

# Parental Involvement in Early Childhood Literacy Development

Nurul Fatonah<sup>1,\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Universitas Garut, Garut, Indonesia

\*Corresponding author. Email: nurulfatonah@uniga.ac.id

## ABSTRACT

This research aims to discuss parents' involvement in early childhood literacy development. It stems from the importance of parents' roles in early childhood activities, especially those that develop literacy. So far, research on children development paradigm have only been done by looking at the factors within the family as an asset has not been investigated in the context of Indonesian culture. Therefore, research on parents' effort in early childhood literacy development needs to be conducted. This research employs qualitative approach using study case by examining five parents as the participants. The use of interview and observation are implemented to collect the data. Then, the data is analyzed through grounded theory technique.

Bronfenbrenner ecological theory is served as the framework to discuss the problems and understand the data presented in this research. The results of the study indicate that parents' roles are tangible in early childhood literacy development. The conclusion can be drawn as follows: 1) parents perform literacy activities, for example, memorizing, using media and providing literacy-rich surroundings 2) supporting factors such as parents' motivation is associated with parents' involvement with the demand of school readiness and positive belief of the importance of early childhood education. The problems consist of unbalance roles between the parents, physical factor, and 3) the collaboration between the parents and school is actualized in the forms of meetings, giving information, creating parents' coordinator, and communicating between the parents and teachers. Parents must be able to take part in children's activities in order to modify them into the stimulus that develops children's literacy.

**Keywords:** *Early childhood, literacy, parents*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Some literature states that literacy is the initial foundation for an individual to be able to learn (Dove, Neuharth-Pritchett, Wright, & Wallinga, 2015; Lonigan & Shanahan, 2009; Puranik, Lonigan, & Kim, 2011; Senechal & LeFevre, 2002). Poor literacy is associated with children's poor achievement. Lack of literacy in adulthood affects the dropout rate in schools (Burke, Hagan-Burke, Zou, & Kwok, 2010). The result of the study clearly shows that sufficient early literacy will help children in learning to read easier and improve their achievement at schools (Senechal & LeFevre, 2002). Meta-analysis results conducted by National Early Literacy Panel (NELP) in 2008 showed that early literacy could predict the next literacy ability from mid to high level. The result of PIRLS, 2006 in 45 countries shows that children who come from family that stimulate early literacy have a higher literacy (Mullis, Martin, Kennedy, & Foy, 2007). Therefore, children's early literacy is a measure for predicting their literacy in the fourth grade. The results also mean that children's early literacy is the most important predictor of children's reading skill of age 9 to 10 in the elementary (Ko & Chan, 2009).

The importance of literacy for each individual becomes the highlight of all age groups, including early childhood. Therefore, early literacy in the early childhood is one of the components of School Literacy Movement. The previous research shows that early literacy can improve children's achievement at schools. Early intervening in reading avoids the difficulties in children's learning (Burke et al., 2010; Kissel, Mraz, Algozzine, & Stover, 2011).

For early childhood, literacy activities such as reading and writing can either get an approval and refusal responses from the children. It is in accordance with Piaget theory that states children less than seven years old are in the stage of pre-operational (Santrock, 2007). On pre-operational stage, children do not have the ability of structural thinking. In addition, Senechal and LeFevre (2002) stated that reading is a complex process for children. Indonesian government specifically forbids teaching reading and writing directly to early childhood and recommends to get familiar with reading and writing during playing activities.

However, some people see literacy as academic ability and the sign of school readiness (Allington, 2005; Fawcett, Padak, & Rasinski, 2013; Morgan, Nutbrown, & Hannon, 2009; Robinson-Pant, 1996). This argument is supported by the results of the study that states parents' motivation in

putting their children at early childhood education is to hope that their children have an early literacy (Apriana, 2009).

