

EXPLORING A MOTHER'S STRATEGIES AND CHALLENGES IN SUPPORTING HER MULTILINGUAL SON'S ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING: A CASE STUDY

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ABSTRACT

This study explored the strategies and challenges of an Indonesian immigrant mother in supporting her multilingual son's English language learning. The objectives were to identify the language guidance strategies she applied, examine the challenges she encountered, and analyze how she addressed those challenges. The research employed a descriptive qualitative case study design involving two participants. The primary participant, an Indonesian mother living in Australia, participated in two interview sessions, while a second participant contributed supporting data through one interview session. Data were collected through semi-structured online interviews and supporting documentation. The findings revealed that the mother implemented various language guidance strategies grounded in scaffolding and translanguaging practices. These strategies included early language exposure, natural daily conversations, repetition, simple explanations, modeling, and controlled full-sentence language switching between English and Indonesian. The mother faced several challenges, such as her son's fluctuating mood, limited attention span, time constraints due to household responsibilities, and difficulties in teaching English, reading, and pronunciation. To address these challenges, she adopted flexible and child-centered approaches. These included integrating learning into daily routines, adjusting to her child's emotional readiness, using repetition and movement-based activities, utilizing digital media, and seeking support from family members and the surrounding environment. The study implies that home-based English language learning in multilingual families can be effectively supported through adaptive, child-centered parental involvement. The application of scaffolding and controlled translanguaging in everyday interactions can strengthen children's English development. Additionally, continuous adjustment of guidance based on the child's emotional readiness and contextual needs is essential to ensure sustainable and meaningful language learning outcomes.

Keywords: English Language Learning, scaffolding, translanguaging, multilingual family.

1) INTRODUCTION

Education is not only centered within formal institutions such as schools, but also requires continuous support from parents at home. Parental involvement, especially from mothers, plays a significant role in children's holistic development, including language learning. The more intensive the emotional, educational, and communicative

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involvement of parents, the better the outcomes in shaping children's linguistic confidence and academic achievement. Sun et al. (2023) emphasize that mothers serve as the primary source of language input for their children, serving as a direct link between the language used at home and that used in the wider community. Their role extends beyond teaching vocabulary, as they also nurture emotional security, model social communication, and foster children's motivation to learn.

Children's language development is also strongly influenced by the home environment, especially in learning English as an additional language. Ayuningtyas et al. (2024) highlight that intensive exposure to English in informal contexts provides children with greater opportunities to practice language naturally and frequently, thereby improving their academic achievement and social integration. Similarly, Maolida et al. (2024) note that English language learning should continue to be supported outside the school environment through parental guidance, interaction, and daily communication, as the home serves as a powerful informal learning site. In addition, Sumanti and Muljani (2021) report that maternal involvement through repetition, modeling, code mixing, and motivational support contributes significantly to the continuous development of children's language skills.

The role of mothers becomes more complex in multilingual family settings, particularly among immigrant families living abroad. Zabrodskaia et al. (2023) demonstrate that exposure to multiple regional, national, and international languages presents both opportunities and challenges for children's language development. For Indonesian families living in Australia, English functions as the dominant language used in schools and social environments, making it essential for children to master. At the same time, mothers are often expected to preserve the heritage language and cultural identity of the family. This condition places mothers in strategic positions as language mediators who balance the demands of integration into the host society with the maintenance of family values and linguistic identity.

In multilingual families, mothers often employ various strategies to support their children's English language learning. Previous studies show that scaffolding practices such as repetition, modeling, simplifying explanations, and maintaining children's motivation are commonly used in home learning contexts. Furthermore, translanguaging practices allow mothers to switch between languages flexibly in order to support comprehension and communication. In this study context, the participant communicated with her child using Indonesian, English, and Buginese, reflecting

how multilingual interaction occurs naturally in daily family life. Such practices demonstrate the mother's adaptability in balancing linguistic demands with cultural preservation.

Despite the recognized importance of parental involvement, previous research still tends to focus more on formal educational settings such as schools, teachers, and institutions rather than informal family-based learning environments. Bilbao et al. (2025) reveal that language practices at home, which greatly affect children's communicative development, remain underrepresented in empirical studies. Likewise, Maolida et al. (2024) and Chairina et al. (2022) indicate that many studies discuss multilingual development in terms of family language policy or parental attitudes in general. Still, few specifically investigate the lived experiences of Indonesian immigrant mothers who guide their children's English learning in Australia. Therefore, there is a clear gap in understanding the emotional, strategic, and contextual dimensions of maternal involvement in multilingual family settings.

