

**Balinese Language as a Second Language in Early Children Development:
Identification of the Affecting Factors**

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Abstract: *The utilization of the Balinese language among young children is an essential aspect to consider as it pertains to their ability to effectively engage with their surroundings. This qualitative investigation aims to identify the factors that impact the utilization of Balinese during early childhood. The study's participants consisted of five parents and two teachers of children in Group B2. The research method relied on interviews and documentation records, and the data were analyzed using taxonomic analysis. The findings of the study reveal that there are three primary factors that affect the use of Balinese in early childhood, which include language acquisition, language environment, and language learning. The environment, especially the family setting, plays the most crucial role in Balinese language usage. This research uncovered that children who belong to a specific caste and those who reside in suburban environments tend to utilize Balinese more frequently. The environment where children interact holds a significant impact on their chances of gaining experience in using Balinese.*

Keywords: *Acquisition Factors, Early Childhood, Balinese Language*

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INTRODUCTION

Early childhood is a critical period marked by fundamental developmental changes. During this phase, children undergo a sensitive period where essential skills related to maturation are developed. The child's brain undergoes rapid growth during this period, which is attributed to the presence of approximately 100 billion interconnected neurons in the brain (Belsky & De Haan, 2011). With the growth of the children brain, understanding the developmental process of their cognitive abilities becomes an appealing issue to be discussed. It allows us to gain insight into how children acquire knowledge, learn, think, and solve problems at different stages of their development. Taking a closer look to the cognitive processes such as the perception, memory, attention, reasoning would lead to the understanding the typical patterns and milestones of cognitive development. One of the subjects that needs particular attention is how early childhood period foster language development. It involves a wide range of skills, such as receptive and expressive language, syntactic awareness, and narrative discourse processes, all of which directly impact the acquisition of initial reading and speaking skills, as well as the ability to comprehend acquired information (Boons et al., 2013). Unlike children who have the ability to redefine the situation

(Shur & Zuckerman, 2022), or the ability to understand success or failure in learning activities (Rubtsov & Ulanovskaya, 2022), early children cognitive abilities including their understanding of social situations are still developing.

Since their cognitive and linguistic skills are not fully developed to engage in complex process of redefining situation, young children typically rely on more straightforward strategies to adapt and develop their socio-emotional competence. Young children depend on the assistance from the caregivers and use basic problem-solving skills to navigate its social interaction. Thus, it requires them to be exposed to the language and surrounded by a language-rich environment.

Socio-emotional development and language acquisition are closely intertwined and mutually influential (Halle & Darling-Churchill, 2016). For instance, language functions as a means for young children to express and communicate their emotions effectively (Halle & Darling-Churchill, 2016). As language skills develop, children become better equipped to articulate their feelings, needs, and experiences which lead to emotional expression. In turn, enhanced emotional expression and communication contributes to better emotional regulation and social interactions.

Therefore, exposing young children with language rich environment indirectly refer to introducing them to their native language. Several countries, such as Indonesia, Nigeria, and Africa, have various regional languages due to the diversity of their societies. The regional languages spoken by communities within a nation are commonly referred to as mother tongues, which are the languages introduced to children from birth or used for daily communication in their environment. Mother tongues play a distinct role in child development. The language learned at home is crucial as it serves as the foundation for further language acquisition and development (Sahelehkheirabadi, 2015). Specifically in Bali, it is ideal to state that Introducing the Balinese language to children from an early age also helps prepare them for further learning of the Balinese regional language in subsequent educational levels. With a foundation in Balinese language skills, children will find it easier to understand instructional materials and actively use the language in communication. The use of the mother tongue in the classroom increases the likelihood of children utilizing the language outside the classroom (Wedin et al., 2021).

However, such ideal condition is hardly found to extend where the researchers conducted preliminary study. The researchers conducted an observation during March 2022 at two early childhood education centers in Bali. The young children were given common vocabulary used in daily conversation such as days in a week, animals, and number. This preliminary study results in revealing that the students are all responding the questions in their Indonesian language. For instance, the young children were able to name days in a week. Problems arises when the teacher asked what day was it in Balinese terms. There was no response from the students. Such predicament also happened when the young children were invited to do physical playing activities. Since the terms in the play was in Balinese, the participants were hesitantly moving.

