Indonesian Language Barrier in Early Childhood Exposed to English Language Digital Media: A Case Study of Urban Families

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Abstract: The rapid growth of digital media consumption among young children has increased their exposure to foreign languages, particularly English. This phenomenon raises concerns about its potential impact on the development of their native language, Indonesian language. The purpose of this study is to identify the obstacles to Indonesian language experienced by children and to understand the effect of English-language digital media on their language development. This study examines the effect of exposure to English-language digital media on Indonesian language skills in early childhood. The phenomenon found shows that 5-year-old children who are more often exposed to digital content in English have difficulty in using Indonesian, especially in choosing words, constructing sentences, and communicating with peers. This study employed a qualitative case study methodology, with data collected through structured interviews with parents, systematic observations of children's communicative behaviors, and comprehensive documentation of their daily language usage. The results of the study show that intensive exposure to digital media and family communication patterns play a major role in children's language development. Children tend to be more accustomed to using English and have difficulty communicating in Indonesian. This study concludes that early exposure to English can affect children's Indonesian language skills. The recommendation given to parents is to reduce exposure to English-language digital media and increase interaction in Indonesian.

Keywords: Digital Media Exposure; Early Childhood; Language Barriers; Language Development

INTRODUCTION

Exposure to digital media has become an inseparable part of everyday life, including for young children (Romba & Ampa, 2024). In today's digital era, devices such as mobile phones, tablets, and televisions are often used as a means of entertainment and learning (Akbari & Irawan, 2023). Many contents provided in this media is in English, especially in urban environments that tend to adopt global culture. This condition creates a phenomenon of increasing use of English in children at a very critical age of language development. Increased exposure to English through digital media has created significant changes in language use patterns in early childhood (Rahayu, 2019). Many children are more familiar with English vocabulary and phrases, often without fully understanding their meaning. Although mastery of a foreign language, such as English, has benefits in the era of globalization, this condition can be a challenge for the development of children's Indonesian, which should be their primary language.

Indonesian, as the national language, has a strategic role in building national identity as well as being the main means of communication in everyday life (Wardani, 2023). Good command of Indonesian is not only important to support children's cognitive development, but also to strengthen their social and cultural involvement in society (Purwana et al., 2023). When young children use English more than Indonesian, concerns arise about the potential disruption of their ability to understand, use, and develop their mother tongue. This study aims to identify and understand the various obstacles faced by young children in using Indonesian due to exposure to English-language digital media. The main focus of this study is to explore how exposure to English-language digital media can affect Indonesian language skills in young children, especially in the context of urban families. Thus,

this study aims to provide an overview of the challenges of Indonesian language that arise in children who are intensively exposed to digital media that predominantly uses English.

The selection of this topic was motivated by the urgent need to understand this phenomenon in more depth, especially in the context of urban families who have high exposure to digital technology. By exploring these obstacles, it is hoped that solutions can be found to help children develop their Indonesian language skills without neglecting the benefits that can be obtained from exposure to a foreign language. This study is expected to provide guidance for families in managing exposure to English-language digital media so as not to hinder the development of children's Indonesian language and also adds to the literature on the impact of digital media on children's language skills in the context of urban families. The results of this study can be the basis for further research aimed at formulating effective strategies in improving Indonesian language proficiency in children growing up in bilingual or multilingual environments and help parents or educators in designing learning strategies that support a balance between the use of Indonesian and foreign languages. In addition, this study can be a reference for policy makers to develop digital literacy programs that strengthen the use of Indonesian in the family environment and educational institutions.

METHODS

This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study method to deeply understand the phenomenon being studied (Nurahma & Hendriani, 2021). The qualitative approach was chosen because it allows researchers to understand the meaning and interpretation of the research subjects, as well as to see the complexity of the phenomenon from various perspectives. This is in accordance with the statement of Handoko, et al. (2024) which states that a qualitative approach allows researchers to explore the meaning and interpretation of the research subjects, as well as to see the complexity of the phenomenon from various perspectives. A qualitative approach allows researchers to understand how research subjects understand and interpret the phenomena being studied. This is important because each individual has different experiences, backgrounds, and perspectives, therefore their interpretation of the phenomenon will also be different. By exploring the meaning and interpretation of the research subjects, researchers can gain a richer understanding of the phenomena being studied.