Based on this gap, the present study aims to explore in depth the strategies and challenges of an Indonesian immigrant mother in supporting her multilingual son's English language learning at home. Specifically, the study seeks to identify the language guidance strategies the mother uses, examine the challenges she encounters, and analyze how she overcomes them. This study emphasizes not only linguistic and pedagogical aspects, but also the social-emotional and cultural dimensions that shape the process of mother-child interaction in a transnational context. Through this research, the researcher expects to contribute to the growing body of literature on multilingual education and parental involvement.

Beyond its educational significance, the role of mothers in guiding children's learning also has spiritual meaning in Islam. Surah Luqman [31]:13 illustrates the importance of parental guidance through wisdom, patience, and love in educating children. This verse reminds parents that education begins with strong values and moral foundations before other forms of knowledge or skills. In relation to this study, a mother's support in helping her child learn English is not only about teaching language, but also about building character, strengthening emotional bonds, and guiding children to use language for positive purposes. Therefore, this study ultimately highlights that a mother's role in language learning extends beyond teaching words, encompassing patience, faith, and love that help children grow academically and spiritually.

2) METHODS

This study employed a qualitative research design with a descriptive case study approach. This design was selected because the study aimed to explore in depth the strategies and challenges of an Indonesian immigrant mother in supporting her multilingual son's English language learning at home. Qualitative research is commonly used to understand meanings, experiences, and perspectives related to social phenomena. Creswell and Poth (2018) state that qualitative research is used to explore and understand the meanings individuals or groups ascribe to social or human problems. Therefore, this approach was considered appropriate because the present study focused on describing real experiences within a natural family context.

A descriptive qualitative approach was specifically applied because the study did not aim to test hypotheses or develop grand theory, but rather to present factual and comprehensive descriptions of the participant's experiences. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) explain that descriptive qualitative research focuses on presenting the meaning and understanding of human experiences as they are. Through this approach, the researcher was able to investigate how the participant guided her child's English learning process, the challenges she encountered, and the adaptive responses she employed in daily life.

The case study design was used because the research focused on a single case examined intensively and contextually. The selected case represented the phenomenon of an Indonesian immigrant mother raising a multilingual child in an English-dominant environment. This design enabled the researcher to gain deeper understanding of parental involvement, home language practices, and language learning experiences within a multilingual family setting.

The study was conducted online because the participant resided in Australia. Since the participant lived overseas, all research activities were carried out virtually through scheduled online communication. This procedure followed the principles of remote qualitative research proposed by Salmon (2022), particularly regarding ethical interaction, participant comfort, confidentiality, and maintaining the authenticity of online data. Prior coordination was conducted to arrange interview schedules based on the participant's availability and time zone.

The main participant of this study was an Indonesian immigrant mother currently living in Australia who had a multilingual son learning English as the dominant language in school and social environments. The participant was selected through purposive sampling, which is a technique used to select individuals based on their relevance and experience related to the research

focus (Palinkas et al., 2015). The participant met several criteria: she was Indonesian, lived in Australia, had a multilingual child who used more than one language in daily communication, and actively supported the child's English learning at home.

The main participant was identified using the pseudonym NAA (31). She was a 31-year-old Indonesian mother with a five-year-old son who became the focus of the study. At home, she mainly communicated with her child in English while also using Indonesian and Buginese in daily interactions. This multilingual practice reflected the family's adaptive language use in balancing cultural preservation and integration into an English-speaking environment.

To strengthen the credibility of the findings, a supporting participant was also involved. The second participant, identified as AS (32), was the main participant's close friend since college and had a close relationship with the child. She was interviewed to provide supporting information and to confirm several statements delivered by the main participant. The use of pseudonyms was intended to protect privacy and maintain confidentiality throughout the research process.

The primary research instrument was the researcher. In qualitative research, the researcher functions as the main instrument in designing, conducting, interpreting, and analyzing the data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). During the interviews, the researcher actively listened, asked follow-up questions, interpreted responses carefully, and recorded contextual information. This role was important to ensure rich and meaningful data were obtained from participants' lived experiences.

To support the researcher as the main instrument, a semi-structured interview guide containing open-ended questions was used. According to Sugiyono (2013), semi-structured interviews are more flexible than structured interviews and allow participants to express their thoughts naturally. The interview guide focused on two major areas: first, the strategies used by the mother in supporting her son's English language learning; second, the challenges she faced and the ways she overcame those challenges. This structure enabled the researcher to obtain detailed cognitive, emotional, and practical information.

Data were collected through semi-structured online interviews and supporting documentation. The main participant was interviewed in two sessions because the questions were extensive and divided into two major parts: strategies, and challenges with coping responses. The supporting participant was interviewed in one session to validate selected statements. Each interview session lasted approximately 30 to 40 minutes and was conducted through an online platform based on participant preference. All interviews were recorded with participant consent.