Many researches have proven that stimulation can be conducted within the family itself (Bennett, Weigel, & Martin, 2002; Burgess, 2002; Bus, Van Ijzendoorn, & Pellegrini, 1995; DeBaryshe, Binder, & Buell, 2000; Shanahan, Mulhern, & Rodriguez-Brown, 1995; St Pierre, Ricciuti, & Rimdzius, 2005). The roles and functions of family become the center of attention in several researches such as Purcell-Gates (1996) who found that family is the first place for the children to get to know literacy. In addition, Banks (2004) stated that support from the parents is a huge energy for children's education. It means parents must partake in the process of children's education (Anderson, Hievert, Scott, Wilkinson, Becker, & Becker, 1988; Bus et al., 1995; Dever & Burts, 2002; Hornby, 2011; Menheree & Hooge, 2010; Weigel, Martin, & Bennett, 2010). Thus, the parents are important people who contribute a lot to the children's development since the early childhood (Paratore, Melzi, & Krol-Sinclair, 2003).

Latest research of early literacy in some countries proves that it is important to provide environment or surroundings that supports the stimulation of children's early literacy (Burgess, 2002; Melhuish et al., 2008; Park, 2008). Parents' involvement in children's literacy is the strongest variable amongst all other background variables such as social class, family size and parents' educational level (Flouri & Buchanan, 2004).

## **2. LITERATURE**

This research uses Bronfenbrenner as the framework to discuss the problems and understand the data. In his research, Bronfenbrenner (2004) explains a theory that helps to understand the development process of an individual in the environmental space or ecology. In the perspective of psychology, there are three important aspects of individuals' developmental process. Firstly, an individual during the growth period is seen as a dynamic entity that moves to the structure in which he/she lives. Secondly, environment has effects that serve as two-way interacting medium between individuals and the environment. Thirdly, the environment is a place in which the development is not only restricted to the one and close environment, but also towards the relationship development process among every other condition and broader outside effect. Through his theory, Bronfenbrenner has a perspective about environmental system that affects an individual (Mujahidah, 2015). Ecological theory (Bronfenbrenner, 2004) is a perspective of socio-cultural that states an individual develops in five different systems that affect him/her. They are micro system, meso system, macro system, ecosystem, and cronosystem.

## **3. METHOD**

To answer the formulation of this research problem, the researchers used method (these methods):

### **3.1. Design**

This research is conducted by using a qualitative approach. The reason for using this approach is because in this research the researcher will describe the social activities observed. A qualitative approach is where the researcher will observe (directly) the social activities of the parents and the children (Creswell, 2005; Nasution, 2003). Furthermore, the researcher uses case study as the research method. It is in line with the research context where it tries to find life phenomenon (Yin, 2006).

### **3.2. Participant**

The participants in this research are parents who have children aged from 5 to 6 years old. There are a total of 9 participants. The research is located in one of schools in Garut regency. The researcher chooses 9 parents from different background of education, job, age and economy status

### **3.3. Material**

The data is collected by interviewing the participants. The researcher comes to the participants' houses. Besides that, the researcher also meets with the participants who come to the pre-school, and interviews them when they wait for their children in the pre-school. Before that, the researcher asked for permission by oral and written which contains the readiness statement to be the participants. It is important to appreciate the participants rights as it is a part of research ethics.

### **3.4. Data Analysis**

In this research, the researcher used grounded theory as analysis technique. By adapting the grounded theory approach, the researcher can directly manage and abridges the data collection, furthermore the researcher can develop original analyses from the collected data (Creswell, 2005), in other words, out from the fact and from the fact without theory, it develops to create a theory (Nazir, 2003). The analysis stages include coding, focus coding, and create a theory (Alwasilah & Chaedar, 2015).

## **4. RESULT**

Literacy development is an important part of early childhood development. This research is intended to

expose the urgency of environment's involvement in developing early literacy from the perspective of children's closeness. It explains that children's literacy development is an integrated effect of interacting activities as well as the effects of the surroundings starts from the nearest to the farthest.

The nearest surrounding is micro system area (Bronfenbrenner, 2004). In this study, the roles of family affect early childhood's literacy development. Early childhood mostly spends their time with the parents (Hakim, 2012). Children usually do not have a large area of socialization at the age of 4-5. Thus, their homes are called as the main micro system.

