors. In line with this opinion, Thigpen and

Freedberg (2014) also see that parental involvement is correlated with students' test scores. This statement is also confirmed in research conducted by Timmons and Pelletier (2015), which shows that parental involvement is needed to support students' mastery of English.

The participation of parents to support effective English learning can be done not only through partnerships with schools but also by providing learning assistance at home. Edsource (2006) emphasizes that parental involvement at home and school impacts student achievement at school. It is a major supporting factor for students in studying English. Learning assistance carried out by parents at home can be done through various activities. Some of them are by accompanying students to read and do homework (Jynes, 2007) and communicating school activities by children (Zou et al., 2013). The research results by Hosseinpour, Sherkatolabbasi, and Yarahmadi (2015) conducted to 14 parents show that the intensity of parents in assisting children in learning English has a positive impact on children's abilities compared to other children who are not accompanied when learning English.

Even though English is no longer included in the national curriculum for elementary school education in Indonesia, parents' expectations for their children to master the language are still high. It is shown in the research of Indriati (2016) and Wati (2015) that parents also have high expectations to see their children master English. Another study reveals that not a few parents enrolled their children in English courses outside of school hours. It supports the acquisition of good grades in English class and believes that introducing children to English from the age of 6 does not negatively impact them (Djiwandono, 2005).

The previous research reveals that there has not yet been sufficient research on English learning assistance by parents in elite elementary schools that have special characteristics. The elite school take students from the privileged class who can afford their through-the-ceiling fees and other charges (Moniza, 2009), so they do not have problems with the lack of teaching and learning facilities. Furthermore, the elite school personnels believe that their education aims at empowering students according to the latest demands and current market realities of globalization and the language of communication within school is English (Malik, 2012).

The chosen elementary schools as the setting of this research are an elite elementary school in Yogyakarta with complete learning facilities, small classrooms, and students from supper socio-economic class. The results of interviews with the students, which were conducted in English, showed that the students of the two selected elite schools were able to communicate in English. Many of them had achievements related to the use of English, such as speech contests, storytelling competitions, national Olympiad, and spelling bees. The observation results also showed that students actively used English to communicate with classmates, teachers, and staffs, either in the classroom or outside.

A further reason for choosing this elite elementary school is the opportunity to obtain sufficient research data. In these schools, English is studied intensively since grade I although it is no longer listed in the national elementary school curriculum. In

Indonesia, there is diversity in the implementation of elementary school English learning and not all schools take an intensive approach. In addition, the elite elementary school has various programs to support the English skills, which are carried out intensively.

Previous research studies have shown that parents have high motivation to introduce English from an early age and the positive impact of parental learning assistance. Therefore, this study will describe the motivation for early introduction of English and forms of learning assistance by parents in an elite elementary school. The selection of the school context was based on the results of Butler's (2013) research which showed a relationship between parents' socioeconomic background and children's English learning assistance. In China, parents in both upper and lower levels of society highly hope that their children will master English. However, parents in the upper level of society are more intensive in assisting in learning English for their children. In line with the results of this study, the intensive assistance in learning English by parents of students from elite schools is expected to enrich the data in this study so that it is more diverse and becomes an illustration, especially in the development of English learning strategies.

Although previous research has revealed that parental learning assistance can support children's English language skills, only a few of these studies have been conducted in Indonesia. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to describe (1) the motivation of parents in introducing English from an early age, and (2) the manifestation of assistance in learning English by parents.

Literature Review
Parental Involvement in Teaching English

Efforts to involve parents in school activities in general and classroom learning activities in particular are good for providing positive input to the school. Parental involvement can be done in several ways, such as asking parents for their opinion on school programs, workshops on discipline, and discussing hindrances and problems experienced by students (Porteus, et al, 2001). In previous researches (Moloko, 2000) showed that parents can be involved to assist teachers in shaping students' positive behavior towards learning. Parents' involvement in learning activities cannot be ignored because academically successful students are usually attributable to parents' support and guidance at home (Dixon, 1992).

The positive impact of involving parents in learning activities at school is also shown by a research result in which students can achieve maximum success if parents are involved in academic activities (Wolfendale, 1983). The involvement of parents in school activities has an impact on teachers and schools because the activities would be more organized and could increase work motivation.

