

Exploring parental advocacy of children with special needs in learning English: a narrative inquiry

(overview essay)

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Abstract: Parental advocacy in children with special needs should be further explored, aiming at providing help and supports for parents to their children's education, particularly in language learning. This study sought to explore the ways parents from different socioeconomic statuses (SES) practised their parental advocacy or involvement on their children with special needs in English language learning. To this end, this research centralized to a single question: How do the parents coming from different SES practise parental advocacy to the children with special needs in learning the English language? Narrative inquiry is employed as the research design of this study. Two mothers from Indonesia whose children have been diagnosed with autism voluntarily participated in this study. The data collected via interviews were transcribed verbatim, then analyzed narratively. The finding of this study highlighted that families from different SES experienced fluctuating feelings when having children with special needs. However, they insisted on practising various ways to nurture their children in learning English despite some problems that emerged during practising advocacy. The finding of this current study might contribute to the practices of parental advocacy towards children with special needs, particularly in learning English.

Keywords: Children with Special Needs, Learning English, Parent Involvement, SES

1 Introduction

Parental advocacy in children with special education needs is central to promote education for all, particularly English language education. It is due to "parents are an accountability mechanism for their child's education" (Burke and Goldman, 2016, p.137). Substantially, parents are a person who takes high responsibility and plays a vital role in being involved in their children's education. This notion is in line with

Rispoli et al. (2018), who assert that the involvement of parents in education is crucial for students, including students with special needs. The significance of parental advocacy or involvement can help increase children's motivation in learning (Khajepoura and Ghazvini, 2011), improve academic achievement (Ng and Lee, 2014), and also enhance language competence (Wong et al. 1, 2018).

Research consistently indicates that the extent to which parents provide language support to their children with special education needs varies, specifically with socioeconomic status (SES). The research conducted by Huang et al. (2017) shows that the parents who have an excellent SES background give the first exposure to the English language in early childhood. This view is in line with Butler et al. (2017), who say that parental SES significantly contributes to the children's performance in learning a language, English in particular. This previous study is also supported by Rowe and Berry (2019). They explain in their non-experimental study that the role of SES is significant toward improving the quality of educational services.

Nevertheless, parents who have lower SES are often speculated to be less involved in their children's special needs in learning English. They often prioritize their time to meet their children's daily needs (Tan, 2018). Thus, they do not have enough time to get involved when they learn English at home (Malone, 2017). Moreover, Masaka (2018) points out that parents with lower SES less participate in their children's English learning, yet they still provide emotional and spiritual support during their children learning activities.

SES can play a pivotal role in how parents get involved in their children's language learning. The children who have a privileged background will generally get additional support in the learning process, such as taking some courses or attending private language lessons, and enjoying some cultural activities (Sanjurjo et al., 2017). Moreover, parents from higher SES families tend to be more cognitively involved in children's early learning. For instance, parents usually provide cultural capital (e.g., Work of art and Classic literature) and educational sources (e.g., DVDs, books, and other materials) to stimulate them cognitively before the beginning of school (Caro, 2015 as cited in Caro, 2018). In this sense, the parents who have better financial support tend to navigate their children in learning the language.

Concerning the importance of parents' role in the parental involvement of children with special needs, family background is a crucial factor that determines the ways the parents get involved in their children's education. Research conducted by Iwaniec (2018), using a questionnaire, illustrates that family background, including parental education and SES, tends to influence children's motivation to learn a language consistently. Moreover, Eilertsen et al. (2016) demonstrate in their experimental study that family background plays a crucial role in parental involvement in language learning.

However, research has also indicated that most parents strive to provide appropriate support for their children learning the English language. Parents often get stressed (Hoddap and Burke 2014) and confused (Lessenberry, B. M. and Rehfeldt, R. A., 2004) to support their children's language learning. Moreover, they also struggle to develop advocacy strategies to manage their children. They do not have a sufficient understanding of creating advocacy strategies for their children (Besnoy et al., 2015). Furthermore, Rehm et al. (2013) indicate in their qualitative study that besides the lack of understanding, parents also lack information about providing support for learning English. Thus, they are not used to help their children learn English (Forey et al., 2015).

Having recognized that there have been problems about parental advocacy or involvement on the children with special needs in learning English, thus there should be a further study that can help illuminate the existing issues. Moreover, until recently, the research of parental advocacy in children with special needs in learning English is mainly conducted under a quantitative paradigm and is framed from the global perspective. The research which voices parental advocacy or involvement in Indonesia should necessarily be undertaken. Thus, this study is focused on the parental advocacy of children with special needs in learning English in Indonesia by utilizing a qualitative approach, which adopts Narrative inquiry as to the research design. To be specific, this study was conducted to explore further how parents coming from different SES practise their advocacy or involvement on the children with special needs in learning English. Thus, there is a single question, how do the parents coming from different SES practise parental advocacy or involvement to the children with special needs in learning the English language?