The aforementioned explanation indicates that Balinese language to young children has shifted in terms of its function from L1 to become L2. Even all young children were interacting using a language (Lederberg et al., 2013), but its function has shifted from as a means of interaction to become a language that its objective is to fulfill educational system and job-related usage (Saville-Troike, 2006). With such condition, the researchers are eager to investigate to contributing factors to such shifting function of Balinese language from L1 to become L2 among young children in Bali.

METHOD

This qualitative research aims to identify the factors influencing the usage of the Balinese language in children aged 5-6 years. The researchers conducted this study in Early Childhood Education (ECE) in Bali. Furthermore, the research was conducted over a three-month period, involving parents and teachers of children in group B2. Prior to the interviews, the parents and teachers were required to provide their informed consent as research participants. After the interviews were completed, the participants were asked to fill out a member check form to verify the accuracy and validity of the collected data.

The participants in this study consisted of parents (n = 5) and teachers (n = 2) of children in group B2. The parents had diverse occupational backgrounds, including lecturers (n = 2), housewives (n = 1), private employees (n = 1), and government employees (n = 1). As for the teachers, one had a background in ECE teacher education, while the other was currently pursuing ECE teacher education. Prior to data collection, all participants provided their consent to participate in the research. In order to facilitate the analysis of the interview data, the participants were assigned codes: N (representing Parent/Mother) and G (representing Teacher), followed by a numerical indicator indicating the order of participation (e.g., N1 to N5 and G1 to G2).

Table 1. Characteristics of Research Participants

Participant	Participant Data	Frequency	%
Parents (n=5)	Age		
	• Under 35 years	2	40
	• Over 35 years	3	60
	Gender		
	• Male	0	0
	• Female	5	100
	Educational Background		
	• Senior/ Vocational High School and below	1	20
	• Bachelor of Education	2	40
	• Magister	2	40
	Occupation		
	• Lecturer	2	40
Teacher	• Private Sectors	1	20
	• Civil Servant	1	20
	• Housewife	1	20
	Age		
	• Under 35	0	0
	• Over 35	2	100
	Gender		
	• Male	0	0
	• Female	2	100
	Educational background		
	• Graduates of Early Childhood Education Program	1	50
	• Graduates of Non-Early Childhood Education Program	1	50
	Teaching Experience		
	Over 5 years	1	50
	Under 5 Years	1	50

The study participants consisted of five parents and two teachers of children in group B2. Table 1 provides an overview of the participants' characteristics, highlighting their diverse backgrounds in terms of age, education, and occupation.

Data was collected through semi-structured interviews conducted with the respondents for approximately 45 to 60 minutes as well the result of observation in the classroom interaction. The interviews followed an interview guide based on the theory of language development, encompassing language acquisition/acceptance, language learning, and the language environment. These factors were further categorized as internal and external influences on children's language development (Kapengut & Noble, 2020; Sun et al., 2020). The parents, as participants, were asked a total of 19 questions, comprising five questions related to language acquisition, five questions related to language use, five questions related to environmental conditions, and four questions related to language learning. The teacher, on the other hand, was given 15 questions, including three questions on language acquisition, four questions on language use, two questions on environmental conditions, and six questions on language learning. Some parents opted for face-to-face interviews, while one participant conducted the interview remotely via the Zoom meeting application. The interviews took place at the school during drop-off and pick-up times. Additional data was collected through documentation, including pictures and learning videos provided by the teacher. Data analysis commenced with the transcription of the interview results, followed by coding to identify the main and sub-focus areas pertaining to the factors influencing the use of Balinese language in early childhood. Taxonomic analysis was employed for data analysis in this study.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Early Introduction to Balinese

The Balinese language is deeply intertwined with Balinese culture, as language and culture are closely interconnected. Language serves as a medium of communication and a carrier of culture. Language and culture are inseparable, as a culture without language and language without culture are inconceivable. Specific languages often reflect specific cultures (Solgi & Tafazoli, 2018). By introducing Balinese language in early childhood, children indirectly learn about the associated culture.