Teaching English at Elite School

Every parent wants the best for their children, including education. One way to do this is by choosing schools for children according to the parents' perspective on

educational goals and things that are considered important for their children. One of the considerations is the implementation of learning English from an early age in the hope that it will be easier for children to master it. In fact, the high interest of parents in TEYL encourages schools to bring in native speakers from abroad to become teachers (Garton et al., 2011).

The global expansion of the need for English mastery has created business opportunities around the world. Although the cost of education in private schools is more expensive than state-run schools, this actually strengthens the image that private schools are more effective in educating their students (Peterson & Laudet, 2006). In fact, this phenomenon has become part of the lifestyle and gave rise to a new term, namely elite schools. Interest in elite schools is currently increasing due to an increase in the economy, but on the other hand it shows global inequality (Piketty, 2014). To be able to maintain and increase the of students' and parents' interest in elite schools, efforts are being made to make it possible to deliver students to the next level of the prestigious schools (Kenway & Koh, 2013). Parents want their children to interact with a group of peers who come from circles who have the same social status as they are (Figlio & Stone, 1997). In other words, the increasing interest in elite schools is also influenced by social factors in which parents want their children to be in the same environment of people with the same characteristics as the parents. In addition, by enrolling their children in elite schools, parents hope that their children can have prestigious career achievements as well.

Method

This research is qualitative research because this type of research is expected to provide a broader and deeper understanding of the object of research (Vanderstoep and Johnston, 2009). Researchers need it because research on English learning assistance provided by students' parents has a broad scope. There are five types of research in qualitative research: narrative research, ethnography, grounded theory, phenomenology, and case studies (Creswell, 2007). Of the five types of research, case studies are considered the most appropriate to answer the questions in this study. It is reinforced by Timmons and Cairns (2010), which state that case studies can be effective and detailed in monitoring classes or schools with unique programs in educational research. This study aimed to explore data regarding assistance in learning English by parents from an elite elementary school who are assumed to come from the upper-middle class and have high motivation for their children's foreign language mastery.

This research was conducted in an elite elementary school in Yogyakarta. The selection of this research setting was based on the research objectives (Hatch, 2002). Because the prior research studies reveal that parents have a role in developing children's English skills, this study aimed to explore data on motivation and forms of learning assistance. Researcher used purposive sampling to select informants who met

predetermined criteria (Cozby, 2009). The informants were parents of students from elite elementary schools who have many achievements in English.

Participants' identity involved in the study will not be exposed because, according to Timmons and Cairns (2010), researchers in case study research must guarantee participants' confidentiality. Therefore, in this study, the researchers used the initials of the names mentioned as follows. In this study, researchers gave open-ended questionnaires to 60 parents of students in grades III-VI.

Discussion

An open-ended questionnaire distributed to 60 parents of grade IV-VI at an elite elementary school in Yogyakarta opened up opportunities to get more diverse data because the respondents could provide detailed and as many answers as they can. The first data obtained was the age when the students were first introduced to English. The data were presented in the following table.

Table 1. Early Introduction to English

No	Age	Percentage
1	0	10 %
2	1	11.7 %
3	2	18.3 %
4	3	11.7 %
5	4	30 %
6	5	13.3 %
7	6	5 %
	Total	100%

Based on the table above, it was preferable for parents to introduce their children to English from 4 years. In fact, in the top two, 18.3% of parents introduced a foreign language since the child was not yet 2-year-old. In addition, the data showed that only a few parents of elite elementary school students in Yogyakarta had introduced English to their children since the age of 6 years.

Data regarding the introduction of English to children showed that most parents of elite elementary school students in Yogyakarta introduced English to their children from an early age. The following table showed the number of reasons that encouraged parents to do this.