During the interviews, field notes were also taken to capture tone of voice, pauses, emotional expressions, and other contextual details that might not be fully represented in the recordings. In addition, supporting materials such as screenshots, photos, or examples of learning media used at home were optionally collected. These documents were used to enrich the data and provide contextual understanding of the mother's language guidance practices.

The data were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles and Huberman (1994), as presented by Sugiyono (2017), consisting of four interconnected stages: data reduction, data display, conclusion drawing, and verification. In the data reduction stage, transcripts were read repeatedly to identify meaningful statements related to strategies, challenges, and solutions. Relevant statements were coded manually and grouped into categories and themes. Irrelevant or repetitive data were excluded to maintain analytical focus.

In the data display stage, the organized findings were presented in narrative descriptions and thematic tables showing quotations, initial codes, sub-themes, and major themes. This process helped the researcher understand relationships among strategies, difficulties, and coping efforts. In the conclusion drawing stage, interpretations were developed continuously during the research process and refined whenever new patterns emerged.

Verification was conducted through triangulation by comparing information from interviews, field notes, and supporting documentation. The researcher also reviewed all findings repeatedly to ensure that interpretations were fully supported by the data. Throughout the study, digital files were stored securely on password-protected devices and deleted after the completion of the research. Participation was voluntary, and all participants had the right to withdraw at any time without consequences. This procedure ensured ethical standards, trustworthiness, and data confidentiality.

3) RESULTS

The findings of this study were obtained from semi-structured interviews with the main participant, NAA (31), and the supporting participant, AS (32). The findings were grouped into two major categories: (1) language guidance strategies used by the mother in supporting her

multilingual son's English language learning, and (2) challenges encountered by the mother and the ways those challenges were addressed.

The data showed that the mother used several strategies in guiding her son's English language learning at home. The strategies included early language exposure, daily natural conversations, repetition, simple explanations, modeling, and controlled language switching between English, Indonesian, and Buginese. These strategies were identified from repeated statements during the interview sessions.

Table 1. Coding of Language Guidance Strategies Used by NAA (31)

No	Theme	Evidence Found
1	Early Language Exposure	English was introduced from an early age.
2	Daily Natural Conversations	English was used in routine communication.
3	Repetition	Words and phrases were repeated frequently.
4	Simple Explanations	Vocabulary and instructions were simplified.
5	Modeling	Pronunciation and sentence forms were demonstrated.
6	Controlled Language Switching	English, Indonesian, and Buginese were alternated when needed.

The findings showed that English had been introduced to the child from an early age through songs, common expressions, and daily communication. The participant reported that English was used regularly in routine conversations such as giving instructions, asking questions, naming objects, and responding to the child's needs.

The data also showed that repetition was frequently used when introducing vocabulary and expressions. Important words and phrases were repeated several times. In addition, difficult language input was simplified through short sentences and easier explanations. Correct pronunciation and sentence patterns were also demonstrated directly by the mother for the child to imitate.

The interviews further revealed that controlled language switching was used during communication. English was commonly used for learning purposes, while Indonesian and Buginese were used when clarification was needed or when emotional communication occurred within the family context.

The findings also identified several challenges faced by the mother during the learning process. The reported challenges included the child's changing mood, limited attention span, time

constraints caused by household responsibilities, and difficulties related to reading and pronunciation.

Table 2. Coding of Language Guidance Challenges and Ways to Overcome Them

No	Challenge	Action Taken
1	Changing mood	Learning activities were postponed or adjusted.
2	Limited attention span	Short and enjoyable activities were used.
3	Time constraints	English practice was integrated into daily routines.
4	Reading difficulties	Repetition and gradual guidance were applied.
5	Pronunciation difficulties	Modeling and digital media were used.

The data showed that the child's changing mood affected learning participation. When the child was tired or unwilling to learn, activities were delayed or changed according to the child's emotional condition. Limited attention span was addressed through short activities, games, songs, and movement-based interaction.

The findings also showed that household responsibilities reduced the time available for structured learning sessions. To address this situation, English practice was included in daily activities such as mealtime, playtime, and routine household interaction. Difficulties in reading and pronunciation were addressed through repeated practice, gradual assistance, direct modeling, and the use of digital media.

4) DISCUSSION

Language Guidance Strategies

This study found that the Indonesian immigrant mother played an active role in supporting her multilingual son's English language learning through several home-based strategies. The participant provided early language exposure, used English in daily communication, applied repetition, simplified explanations, modeled correct pronunciation, used digital media, and switched flexibly between English, Indonesian, and Buginese. These findings indicate that language learning at home was supported through continuous interaction and responsive parental involvement.

The use of early exposure and routine communication supports previous studies emphasizing the importance of meaningful language input in children's language development. Sun et al. (2023) explained that mothers often function as the primary providers of language input and create communicative environments that support children's linguistic growth. In this study, English was introduced through songs, greetings, simple commands, and daily routines from an early age. This finding is also consistent with Ayuningtyas et al. (2024), who found that regular informal English exposure contributes positively to vocabulary growth and communicative confidence.