2 Material and Methods

Narrative inquiry was employed as the research design of this study. According to Johnson and Christensen (2016), Narrative inquiry is pointed out as qualitative research that studies people's lived experiences as a storied phenomenon to generate a narrative chronology within the story (Creswell, 2013). Since the researcher's focus is on the parental advocacy or involvement of children with special needs in learning English, the notion of using narrative inquiry as the research methodology is entirely appropriate. This is due to the research focus is compatible with the features of narrative inquiry itself.

Concerning the research design, the researcher did a pilot interview with her colleague who is recently engaged in intense interaction with children with special needs in learning English for testing the interview questions. Then, two Indonesian mothers have different SES; also, children diagnosed with autism voluntarily narrated their story about being engaged in their children with a particular need to learn English

in this study. The researcher interviewed the participants twice to ensure the validity of the data. The data collected via interviews were transcribed verbatim and then analyzed narratively. There are at least four themes as the results of the data analysis. They are: 1. the parents' experience when raising their children with special needs, 2. the parents' practices when nurturing their children special needs in learning the English language, 3. the problems in rearing the children with special needs in learning the English language, and 4. the strategies to cope with the problems.

3 Results

Participant's Experience on Nurturing Children with Special Needs

Mrs. Jane

Mrs. Jane uttered that she and her husband had been blessed with two lovely sons. Regrettably, one of them, particularly her eldest son has been diagnosed with autism and dyslexia. She and her husband affectionate them equally and unconditionally. Their children are such a miracle for them. They talked that they feel guilty and crest-fallen about their son, yet they always give a positive response to their son's limitation instead of blaming the situation, which happened inside their life.

Mrs. Jane explained that she was the person who found and knew the symptoms of her son first. She was shocked at that time. Perplexedly, she told it to her husband. This sudden news was unbelievable for them, and it also made them sad about their son's future. When her son was born, he did not have specific signs, indicating that he was getting autism. Nonetheless, the symptoms were known when her child was two years old. At that time, her child got a growth delay, which was not regular for his age, such as poor motor skills, difficulty in social interaction, and weak immune system.

After finding the symptoms, Mrs. Jane said that she and her husband tried to find a place or a doctor to heal their son's disability. They tried their best to heal their son instead of feeling grief continually. They were never desperate to find the best doctor for their son despite the financial instability they had. Surprisingly, after bringing him to the doctor for the last, it was found that there was a lump inside their son's right brain, which caused their child to be abnormal. Then the doctor did another in-depth examination, the result of which was that their son was diagnosed as having autism.

Dismally, there were other defects in her son's body. The symptoms were known when he was at kindergarten. At that time, he got an impediment in reading, writing, or spelling a word. Moreover, he also got difficulty and puzzling about numbers and letters; thus, Mrs. Jane brought him to the doctor who had handled him before. Mrs. Jane and her husband patiently took their child to the doctor, although they

were worried about the result. Then, the day came, the doctor diagnosed her son as having dyslexia too. Immediately, Mrs. Jane got startled and felt blue. This was due to being agitated about how her son would grow in the future with the limitations he has and how he can live independently with his limitations.

For the first time, it was difficult for Mrs. Jane and her husband to admit that diagnosis. Since then, Mrs. Jane and her husband have had various experiences in taking care of their son. Mrs. Jane expressed her feeling that it is arduous to have a child with special needs. This is due to that many people exclude her son's existence, even deemed that her son is a crazy person, and bullied him continuously. Thus, it was one of the most complex parts she had ever had because she and her husband had to maintain his emotions stable to avoid situations that should not happen.

In this regard, Mrs. Jane also voiced that she tended to support her son emotionally and spiritually he was learning about English. She honestly got stressed when nurturing him because of the limitation that he has. Thus, she often stabilized her son's emotions first by creating good memories, situations, and conditions so that he would feel safe and happy learning at home. Moreover, she also explained that she frequently gave him little appreciation to cherish and encourage him to be better. Thus, Mrs. Jane has built a strong bond between her and her son and then genuinely shows her affection for her son. Then, she and her husband always pray for the best for his future.

