

**MULTILINGUAL PRACTICE IN INDONESIAN CONTEXT: A CASE  
STUDY OF TWO INDONESIAN CHILDREN IN SUMATRA**

**A Thesis by**

**Riski Aginia Hafizha**

**06012681923032**



***MAGISTER* PROGRAM OF LANGUAGE EDUCATION  
FACULTY OF TEACHER TRAINING AND EDUCATION  
SRIWIJAYA UNIVERSITY**

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# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

This chapter introduces the background of the study, the problems of the study, the objectives of the study, and the significance of the study.

### 1.1 The Background

The urgency of acquiring the lingua franca is demanded in this era of industrial revolution 4.0 and society 5.0. Language plays an important role in bridging the globe by connecting and engaging with the global community not only in speaking but also in writing. People realize that the more they need to enter the global world, the more they really have to participate effectively in transnational social spaces, which require the navigation of multiple languages and literacies (Silvhiany, 2019). One of the ways is to improve one's understanding of the languages. Furthermore, the world nowadays changes rapidly and the limit to discover the world is only language. In fact, people living in different places learn different languages. Thus, languages and cultures might border communications and interaction, but English – the lingua franca – can be used as a bridge language to establish understanding for people all around the world who do not speak the same language.

Indonesia is one of the countries which does not share English as its national language (non-English speaking country). Lauder (2008), Mattarima and Hamdan (2011) on their research stated that English was the crucial compulsory subject in Indonesia. Although in 1990, based on Government Regulation number 57 year 1997-1998, the use of English has been accommodated as a means of communication in university level besides its status as a foreign language and in 1990, based on Government Regulation number 28 and 29, the use of English at school was approved, English is still seen in Indonesia only as a foreign language. Based on The Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia of 1945 Article 36, Section 1,

“Bahasa Indonesia is the national language, official language, academic language instruction, and mass media language”. This means that English is not instructed to be used at the national level and this is very challenging for the Indonesian to master and use English.

Regrettably, the data showing English proficiency index in Indonesia did not show better score in the last three years. According to EF English Proficiency Index (EF-EPI) Indonesia is still regarded in low English proficiency. In 2019, EF-EPI noted Indonesia in 61<sup>st</sup> rank with a total score of 50.06. This result placed Indonesia far below other countries in the world such as the Netherlands – which was at the 1<sup>st</sup> place with a total score of 70.27 and the other two ASEAN countries, Malaysia (26<sup>th</sup>) and Singapore (5<sup>th</sup>) with a total score of 58.55 and 66.82. Moreover, in 2020, Indonesia was at the 74<sup>th</sup> rank out of 100 countries, with a total score of 453 and in 2018 Indonesia was placed at 51<sup>st</sup> rank out of 88 countries enrolled in the test. Furthermore, the research by Mirizon, Diem, and Vianty (2018) showed that comprehension achievement of students in Junior High School level in South Sumatra was categorized on average level and that female students’ English comprehension scored better in comprehension than the males.

The condition above is getting worse, following the introduction of the 2013 curriculum in Indonesia by the Ministry of National Education as English was excluded from the elementary school curriculum. This condition contradicts the urgency of this 21<sup>st</sup> century high demand to compete worldwide by mastering more than one language effectively and appropriately. As a result, this reason brings parents to share more concern on how their children will be able to participate in the global world. They believe by introducing English to their children at the very young age, their children can develop English communication skills. To master a language and use it as the means of communication is dependable on how someone is fostered and nurtured since childhood. One of the convictions of the parents is to raise the children with more than one language or to become bilingual.

Bilingually parenting is proposed by some research because of the possible benefits it provides parents: improving job prospects, improving technological skills, improving the fitness in global cultures.

Moreover, several research have spoken on how language could help the children to have better chance to explore the world. Arnberg (1987), Bialystok and Senman (2004), and Gandara (2015) revealed that bilingual children have shown great benefits in certain ways, such as social, personal, cognitive, professional, and academic. King and Fogle (2006) stated that huge number of parents in USA and other countries welcome the view of bilingualism as a nice view and a 'family goal' then they supported the chance to learn more than one language since early childhood. Therefore, Piller (2005) suggested bilingual parenting which now invaded the middle classes circle such as mathematics, art and music classes, baby sign language instructions and even infant gym classes. The demand on two-way bilingual programs increased intensely among English speaking parents (Montague, 2000). The belief that language can overcome the barrier and cut the limit to explore the world encourages parents to raise their children to acquire more than one language. Additionally, Brown (2000) stated that acquiring and accustoming language is a complex process through a conditioning process. Language acquisition is not instant, yet kids are like sponge when they absorb the language very quickly through what they hear and see. Parents nowadays have realized that language is one thing that crucially needed in this era, which is very beneficial for the future.