Table 2. Reasons of Early Introduction to English

No	Category	Summary of the Parents' Responses	Percentage
1	Belief of English language	The younger the better (Input easily absorbed by children)	52.2 %
		Essential for a child's future	26.1 %
2	Family	Having an expatriate member of family	11.6 %
		Temporarily staying abroad	7.2 %
3	No reason	No reason	2.9 %
	Total		100%

More than 50% of parents thought that the earlier the child was introduced to English, the easier the process of mastering a foreign language would be. In addition, many parents had high hopes for mastering English for their children's future. Another reason that encouraged parents

to introduce English early was the family factor. Parents needed to introduce their children to English because they had foreign-nationals-family living in Indonesia. In addition, parents needed to introduce English because they took their children to live abroad due to study and work for a while.

The belief of 'the younger, the better' is a further reason behind the implementation of TEYL. A second language is acquired if learning competences are gained before a certain age (pre-puberty) (Ellis, 2003). This age group is referred to as the critical period and during this period, language sensitivity is high. Brewster et.al. (2003) added that children are benefit most in listening comprehension and pronunciation, so they find it easy to understand and imitate new language items. They are also able to master English to a level of that of native speakers, although with different accents (Pinter, 2006), and carry stronger self confidence (Harley, 1998).

Cognitivism assumes that a child's innate factor is considered as the determining factor in the language learning process. Child is born with a potential that is specially equipped with a tool to acquire a language. This special tool is called language acquisition device (LAD), which plays a role in processing language. Moreover, LAD also contains "abstract representation of universal rules" such as a common potential called the universal grammar (UG). It serves as the main instrument for a child in the process of language acquisition. Using LAD, when a child receives a linguistic input, it becomes the basis to develop his language competence (Brown, 2007).

Parents of elite elementary school students in Yogyakarta had high hopes for their children's English mastery. The following table showed that these expectations could be seen from 4 aspects, namely studies, work, social networks, and personality.

Table 3. Parents' expectations for children's English skills

No	Category	Summary of the Parents' Responses	Percentage
1	Studies	Access to information	27.1 %
		Further studies abroad	8.2 %
2	Profession	It's easier to get a job / earn money	25.9 %
		Work at international level	5.9 %
3	Association	International association	3.5 %
		Easier when traveling	14.1 %
4	Personality	Increased confidence	11.8 %
		Becoming a meaningful person / supporting national progress	3.5 %
Total			100%

The greatest hope of parents for their children's English skills was to support studies, especially in terms of easy access to information in the context of mastering science and technology. In addition, parents wanted their children to continue their studies abroad, which requires mastery of English. The work factor was also a parent's expectation of their children's English skills. Parents had confidence that children would find it easier to get jobs and even work for international standard companies by having English skills. Parents of elite elementary school students in Yogyakarta also hoped that English language skills would expand their children's social networks to an international level. Another hope that parents believed was that children would feel more confident and useful for the nation by mastering the English language.

The parents' expectations of elite elementary schools in Yogyakarta were in line with the opinions of several experts.

Mastery of English is seen to have an important role in the era of globalization (Nunan, 2003). It is considered to be able to open up opportunities for a better life, promise a higher social status (Ghatage, Inal, Kapur, and Lee, 2000), and allow access to various sciences (Sua and Raman, 2007). Therefore, there is a strong push for teaching the language during the early years with the aim of preparing prospective workers with greater English mastery (Graddol, 2008). In addition, many parents want their children to master English to support their education and future career (Garton, Copland, & Burns, 2011). Consequently, pressure to implement TEYL has got stronger (Enever and Moon, 2009).

English learning assistance provided by parents was carried out in all language skills. Learning activities to support students' listening skills could be divided into five categories: listening and doing activities, listening for information, listening and repeating activities, listening to stories, and independent listening (Scott & Ytreberg, 1991) were shown in the following table.

Table 4. Listening Assistance

No	Category	Summary of the Parents' Responses	Percentage
1	Listening and doing activities	Giving instructions in English regarding daily activities	29.3 %
		Asking the child to respond in the form of actions	12.1 %
2	Independent listening	Listen to films	14.1 %
		Listen to songs	16.2 %
		Listen to podcasts	2 %
		Listen to native speakers	1 %
3	Listening to stories	Reading stories in English	16.2 %
4	Listening and repeating activities	Providing a new vocabulary or phrase model and asking children to imitate it	7.1 %
5	Listening for information	Giving several English questions based on certain topics that the children had to listen to it	2 %
Total			100%

The results of this study also showed five forms of listening learning assistance. The form of learning assistance carried out by the majority of parents was listening and doing activities. It was done by giving instructions in English regarding daily activities and asking the child to respond in the form of actions. This form of learning assistance was known as the Total Physical Response (TPR) method. This method was believed to improve students' listening skills. It was proven by prior research conducted by Aprilia (2016), Fiska, Budi & Asih (2016), Indah & Binti (2019), Mellya & Ulfa (2015) and Prananti, Ratminingsih & Marjohan (2019).