The importance of preserving the Balinese language is recognized in the Governor of Bali Regulation Number 80 of 2018, which addresses the Protection and Use of Balinese Language, Script, and Literature, as well as the implementation of the Balinese Language Month. Chapter III of the regulation focuses on the Use of the Balinese Language, particularly Article 4, which stipulates the usage of Balinese language as a means of communication by employees, teachers, education staff, students, and the public in both government and private institutions on specific occasions such as Thursday, Full moon, New Moon, and the Province's Anniversary in August (Brown & Park, 2020). The implementation of this regulation extends beyond the public sphere and has also been incorporated in educational institutions, including Early Childhood Education (ECE).

Preserving Balinese culture through language is integrated into the educational curriculum from ECE to higher education levels. Learning about culture brings significant benefits in terms of language proficiency, heightened cultural awareness, and fostering positive attitudes towards indigenous communities and target populations (Al-Harbi, 2019). Language is a social phenomenon, and linguistic development and maturity cannot be dissociated from broader social and cultural development (Aljumah, 2020).

"So that children know their mother tongue, then because of the Balinese language, it's okay... it's extinct..." (Teacher 01, Interview, October 8, 2022).

"So that the children will get to know it...the original regional language is their mothertongue..." (Teacher 02, Interview, October 8, 2022).

"...he knows the culture if he is Balinese" (Parent 02, Interview, 9 October 2022).

"If he doesn't learn Balinese later when he talks he feels isolated" (Parents 01, Interview, October 7, 2022).

The integration of Balinese language in early childhood education serves not only as a vital aspect of cultural preservation but also as a medium for effective communication, meaningful interaction, and self-expression. As depicted in Figure 1, children show joyous expressions while engaging in the act of singing Balinese songs and synchronously dancing to the rhythmic tunes.



(a)



(b)

Figure 1. Children Dance while Singing Balinese Songs

It is evident that both parents and educators acknowledge the significance of incorporating Balinese language instruction in early childhood education. This recognition is particularly pronounced in terms of its positive impact on fostering children's social interaction and communication skills. Moreover, the effort is aimed at introducing Balinese language at a young age also serve the purpose of preserving and transmitting the rich cultural heritage of the Balinese community. It is necessary to note that language acquisition, as suggested by previous research (Cho, 2020), plays a pivotal role in enhancing children's cultural awareness.

Language Acquisition

Language acquisition, also known as language learning, refers to the subconscious and instinctive process through which an individual gains proficiency in a language. Particularly during early childhood, language is intuitively perceived as a medium of communication with their close environment. The initial language a child is exposed to and rapidly grasps is commonly referred to as the "mother tongue." Notably, children exhibit a greater aptitude for language mastery compared to adults. This aptitude roots from their capacity to absorb and internalize linguistic nuances effortlessly within natural contexts. Consequently, young children tend to surpass adults in their language fluency, as they may experience accelerated progress in language development [16]. The language introduced to a child by their parents typically becomes their primary and most proficient form of communication. The findings from the interview indicate that the young children are no longer introduced to Balinese as their first

language as four participating subjects assert that they communicate to their children in Indonesian. Additionally, the interview also reveals that the young children initial language acquisition is significantly influenced by the linguistic patterns employed by parents during the interactions. The proficiency of children in acquiring language evolves progressively through distinct developmental stages. In the case of Balinese language acquisition during early childhood, the process commences with the absorption of auditory input, subsequent retention, and tentative utilization during conversations. Young children exhibit remarkable aptitude as both recipients and learners of language; however, the efficacy of their acquisition journey is also contingent on engaging with proficient speakers of the language (O'Grady & Hattori, 2016).

"The acquisition of the language seems to be gradual. He heard first, he thought first, but he didn't pronounce it yet" (Parents 05, Interview, 9 October 2022).

"He understands our Balinese conversation, but he only has a hard time answering it" (Parents 04, Interview, 9 October 2022)

Language acquisition in children commences at birth and unfolds throughout a critical period of development. Dekeyser and Larson Hall emphasize that during the first three years period, a child is exposed to the linguistic elements in their surroundings. For young learners to start on the acquisition journey of Balinese as their primary language, their proficiency in using Balinese tends to surpass those who initially acquire Indonesian. The immersive nature of early childhood allows children to be fully mingle in their linguistic environment, enabling continuous listening, interaction, and communication in a specific language. These social interactions play a pivotal role in the process of language acquisition, as language itself is intricately intertwined with social dynamics (Al-Harbi, 2019).