Hence, family is the first and crucial factor to construct children's language development. Moreover, family plays a big role in the children's upbringing. Talking about language, some families will raise children based on their expectations. Many parents and family put a big hope on language to face the globalization era. The belief that language can overcome the barrier and cut the limit to explore the world somehow encourages parents to raise their children to acquire more than one language. Consequently, many parents believe that raising bilingual children will benefit the kids for

their social, economic, cultural, educational, and even political side. King and Mackey (2007) highlighted that bilingual ability brought social-emotional advantages to the children. Thus, children are more sensitive to others who share different backgrounds and cultures. This is in line with Rosenberg (1996) who mentioned that bilingual children had cultural advantages and more economic advantages, especially in their future careers. He, furthermore, claimed that bilingual society had better and higher chance on their career in the future compared to those who only acquired one language (monolingual). Nicolandis, et al. (2016) emphasized academic and cognitive advantages on bilingual children as bilingual children were easier answering some questions especially for those related to judge sentences grammatically and did non-verbal problem-solving tasks.

Literacy practices in this contemporary time often involved multimodal media enhanced by digital technology tools. Therefore, language socialization within families and their literature practices at home are intertwined with the technological access available at home. King and Fogle's (2006) study showed that parents in the United States and outside the states advance the children bilingualism by exposing them with bilingual books, videos, DVDs, television programs and music. In the same vain, studies have shown the prominent role of technologies in supporting transnational families' language socialization and practices. Silvhiany's study (2019) on Indonesian transnational families in the United States, for example, highlighted the affordances of digital technologies and social networks in the families' religious and heritage literacy learning and practices. Transnational families also strategically used various digital communication tools to maintain connection with their relatives across the globe (Gonzalez & Katz, 2016)

Additionally, language acquisition is influenced by family's language socialization. Subconsciously, in having communication with the kids, family will also share their culture, heritage and customs. This will direct children somehow to imitate and acquire the parents' language. As

claimed by Ada and Zubizarreta (2001), any family culture and values would not be developing any essential sense of belongings and connectedness among the family if the kids and the family could not communicate fully. With this supportive environment, the kids will have exactly the same language that the parents' use to communicate with them, yet in some cases – some conditions, things are different from what it is expected. A case study drawn by Ren and Hu (2013) revealed similarities and differences in the way the two focal families drew on language practices from multiple resources to involve their children in an array of bilingual/bi-literacy activities and to align these activities to the current and projected future needs of the children. The study showed how the family members' cultural backgrounds, past experiences of learning and parenting, educational beliefs, and aspirations for the children shaped language ideology, language practices, and language management at home and to socialize the focal children into distinct language and literacy practices.

Most of the time, there have been many research about bilingualism and its practices and they are commonly found in transnational family. Most of the studies obtained showed the practice as one of the parents spoke in English and the other with his/her own language (heritage language). Bilingualism study with the participants as English Language Learners (ELL) are also rarely found in Indonesian context, specifically in Sumatra province, Indonesia. Meanwhile, there are many bilingual schools establish in Indonesia which foster the children to acquire English as the language of instruction used at school. The researcher is curious to explore the phenomenon of English language exposures within the backdrop of the parent-participants and the children-participants targeted are non-native English speakers. This study was aimed at examining how two children in Sumatera, Indonesia were socialized into bilingualism in which English was one of the languages they were exposed to within the family, the language ideology the parents' believed in to raise the kids to become bilingual and how the family overcame the challenges on raising English-Indonesian

bilingual children in Indonesian context.

## **1.2 The Problems of the Study**

The problems of the study are formulated into the following questions:

1. What kinds of language learning and literacy practices occurred at home of the bilingual child?
2. What were the parents' beliefs/attitudes toward English language and bilingual education?
3. What were the challenges that the family faced in raising bilingual child?

## **1.3 The Objectives of the Study**

Based on the problems above, the objectives of the study are:

1. to find out what kinds of language learning and literacy practices occurred at home of the bilingual child.
2. to find out what the parents' beliefs/attitudes toward English language and bilingual education were.
3. to find out what challenges that the family faced in raising a bilingual child.

## **1.3 The Significance of the Study**

It is expected that the result of the study can:

1. give new information and insight to parents about children and bilinguals; how to start bilingual family literacy and the practices that may be applicable to do especially for non-immigrant families. This will broaden the expectations on being bilingual family and to synergize together with the educators for choosing bilingual education.
2. give more information to educators to synergize together with the family in educating bilingual children; to have more prior knowledge on handling children who are bilingual and are having bilingual family literacy practices at home. The educators are expected to understand

the background of each child to prepare the best strategies to teach the kids later on.

3. give valuable information that can be more useful as a reference for the next writer or researcher. The future researcher also could continue the gap which are still empty to be discussed in the future.



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