The case study method was chosen to allow researchers to focus on a specific context and analyze in depth a particular individual or group that is the object of the study. This study will use descriptive and narrative data to gain a broader understanding of the research subject. This is in line with the opinion of (Assyakurrohim et al., 2022) namely by using a qualitative approach and case study method, this study can provide a comprehensive and in-depth understanding of the phenomenon being studied, based on the existing situation by focusing the analysis on individuals or groups that are the objects of study in the study.

Research subjects in a study are individuals or groups who are sources of information and objects of observation (Habsy, 2017). They are people who provide data and information about the situation and conditions of the research site, and become the object of observation of researchers. In other words, research subjects are people who provide insight into the research object and help researchers understand the phenomena being studied. Mahendra, et al. (2024) describe research subjects as informants, which means people who are used to provide information about the situation and conditions of the research site. In line with this definition, Ahmadi, et al. (2021) describe research subjects as people observed as research targets.
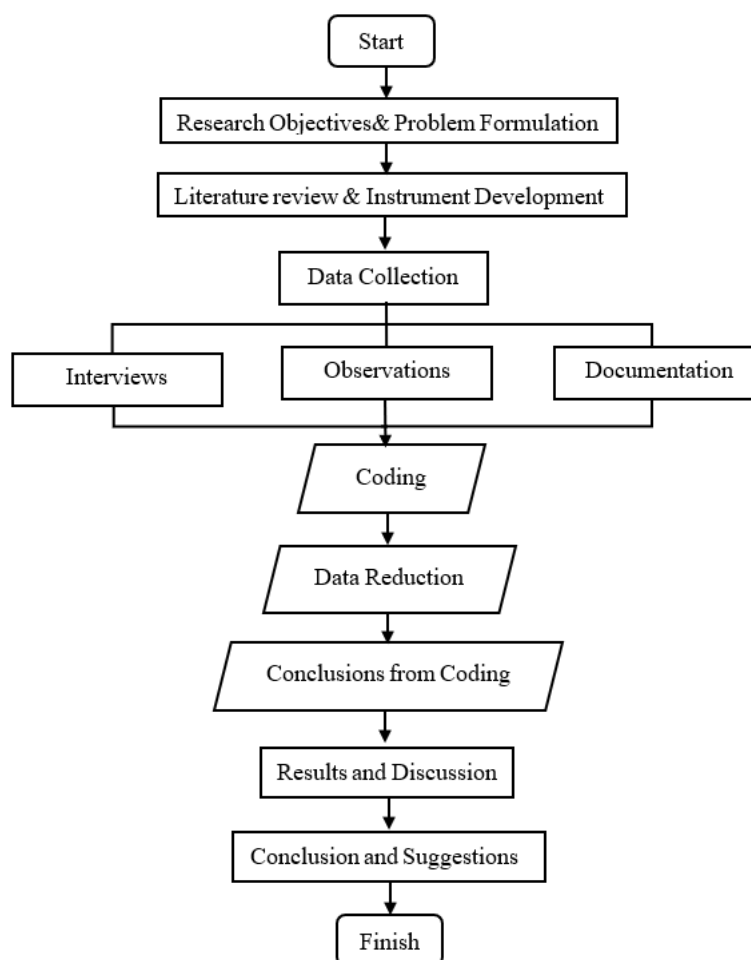
Figure 1. Research Process Flowchart

In this study, the research subjects were 5-year-old children. FA is a 5-year-old child who is exposed to English in its use. The selection of this subject was based on the suitability between the subject's condition and the focus of the study. FA's parents are expected to be able to provide information that can help strengthen research data on communication patterns with family, obstacles to social interaction, and the role of parents in supporting their language development. In addition, researchers will also observe the process of simple conversations between FA and her parents to gain a deeper understanding of the language used by children. By utilizing information and observations from FA, researchers hope to obtain accurate and relevant data to answer research questions and achieve research objectives.

The data collection techniques used were observation, interviews, and documentation.

1. Observation

Observation is a method of collecting data through direct observation of the phenomenon being studied. According to Sugiyono (in Sari & Wirman, 2021) Observation is a process in which researchers collect data by going directly to the field and observing what happens in the field. Observation techniques allow researchers to see, record, and be directly involved in the activities of informants, researchers can see and learn the meaning of visible behavior, observation involves the process of observation to understand situations and interactions in more detail. In this study, researchers conducted observations on social interactions and language use of FA children aged 5 years in Haji Idi Alley, Nagarawangi Village, Tawang District, Tasikmalaya City. Researchers observed how FA used Indonesian in communicating, especially when interacting with parents and the surrounding environment. In addition, observations also recorded the influence of exposure to English in the family on children's communication patterns outside the home.