Language Environment

Human culture is intrinsically shaped by geographical factors, and language development in children primarily involves imitation of the linguistic patterns present in their immediate surroundings. The environment in which a child grows up plays a significant role in determining the sounds and language structures they produce, aligning with the behaviorist perspective. Nevertheless, children could perform a great amount of creativity in their language usage. They not only adopt the sound patterns prevalent in their community but also mold and manipulate them to convey specific concepts and ideas. Furthermore, children are like sponges. They comprehend the linguistic sounds and structures prevalent in their daily interactions. Their developing linguistic abilities are a reflection of the linguistic input they receive from their immediate environment.

"...he has only recently learned Balinese if he visits his parents' home Ville" (Parents 03, Interview, 9 October 2022).

"Because of the environment, Ma'am, yes... all of my children use Indonesian because all my neighbors use them too " (Parents 05, Interview, October 9, 2022).

The environment has functions in shaping various aspects of early childhood development, with language acquisition being notably influenced by a child's interactions with their surroundings. Language experience is greatly enriched when children actively engage with their environment, as external stimuli contribute significantly to the process of language

learning. Frequent interactions allow children to be exposed to various words and phrases. Diverse speech introduces new vocabulary, while complex speech helps them understand sentence structure, grammar, and syntax. This builds a strong foundation for both oral and written language skills. Among the various environmental factors, the family setting emerges as the primary and most influential context for young children. The quantity of language input in this environment is believed to wield substantial impact on a child's language proficiency (Solgi & Tafazoli, 2018).

In the family environment, the use of Balinese language serves as a potent stimulus for children to absorb, retain, and imitate the linguistic patterns they frequently encounter. The language utilized at home significantly shapes a child's language development and fluency. Consequently, the incorporation of Balinese in family interactions fosters an environment conducive to the acquisition of this language.

Despite the beneficial effects of Balinese language exposure in the family setting, it is revealed that some parents predominantly use Indonesian in their interactions with their children due to various reason. One of the clearest facts derived from the interview is because the number of the people speaking the language is decreasing in the neighbouring situation and can only be exposed once the young children visited their grandparents' house. Another subject also mentions that the inability of himself as a father to use the native language also influences the interaction using Indonesian.

"Children at home are used to using Indonesian. Indeed, they are combined, but they mostly use the Indonesian language with their mother and father. (Teacher 01, Interview, October 8, 2022).

"...I don't know much about Balinese myself, so my father's time portion is also lacking" (Parents 01, Interview, October 7, 2022).

"My husband and I speak Balinese at home (Parents 02, Interview, 9 October 2022).

"Everything uses Balinese" (Parents 02, Interview, 9 October 2022).

"...I use mixed language, more Indonesian though. Even though I'm Balinese, I use Indonesian most of the time to communicate" (Parents 03, Interview, 9 October 2022).

"On average in one yard the house uses Balinese" (Parents 03, Interview, 9 October 2022).

"...I communicate with their father more often in Balinese, so they seem to be influenced by that" (Parents 05, Interview, 9 October 2022).

During the process of development, children are subject to the influence of both genetic and environmental factors, which significantly shape their behaviors, including communication and language learning. They often adapt their conduct to align with the social norms and expectations prevailing in their surroundings. The geographic location where children are raised and the individuals, they frequently interact with play a crucial role in determining the extent of their exposure to and usage of Balinese during early childhood. Engaging in authentic language interactions with native speakers in real-life situations facilitates a smoother and more effective language acquisition process, particularly when it comes to learning their mother tongue (Kormos & Csizér, 2007).

"In his environment, he is not used to using Balinese, accustomed to using Indonesian" (Parent 02, Interview, 9 October 2022).

"Children around my house speak Balinese" (Parents 02, Interview, 9 October 2022).

"...I live in a housing estate, so there are more immigrants, actually. So, like it or not, it affects us in using the Indonesian language, right?" (Parents 05, Interview, 9 October 2022).