Parents' roles at home are crucial to children's development. Literacy stimulation can be done within the family (Bennett et al., 2002; Burgess, 2002; Bus et al., 1995; DeBaryshe et al., 2000; Ryan, 2005; Shanahan, Mulhern, & Rodriguez-Brown, 1995; St Pierre et al., 2005). This study finds that parents are engaged in doing some activities together with the children. This act is carried out to make sure the optimal children's development. In the aspect of literacy, parents stimulate children's literacy in many ways, such as letting the children learn to read and write, memorizing activities through singing songs, and providing educative media as well as literacy-rich surroundings.

It is important to note that there are pros and cons on whether reading and writing skills are appropriate for early childhood. It is also affected by parents' educational background. Theoretically, all participants do not know the prohibition of Calistung (Reading, Writing, and Operation). It is because none of them comes from childhood education or childhood psychology background. However, they know it practically even though they do not know the theory. The participants agree that early childhood education must be conducted in delicate situation and free of pressure.

The participants of this study are in the mid to low level economy. However, their economic status and background do not stop them from caring about their children's education. They fully pay attention by giving simple stimulating activities and providing creative learning media. Parents' economic conditions do not hinder them in providing a learning media. Furthermore, the learning media, such as posters of alphabet or numbers are mostly inexpensive.

In practice, most of the stimulating process of literacy is done by the mother at home. In a micro system, Indonesian culture shapes the dominant roles of mother in child rearing. As a result, the roles of father do not get exposed sufficiently. In addition, some fathers in this study have bachelor degree. The higher educational background of the fathers should be seen as an opportunity to take part in stimulating the children. However, it is because of Indonesian culture that adopts patriarchy so that the mother has more dominant roles in supporting children's education. Child rearing and education are mother's responsibility.

In addition, Indonesian government fully supports children education through early childhood education (ECE). That

is why most parents think that ECE is obligatory. It is also because ECE has spread across the nation, even to the rural areas. The increasing number of ECE cannot be separated from the government's support and commitment towards children empowering. It is also affected by some factors. The easier access towards preschool education has two effects. Firstly, the increasing number of ECE indicates high participation and awareness to get education as early as possible.

The country has a role to put ECE as a central part of Sustainable Development Goals, and ECE is one of government's commitments. Therefore, there is a rapid growth of ECE and can reach rural areas. It is in accordance with the vision of UN (United Nations) to make sure that all children, boys and girls, have access to childcare and good quality ECE (Bapenas, 2017).

The result of PISA test in Indonesia encourages better educational policies, especially on literacy aspect. The last PISA test was conducted in 2015 and indicated that Indonesia was lacking of texts. The government needs to encourage reading activities as students' needs in the educational process because of the low reading motivation and awareness in Indonesia. Learning process at school must encourage varied and exploratory reading strategies. Thus, reading skill, especially literacy, is the main focus in improving proficiency.

## 5. DISCUSSION

After conducting the research and the analysis, the researcher concludes that the parents' engagement is very influenced by the parent's jobs. It is related to the available learning time with the children. The worker parents have little learning time with the children, furthermore, the parents feel that they already fully helped by enrolling the children to pre-school. Some of the participants who has job believes in the teachers to teach their children, and feel that educating the children is the teachers' responsibility. The parents only support the children needs. However, parents' attention to the children is still the main point (Bangun, 2008).

Parents are supposed to be an educator for their children. (Wong, Hockenberry-Eaton, Wilson, Winkelstein, & Schwartz, 2001) stated that parents can educate their children directly to reach the expected behavior from the parents. Parents' engagement is important to support the children learning. Many researches proved that parents' engagement directly related to achievement and motivation (Topor, Keane, Shelton, & Calkins, 2010; Yuliani, 2004). The Parents' factor are also influenced by their education, as Baker and Stevenson (1986) stated that parents' education is related to achievement. Meanwhile, the length of learning is strongly influenced by what type of jobs the parents' have (Sunarti, Atat, Noorhaisma, & Lembayung, 2005).

The family members' engagement is strongly related to the numbers of family members (Arisandi & Latifah, 2008). The family that has many members of family will have more options and people on who can engage in developing

children literacy. If the focus on developing children literacy happens to focus on the younger siblings, the children can have their older siblings who can help them and ask them to learn together.

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