The second form of assistance widely used to improve listening skills was independent listening. It was done by providing learning facilities such as internet access so that children could listen to films, songs, and podcasts in English and enrol children in English courses mentored by native speakers. The results of this study were also in line with the results of prior research conducted by Amalia, Kusrini, & Ramadhani (2019), Gibreel (2018), Kamilah (2013), Rismawati (2017), Tekin (2016), Safranj (2015), and Widiastuti (2012) showing the role of these facilities to support listening skills.

Listening to stories was a form of learning assistance carried out by parents of elite elementary schools in Yogyakarta by reading stories in English. The use of English stories to support the development of listening skills was also shown in prior research (Hamdy, 2017); Palangngan, Atmowardoyo & Veda, 2015); Ramirez & Alonso, 2007); and Sandaran & Kia, 2013). The form of listening learning assistance carried out by a minority of parents was listening and repeating activities by providing a new vocabulary or phrase model and asking children to imitate it and also listening for information by giving several English questions based on certain topics, then the children had to listen to it. The results of this study were also relevant to the results of research conducted by Qismullah, Abdul, Yunisrina & Lathifatuddini (2017) and Wa Ode (2019) discussing listen and repeat activities, as well as research by Hidayah (2014) and Dewi (2016) discussing listening for information.

Learning assistance provided by parents was also aimed at developing children's speaking skills. It can be done by presenting new language orally, controlled practice, guided practice, dialogues and role-play works, and free speaking activities (Scott & Ytreberg, 1991).

Table 5. Speaking Assistance

No	Category	Summary of the Parents' Responses	Percentage
1	Free speaking activities	Communicate at home using English	41.9 %
2	Controlled practice	Saying rhymes	4.8 %
		Singing songs	11.3 %
		Practising new vocabulary	27.4 %
3	Guided practice	Produce new sentences based on examples of sentences that children had learned at school	9.7 %
		Speaking games	3.2 %
		Information-gap activities	1.6 %
Total			100%

In this study, the most common parental learning assistance was free speaking. Parents revealed that they often invited their children to communicate at home using English. Topics that were often discussed include activities carried out by students at school, school assignments, friends, weekend plans, problems that children were facing and their feelings. The free speaking activity was also proven to improve students' speaking ability, as shown in some research conducted by Kayi (2006) and Paul (2003).

Apart from free speaking activities, many parents accompanied their children through controlled practice by saying rhymes, singing songs, and practising new vocabulary. It was also expressed by Nunan (2003) that to develop speaking skills; children need to be assisted to produce the English speech sound and sound patterns, use stress sentences, intonation patterns, and rhythm, and choose the right words according to the context. In research conducted by Iroegbu & Ifedayo (2020), Sri, Hijjatul, & Mulyadi (2018), and Titis (2018), it was revealed that rhythms and songs could improve students' speaking skills.

The form of assistance in learning English that some parents did was guided practice. Parents accompanied children to produce new sentences based on examples of sentences that they had learned at school. In addition, parents revealed that they used flashcards to do speaking games with their children and information-gap activities. The speaking assistance provided by parents was in line with Paul's opinion (2003) that practising new patterns in combination with the other patterns that the children had learned could make it easier for students to understand

the sentence patterns. Speaking games were also believed to motivate students to develop their speaking skills (Harmer, 2007; Urrutia & Vega, 2006).

In this study, it appeared that reading skills were also developed by parents through three forms, namely helping recognize the sound, word and phrase; finding information; and retelling a story (Slattery & Willis, 2001). It was presented in the following table.