2. Interview

Interview is a data collection technique by asking informants directly to obtain in-depth

information. Interviews can be conducted face-to-face or through communication media such as telephone. The main goal is to understand the informant's perspective on the issue being studied. In this study, interviews were conducted directly with parents and other family members living in Haji Idi Alley. Topics discussed included the habit of using English at home, communication patterns formed between parents and children, and obstacles faced by children in using Indonesian, especially in social contexts. Interviews also covered parents' expectations of their children's language skills and social interactions.

3. Documentation

Documentation is a data collection technique by utilizing documents or records related to events that occur (Purwaninngsih & Darma, 2021). Documentation can be in the form of writing, images, videos, or other artifacts that are relevant to the research phenomenon. This technique helps strengthen data obtained from observations and interviews. In this study, documentation was conducted by collecting data in the form of photos or videos of children's daily activities in the family environment and the community around Gang Haji Idi. In addition, documents such as parents' diaries related to children's language habits were also used as additional data sources. This documentation aims to obtain a deeper picture of children's language use and social interactions in the environment.

The research data analysis was conducted in 3 stages, namely data reduction, theme grouping, and drawing conclusions. In the data reduction stage, the researcher conducted coding to then group the data according to categories or themes that are in accordance with the formulation of the research problem. The main focus in data reduction is to focus on issues related to Indonesian language barriers, children's social interactions with their social environment, and the role of parents in helping children speak Indonesian. After the data is presented, the researcher will draw conclusions based on the results of the data analysis that has been processed through reduction and presentation. Conclusions will be drawn by referring to the formulation of the problem that has been set, as well as support from evidence found in data collection. This conclusion is expected to answer research questions regarding communication patterns between children and

parents at home who do not use English, obstacles in children's social interactions, and the role of parents in supporting children to speak well using Indonesian.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Digital Media Exposure

Based on the results of the interview with Mrs. VE, FA's parent, it is known that FA often accesses various digital content available on the YouTube platform. Mrs. VE stated, "FA often watches English-language children's video content on YouTube. Usually, the videos are cartoons or songs that really attract FA's attention." This shows that FA is more often exposed to English-language content through digital media that is part of her daily routine. This condition illustrates how young children, such as FA, are increasingly accustomed to using digital media that provides information and entertainment in English, even though they live in Indonesia and the everyday language used at home is Indonesian.

This phenomenon is in accordance with research revealed by (Rici, 2023), which states that the rapid growth of digital technology, including the popularity of video platforms such as YouTube, has penetrated early childhood. YouTube is now one of the most popular video applications, and many young children use it to watch various types of content, both educational and entertaining. Although YouTube provides various types of content in Indonesian, most of the existing videos, especially those aimed at children, use English as the main language. Rici claims that exposure to this English-language content can affect the development of their language. Iskandar et al. (2022) argued that in accessing digital media parents need to provide appropriate assistance by sorting out content, accompanying children when using digital media, making and implementing rules together consistently, and making creative efforts so that children's interactions are not limited to digital media, but also with parents as caregivers.

Based on the results of the interview with Mrs. VE, FA's parent, it was found that FA spends about 1-2 hours every day watching videos on YouTube. Mrs. VE explained, "FA usually watches videos on YouTube for 1-2 hours every day." This shows FA's habit of accessing digital content as part of his daily activities. Although the duration of exposure to digital

media is relatively short, it is important to consider its impact on the language development and social aspects of children who are exposed to digital content for a fairly long period of time. The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommends that children aged two to five years old limit digital media use to one hour per day of high-quality content. This time limit is intended to give children enough time to participate in additional activities that support their overall health and development and to establish healthy media consumption habits. Additionally, the AAP emphasizes that children younger than 18 months should not be exposed to electronic media, with the exception of video chat or calls, which are considered interactive media that allow for social engagement with adult support (Limardi et al., 2019).

Indonesian Language Obstacles

Based on an interview with Mr. YA, FA's parent, it was found that FA often had difficulty using Indonesian, especially when asked to tell a story. Mr. YA explained, "FA often feels confused and has difficulty when asked to speak, especially in Indonesian." FA feels more comfortable using English, especially before entering school age. This condition indicates that FA has difficulty in speaking Indonesian, which is likely influenced by exposure to more dominant English-language digital media, thus affecting his ability to communicate using Indonesian. The researcher also observed FA by asking several questions using Indonesian. At that time, FA looked confused and only smiled without giving a clear answer. However, when the researcher asked him to speak in English, FA was able to respond fluently.