In the same vein, Mrs. Jane also voiced her feeling that the challenging part in taking care of children with special needs involves herself in the academic sphere because it takes special treatment and financial aspects. She said that the financial aspect is the critical aspect if other parents want to have successful children. Unfortunately, Mrs. Jane got economic instability, which meant that her financial background could not accommodate the facilities for learning English for her son, so her son could not learn English well. It made her desperate, yet she got a bunch of support from her family, her father in particular, so at least her son got the knowledge and experience in learning English from her father.

By recognizing the financial problem, Mrs. Jane also explained that she has poor skills, insufficient knowledge, and less experience using English. Thus, she was not used to educating her son about English well and helping her son learn English. Although she did not tutor him intensively, she tries her best with her limited skills.

Surprisingly, Mrs. Jane did not feel hopeless, yet she tried implementing several ways to overcome the problems, family-centered and school involvement in particular. Moreover, she also initiated to participate in volunteering activities or seminars. She felt grateful because she got many experiences, which educated her to be an active parent.

Mrs. Jeana

Mrs. Jeana is married and lives with her husband, two lovely sons and a daughter. They live blissfully and love each other. They also have a perfect financial background. Nonetheless, Mrs. Jeana also described that her eldest daughter had been diagnosed as having mild autism despite the bliss. They never imagined that they would have a child with special needs, yet the unexpected accident happened.

Mrs. Jeana explained that the symptoms were noticed at the time when her daughter was born. She did not cry like a baby in general and stayed quiet. After a few months, her daughter's growth seemed promising, but she did not give any response when interacting with her. Mrs. Jeana and her husband had tried everything to make her respond to the parents, but she became indifferent to the people around her. Thus, her parents initiated to bring her the pediatrician who handled her since she was born to assure her daughter's problem. After several weeks of taking the examination and consultation, the doctor affirmed that their daughter was diagnosed with mild autism.

After listening to the diagnosis, Mrs. Jeana and her husband felt remorseful and woeful at first. Still, since the doctor had warned them after the unexpected accident that happened with Mrs. Jeana when she was pregnant, they have prepared all the possibilities and things for her daughter. Mrs. Jeana also admitted that it was her fault, which caused her daughter to have special needs. Sometimes she still blames herself, but she realized that she could not fault it continually, so she responds positively to her daughter's limitations.

After that day, Mrs. Jeana and her husband determined to rehabilitate her daughter by doing some therapies at night. For instance, they always gather at night to conduct a family discussion or family time, and sometimes if they have leisure time, they always pray together. Moreover, Mrs. Jeana also conveyed her feelings that she is grateful for the situation, which had happened. She has learnt to be more responsible and persevering toward her children. In addition, she also gets a lot of support from her family, which makes her feel strong; even her family also admitted her daughter's existence and still loves her unconditionally.

Hence, Mrs. Jeana enunciated her deep regret at her children, especially her daughter, because she and her husband can involve themselves when her children are doing learning activities. Despite the hectic work schedule, they frequently provide their children's education needs such as educational sources. Besides that, they always control them through their babysitter or their tutor. Then, they will personally check their development at the weekend. Moreover, Mrs. Jeana also works collaboratively with her sister to "manage and control my daughter or sometimes accompany my daughter when doing her learning activities," she said. She believes in her sister because her sister also loves her daughter unconditionally. Moreover, her sister is also close with her daughter, so she cannot lean her daughter on her sister. Mrs. Jeana

also attended volunteering or seminar activities to enhance her knowledge and gain new relations and experience

4 Discussion

The previous section has detailed a significant finding based on different themes related to parents' experiences with children with special needs in nurturing them when learning English. Therefore, this section aims at dialoguing the findings with a related literature review, described in the previous chapter.

The initial finding reveals that parents with special needs, including autism, have a tough time nurturing their children. This is due to raising children with special needs is not simple, yet it isn't straightforward. All participants also admitted that even though it was arduous, they still had to endure their responsibility for their children and always be by their children's side when needed. Unfortunately, both participants feel deep regret and are guilty to their children. This finding fits with the research conducted by DePape and Lindsay (2014), where parents who have a child diagnosed with autism often blame themselves, also experienced guilt and regret after suspecting the causes of autism.

Moreover, this perspective is also corroborated by Ooi et al. (2016), who assert that every single mother who has an autistic child tends to have mixed feelings, such as feeling grief and loss. Hence, all participants were unsatisfied after hearing the diagnosis (Lutz et al., 2012). Nevertheless, they always blame themselves for their children's disabilities. Thus, this finding contradicts the research conducted by Desai et al. (2012), who show that Indian parents with special needs blame the doctor who diagnosed the children with autism.