Table 6. Reading Assistance

No	Category	Summary of the Parents' Responses	Percentage
1	Retelling a story	Encouraging children to retell the story	37.9 %
		Explaining the reading content	7.6 %
2	Finding information	Asking children to find important information from the texts they read	24.2 %
		Explaining the meaning of new vocabulary in reading	12.1 %
3	Helping recognize the sound, word and phrase	Helping children understand sounds, words, and phrases through reading mentoring	3.0 %
		Giving correction or feedback to child's inaccuracies in reading	15.2 %
	Total		100%

Of the three reading assistance forms, most parents used stories to encourage children to retell their contents. The activity of retelling a story had also been proven to improve students' reading skills through several studies (Dunst, Carl, Simkud & Hamby, 2012); Miller, Sara & Pennycuff, 2008; and Rudiawan & Jupri, 2020).

Some parents also developed reading skills by asking children to find important information from the texts they read. It was done by the parents using the question-and-answer method. This activity was also one of the strategies teachers often applied in teaching reading (Muhammad & Jannatun, 2019). In addition, a minority of parents revealed that they helped students understand sounds, words, and phrases through reading mentoring. The awareness of those language elements needed to be understood by teachers because it was a strong predictor of students' reading success (Adams, Foorman, Lundberg, & Beeler, 1998).

Table 7. Writing Assistance

No	Category	Summary of the Parents' Responses	Percentage
1	Free writing activities	Writing a description	16.4 %
		Writing a synopsis	14.9 %
		Writing a short story	11.9 %
		Writing a diary	9 %
		Writing a letter	7.5 %
		Writing an email	16.4 %
2	Controlled writing activities	Dictation	11.9 %
		Copying	3 %
3	Guided writing activities	Fill-in exercises	6 %
		Dictation of half a sentence	3 %
	Total		100%

Parents of elite elementary school students in Yogyakarta provided three forms of assistance to develop children's writing skills: controlled, guided, and freewriting activities (Scott & Ytreberg, 1991). The following table showed the forms of learning assistance carried out by parents to support writing skills.

In this study, the form of writing assistance mostly done by parents was controlled writing activities through free writing activities. This activity was done through the creation of descriptive text, synopsis, short story, diary, letter, and email. It was believed to improve children's writing skills (Dede & Juwita, 2019) and self-confidence when writing (Hwang, 2010).

Dictation and copying activities were a form of writing assistance that parents also did a lot. Children were asked to write down sentences, phrases, or words read by their parents and copy them from books. In several studies conducted by Uda (2008), Yanti, Dian, Maisaroh&Ibnu (2018), Zulraudah & Jufri (2014), it was shown that these activities could improve students' writing skills. Suzuki, Itagaki & Koike (2010) added that these activities were beneficial for developing writing skills and vocabulary mastery.

The minority of parents revealed that they accompanied students through guided writing activities through fill-in exercises and dictation of half a sentence. This activity was believed to improve writing skills (Dung & Trung 2020), including students' vocabulary mastery (Dehkordi, 2016).

Conclusion

Apart from learning at school, learning assistance at home is also one of the requirements of "The Younger the Better". Children learn language naturally by hearing people around them talk. However, it is not necessarily possible to produce a perfect speech, children still need the help of people around them, including parents, to try out sounds, play with sounds, help them and appreciate them all the time, and wait until the children finish speaking, then repeat and paraphrase. Here, the role of parents is very important to stimulate the development of language skills through routine activities and facilities for learning English.

Parents of the Yogyakarta elite elemetary school students are also the supporting factor for learning English. Based on open questionnaires filled out by parents, it shows that most parents introduced English from an early age. Not even a few who introduced it before the age of 1 years because they have the perception that English is easier to master if introduced early. In addition, parents have expectations related to work, study, and better social relations with the mastery of English by their children. Therefore, parents not only introduced English from an early age but also provide facilities and help to learn English at home to support students' listening, speaking, reading and writing skills.

Based on the research findings, it is important for parents to show positive attitudes towards learning English because parents' attitudes towards language can affect children's attitudes. The elementary school-aged children still depend on the help of adults for the things they do, so parents need to motivate their children to be active in activities related to developing English skills. In addition, parents are also expected to be a part of children's English learning both inside and outside the classroom.

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