Santrock in (Wahidah & Latipah, 2021), states that language is a form of communication that involves symbols, either verbally, in writing, or through gestures. Without language, the communication process will not run well, and social interaction will not occur. This is very relevant to the development of early childhood, who need language skills to be able to communicate with others and express their feelings. Skills in choosing words and constructing the right sentence structure are important parts of effective communication. Obstacles in speaking Indonesian, such as those experienced by FA, can affect their ability to interact and convey thoughts or feelings with others in everyday social contexts.

Based on the results of the interview with Mrs. VE, a parent of FA, it was explained that, "Every day we always actively talk to our children using Indonesian. For example, when we are relaxing we tell stories about our daily activities, and when discussing important things, we still use Indonesian. We try to get our children used to hearing and understanding the language in everyday situations. We are consistent so that children can understand vocabulary, how to construct sentences, and the correct intonation. In addition, we often provide reading materials such as story books, for example about animals or adventures, which children like. We read these books to introduce new words. Sometimes children are also enthusiastic about reading by themselves. If there are mistakes, we tell them in a simple way, without getting angry, for example by giving examples of correct sentences. That way, children know their mistakes, but still feel comfortable learning." This narrative reflects the parents' efforts to maintain the use of good and correct Indonesian, although it does not rule out the possibility of using mixed languages in certain situations.

According to (Purwaningrum & Redyanita, 2017), language development in communication is greatly influenced by the experience and social conditions of the language user, as well as the context of the situation and atmosphere. The use of mixed languages, which include code-switching and code-mixing, often appears in everyday communication, depending on the situation that requires a change or mixing of languages. Although Indonesian is predominantly used in family interactions, it is not uncommon for children or parents to use English words in certain contexts, especially when discussing things that are more often found in English. The use of this mixed language can be influenced by exposure to English-language digital media, which of course affects the way children communicate, even though they remain accustomed to Indonesian in the family environment.

Based on interviews with FA's parents, namely Mr. YA and Mrs. VE, they said that, "Our child uses English more often than Indonesian in his daily life. Although at home we try to speak Indonesian, FA tends to be more comfortable and accustomed to using English, especially when watching digital content that is mostly in English." This shows that although efforts are made to use Indonesian in the family

environment, exposure to digital media in English still has a big influence on how FA communicates. In the context of children's language development nowadays, exposure to English-language digital media is one of the main factors that can help second language learning in early childhood. However, without being balanced with sufficient interaction using Indonesian, this exposure can affect children's Indonesian language skills. Penfield, through the theory of brain mechanisms, states that early age is a very appropriate period to introduce a second language other than the mother tongue (first language) (Na'imah, 2022). Therefore, although introducing English from an early age has benefits, a balanced approach is needed so that mastery of Indonesian is maintained properly in daily interactions at home.

Impact on Children's Social Interactions

Social interaction plays a very important role in the development of children's communication skills. According to H. Bonner in (Marsah Rahimah Adhyaksari, 2024), social interaction is a relationship between two or more people, where the actions or behavior of one individual can influence, change, or improve the actions or behavior of another individual, and vice versa. Children learn a lot through interactions with the people around them, including family members, peers, and their social environment. Iskandar (2021) said that one of the good practices that can be done by parents to help children understand language is through play activities that are in accordance with the characteristics of child development.

Based on interviews with FA's parents, they stated that, "Our child is more often at home, so the opportunity to interact with peers is very limited. He plays more with his younger siblings and rarely meets other children outside the home." This shows that FA's limited opportunities to socialize hinder the development of his communication skills, especially in speaking Indonesian in the context of everyday conversations with peers. Furthermore, FA's parents added, "When he first entered kindergarten, FA was not very active in socializing with his friends. He tended to be shy and needed more time to feel comfortable." Although FA began to interact with friends in kindergarten, these interactions were mostly in Indonesian, because the language of instruction at school is Indonesian. This shows that the lack

of opportunities to socialize affects FA's ability to adapt and communicate with his friends.