The family environment, social environment, and school environment are environments where children interact and get stimulated. The support of the literacy environment for children's language is very strong and has a significant effect (Payne Grover et al., 1994).

Language Learning

In developing language skills, children need the help of adults who provide stimulation, both at home, at school, and in the surrounding environment. Language learning aims to help individuals develop the ability to relate effectively to others (Wong et al., 2017). Language learning for early childhood, including learning Balinese is not only the task of teachers at school but also requires the role of parents or the family environment to always provide the same and sustainable stimulation so that children get more language experience.

"Introduction through daily conversation" (Parents 04, Interview, October 9, 2022).

"Directly, sis, yes, that's self-taught. So there are no media (Parents 05, Interview, 9 October 2022).

In learning Balinese, the quantity and quality of stimulation received by children can affect the child's ability to use Balinese. The more often and the more children get stimulated, the more the language development of early childhood increases. The amount of time teaching language in schools can also affect a child's vocabulary competence (Sun et al., 2018).

"On Thursday, we have to teach Balinese" (Teacher 01, Interview, October 8, 2022).

"I use it for preliminary activities, for example with songs, with stories" (Teacher 01, Interview, October 8, 2022).

The acquisition of the Balinese language in the school learning environment plays an important role in preserving and transmitting the language to future generations. In schools, children are exposed to the Balinese language through various forms of interaction, such as classroom learning and cultural activities like traditional games and other aspects related to Balinese culture. Special strategies are needed to make the learning of the Balinese language in early childhood education easily accepted by children. The teaching strategy carried out by the teacher requires creativity from the teacher concerned to manage all the needs of the learning process needed to generate children's learning motivation and learning objectives can be achieved. The use of interactive strategies is beneficial in the learning process because it offers the possibility of productive and participatory learning from engaged learners to communicate and collaborate effectively (Deng et al., 2023; Turan & Ulutas, 2016; Zahra et al., 2013). In learning Balinese at an early age, learning activities are packaged in a fun atmosphere with varied activities so that children can more easily absorb and practice the vocabulary and sentences they hear.

"...in some of the teaching materials they need to use Balinese, such as singing Balinese songs "(Parents 01, Interview, 7 October 2022).

"Learn to count. One, two, three, use Indonesian first, now... now try Balinese." (Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday to mention the names of the days, we also ask, "Try the Balinese now" (Teacher 01, Interview, October 8, 2022).

"The strategy I use to go through singing, storytelling, song, will also do" (Teacher 01, Interview, October 8, 2022).

"Inviting the children to sing Balinese songs and also talk in Balinese" (Teacher 02, Interview, 8 October 2022).

"Counting in simple Balinese" (Teacher 21, Interview, 8 October 2022).

Figure 2 below shows the learning media used by teachers in introducing Balinese to children, one of which is picture media. The pictures are posted on the classroom walls to stimulate children with a literacy-rich environment. The picture media introduced the names of the days in Indonesian, English, and Balinese. There are also various greetings and some greetings in Balinese. In addition to image media, sometimes teachers also use simple video media containing Balinese stories that are made by the teacher themselves.



Figure 2. Examples of Media Used by Teachers

The success of children's learning is determined by the cooperation that exists between teachers, schools, and children's learning activities at home in the family environment (Mehmet & Emel, 2020). The strength of the stimulation provided, the use of learning methods and media, as well as the packaging of language learning activities, have a great influence on the use of Balinese in early childhood. Children who are motivated by creative teachers will in turn become creative followers of their teacher's example.

CONCLUSION

There are factors that influence the use of the Balinese language in early childhood, including language acquisition, language environment, and the language learning received by the child. The environmental factor plays a very significant role in influencing the use of the Balinese language in children. The family environment and the child's social interactions are external factors that have a significant impact. The views of parents and teachers, as well as the communication interaction patterns developed with the child, are central elements in the use of the Balinese language in early childhood.

To create successful language learning in early childhood, collaborative efforts between parents, teachers, and the social environment around the child are essential. Teachers also

consistently use interactive and creative teaching strategies to foster a productive and enjoyable learning atmosphere, promoting active engagement and collaboration among learners. By integrating various stimulating learning activities, educators ensure that children can easily absorb and practice new language elements.

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