The strategies of repetition, simplified explanation, and direct modeling reflected scaffolding practices in home learning contexts. The participant repeatedly introduced vocabulary, simplified difficult expressions, and demonstrated correct pronunciation for the child to imitate. These findings align with Sumanti and Muljani (2021), who reported that parental modeling and repeated guided practice supported children's language acquisition effectively. This suggests that language learning at home developed gradually through assistance adjusted to the child's level of understanding.

Another important strategy identified in this study was flexible language switching. English was mainly used as the target language, while Indonesian and Buginese were used for clarification, emotional communication, and maintaining family identity. This finding supports Zabrodska et al. (2023), who stated that multilingual families often move dynamically across languages according to communicative needs. In this study, multilingual practices did not hinder English learning, but instead helped maintain understanding and emotional connection within the family.

The use of digital media also became an important strategy. English videos, songs, cartoons, and online children's content were used to maintain the child's interest and provide additional language exposure. This finding suggests that digital resources can complement parental guidance by creating engaging and varied language learning opportunities at home.

Challenges and Solutions

This study also identified several challenges faced by the participant during the child's English learning process. These challenges included emotional inconsistency, limited attention span, time constraints, reading difficulties, pronunciation problems, and inconsistent participation. Among these factors, the child's changing mood appeared to be one of the most influential

challenges because it directly affected willingness to participate in learning activities. This finding is in line with Maolida et al. (2024), who noted that emotional readiness strongly influences children's engagement in home learning situations.

Limited attention span also affected the continuity of learning sessions. The child's focus often lasted only for short periods before shifting to other activities. In response, the participant used short and enjoyable activities such as songs, games, movement-based interaction, and spontaneous conversation. This indicates that learning activities adapted to children's developmental characteristics were more suitable than long formal sessions.

Time management was another important challenge. Household responsibilities limited opportunities to conduct structured learning sessions consistently. To address this issue, the participant integrated English learning into everyday routines such as mealtime, playtime, bathing time, and regular household interaction. This finding suggests that effective parental involvement does not always require formal teaching sessions, but can occur naturally through daily family activities.

Reading difficulties were also reported during the learning process. The child sometimes experienced difficulty recognizing letters, combining sounds, and reading unfamiliar words. To overcome this challenge, the participant used repeated practice, alphabet review, gradual assistance, and word recognition activities. These strategies indicate that reading development was approached step by step according to the child's readiness.

Pronunciation problems were another challenge identified in the study. Some English words and sounds required repeated correction and practice. The participant addressed this issue through direct modeling, repetition, correction, and digital media containing clear pronunciation models. This finding suggests that repeated exposure and imitation remained important in helping children develop pronunciation skills.

Overall, the participant responded to challenges by applying flexible timing, enjoyable learning experiences, gradual assistance, and routine-based practice. These findings indicate that successful home-based English learning depended on adaptability rather than rigid instruction. The participant adjusted learning moments according to the child's readiness, mood, and daily conditions.

Limitations and Future Research

This study had several limitations. First, the research involved only one main participant and one supporting participant; therefore, the findings cannot be generalized to all multilingual families. Second, the study relied mainly on interview data and did not involve long-term direct observation of learning activities. Third, the context focused on one Indonesian immigrant family living in Australia, so family experiences in other countries may differ.

Based on these limitations, future studies are recommended to involve more participants from diverse multilingual family backgrounds and countries. Further research may also use longitudinal observation, parental diaries, or child language assessments to gain richer evidence regarding home-based multilingual language learning. Comparative studies between immigrant and non-immigrant families may also broaden understanding of parental strategies in supporting children's English development.

5) CONCLUSION

This study concluded that the Indonesian immigrant mother played an important and adaptive role in supporting her multilingual son's English language learning at home. The participant applied several strategies, including early language exposure, daily communication, repetition, simplified explanation, modeling, digital media use, and flexible language switching between English, Indonesian, and Buginese. These strategies were integrated into natural family interaction rather than formal classroom-style instruction.

The study also concluded that emotional inconsistency, limited attention span, time constraints, reading difficulties, pronunciation problems, and inconsistent participation were the main challenges encountered during the learning process. To address these challenges, the participant used flexible timing, enjoyable short activities, repetition, gradual guidance, and routine-based English practice.

The findings imply that parents, especially mothers, can significantly contribute to children's English language learning through responsive, consistent, and context-based interaction at home. For educators, the findings suggest that collaboration between schools and families may strengthen children's multilingual development. Future studies are recommended to examine similar issues in broader family contexts with larger numbers of participants.

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