Thus, limited social interaction can have an impact on the development of children's communication skills, as explained by H. Bonner in (Adhyaksari & Paramita, 2024), that children learn a lot through the social interactions they experience. This limitation can hinder the development of language and other social skills. Based on the results of interviews with FA's parents, they felt that exposure to English-language digital media provided certain benefits for children's language development. As conveyed by Mr. YA, "Although FA uses English more often, we feel that he is getting to know new vocabulary and understanding the correct pronunciation faster, especially when watching movies or playing games that use English." This shows that although the use of English is more dominant in FA's daily life, parents see an increase in their child's language skills in terms of vocabulary and in-depth understanding of foreign languages. In addition, according to the views of teachers at FA Kindergarten, they admit that FA's English skills are better than some of his classmates, which can be capital for the child's language development in the future.

However, on the other hand, both parents and teachers also realized the negative impact of exposure to English-language digital media on FA's Indonesian language skills. FA's parents, as explained by Mrs. VE, stated, "Although we always try to speak Indonesian at home, FA often finds it difficult to speak Indonesian with his friends." This suggests that more frequent use of English at home can affect a child's ability to communicate with peers in Indonesian. FA's teacher also expressed something similar, stating that, "FA sometimes finds it difficult to express his ideas in Indonesian, especially when speaking in groups or when telling stories to his friends at school." Overall, parent and teacher claimed that although English-language digital media can help children's foreign language comprehension, they also have a negative impact on children's Indonesian language skills, which impacts social interaction and communication with peers. The findings of this study indicate a significant influence of digital media exposure on children's Indonesian language skills.

Factors Contributing to Language Barriers

The rapid development of the digital technology world, including in terms of social

media platforms and video sharing applications such as YouTube, has had a significant impact, especially on generation Z who are now starting to access it from an early age. YouTube, as one of the most popular video applications, is often used by children in their daily lives, which also influences their language development (Rici, 2023). The increasing intensity of exposure to digital media, both in the form of watching and interacting with foreign language content, can accelerate children's language learning process, but also has the potential to cause obstacles in mastering Indonesian, considering the large amount of content that uses English. This is an important factor that needs to be considered in understanding the language challenges faced by children who are intensively exposed to digital media.

Communication patterns within the family play an important role in the formation of children's language skills. Based on an interview with Mrs. VE, FA's parent, she said, "Our child uses English more often than Indonesian at home." Although at home the parents try to prioritize the use of Indonesian, FA's habit of being exposed to English-language digital media more often makes him more comfortable and accustomed to using the language in everyday interactions. This shows that although there are efforts to implement Indonesian in the family environment, intense exposure to English through digital media can affect children's communication patterns at home, which in turn has an impact on the development of children's Indonesian.

CONCLUSION

There are several obstacles in speaking Indonesian in children caused by exposure to English-language digital media. Children are often exposed to English-language content so that they have difficulty in choosing words and constructing sentences in Indonesian, and even tend to mix English in everyday conversations. This causes children to experience obstacles in communicating with peers who only understand Indonesian. Although parents and teachers acknowledge that there has been an increase in children's English skills, they are also aware of its negative impact on Indonesian language skills. The intensity of exposure to English-language digital media and communication patterns in families that are influenced by children's habits in

accessing English-language digital content are the main factors contributing to these obstacles. This condition is also supported by other factors such as children who rarely go out of the house to play with their peers so that children's mastery of Indonesian vocabulary is lacking. This is proven by the results of the study, namely FA being able to use Indonesian after entering school.

This study strengthens the theory of bilingualism that intense exposure to a foreign language from an early age can affect a child's ability to master their mother tongue in the context of this study, namely Indonesian. Exposure to English-language digital media has complex implications for children's language skills. On the one hand, access to English-language digital content can accelerate the process of learning a second language, expand vocabulary, and improve children's understanding of a foreign language. However, this study shows that intense and dominant exposure to English-language content can have a negative impact on children's mastery of Indonesian, especially in terms of word choice, sentence structure, and communication in social contexts. This is due to the tendency of children to mix languages (code-mixing and code-switching) and use English more often in everyday communication, even in the family environment. Although parents and teachers acknowledge the improvement in English language skills, they also realize that the dominant use of English can hinder the development of Indonesian and children's ability to communicate with peers who only understand Indonesian. Factors that contribute to this obstacle include the intensity of exposure to English-language digital media and communication patterns within the family that are influenced by children's habits in accessing digital content. Maintaining a balance between exposure to English and sufficient interaction using Indonesian at home and in the child's social environment is necessary, so that the child's Indonesian language development is well maintained.

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