The finding of this study shows that emotional support from the parents influences the children's emotions when learning English. For evidence, all the participants usually express their unconditional affection to their children by listening to their problems or appreciating the things done by their children. This finding represents a similar theme in Lundqvist, Westling, & Siljehag (2018), which denotes that listening and respecting the live experience of children with autism, is pivotal because it will determine their emotion and development. By listening and respecting them, the parents already show their genuine love and care to them and value their existence. In contrast, this finding is reciprocal with research conducted by Kurz (2018), Marciano, Drasgow, & Carlson. (2014), and Nicholas et al. (2015). In addition, this finding points out that spiritual support is an obvious factor, which contributes to rearing children with special needs. This finding is linked to DePape and Lindsay (2014) and Masaka (2018), who speculate that parents of autistic children opted for conducting religious treatments to stabilize the emotion, also praying that God will cure their children's disability and provide a bright future for the children. Moreover,

this finding also has a similar perspective with this research finding, which emphasizes that spiritual support also builds the closeness of each family member.

Although emotional and spiritual aspects are crucial in disabled child-rearing, financial support tends to be a pivotal aspect because it will determine how to be engaged in the children's education, particularly in facilitating the needs. Therefore, this finding illustrates that financial support plays a pivotal role in accommodating and encouraging the children's needs in learning English. For evidence, the children who have a prerogative background tend to get additional support in the learning process, such as attending private language lessons and enjoying some cultural activities for spending their holiday and honing their English. This finding is quite similar to Sanjurjo et al. (2017), who say that the children who have privileged backgrounds will get additional support in the learning process, such as taking some courses or attending private language lessons, and enjoying some cultural activities. Moreover, this perspective is also corroborated with another research finding, which indicates that parents who have a stable financial background will provide all their children's needs in learning English. Thus, this finding tends to be relevant to Caro (2018), who describes that parents from higher SES families tend to be more cognitively involved in children's early learning. For instance, parents will provide cultural (e.g., Work of art and Classic literature) and educational sources (e.g., DVDs, books, and other materials) to stimulate them cognitively before the beginning of school.

Furthermore, there are several problems and barriers faced by Indonesian parents when practising their involvement or advocacy to their children with special needs in learning the English language. Three issues emerged during Indonesian Parents' education about English to their children with special needs: insufficient knowledge, little experience, inadequate skills in using English. These problems are pertinent with Besnoy et al (2015), Rehm et al (2013), and Forey et al (2015). Nonetheless, this finding contrasts with Lechuga-Peña, and Brisson (2018), who explain that parents face three barriers that prevent them from being involved in their children's education, such as cultural and language diversities their children's school, racism, and being individual parent or caregiver.

Having recognized that most problems faced by Indonesian parents are about their experience, knowledge, and skill in using English, financial and time issues also emerged when nurturing their children with special needs in learning the English language. This research finding corroborates Marciano, Drasgow, & Carlson's (2014) study which shows that the financial and time issue is related and delineates that raising a child with special needs takes financial support. Thus, the parents frequently prioritize their time for working.

In addition, this study revealed that all participants opted for family-centered service to cope with the emerging problem. This finding is closely related to Chao et al. (2006), who assert that family-centered service is helpful to find the concrete solution

to deal with the problem. Concepcion and Chanhnam (2007) also pointed out that family-centered service helps the children be closer to their family so that they will be able to solve the problem collaboratively.

Furthermore, parent-school collaboration is also employed in this last finding to the practical way to tackle the emerging problem. The first participant affirmed that she is active in asking for some help from her son's school if a problem emerges during his learning process. This finding was also strengthened by Hodapp and Burke (2014) who points out that parental advocacy seems not to have a significant impact if it is not combined with school services. However, this finding argues Zenda (2020) who explains that parent-school involvement is generally used by parents who do not have enough time for nurturing their children in the academic sphere. However, Larra and Sarascotti (2019) show that although parent-school collaboration is crucial for the children, parental involvement is still needed because it is used as the critical factor of children's development. Thus, this finding also voices that both participants are still active parents who involve themselves as much as possible in nurturing their children in learning English. Moreover, both participants also participate in volunteering activities or seminars to enhance their knowledge and gain new relationships and experience.

5 Conclusion

This current study is devised to explore the ways the parents practise their advocacy or involvement toward their children with special needs in learning English by different family backgrounds, particularly concerning SES. There are quadruple findings that can be illustrated as follows: 1. all the participants experience deep regret and guilt toward their children's disability. Moreover, they also often blame themselves for causing the disability that their children have. Then, they also have mixed feelings when raising their children with special needs, such as feeling grief, loss, and arduous, yet both participants are grateful to have them as their children. Meanwhile, 2. both participants practise various ways to nurture their children with special needs in learning English. For instance. The first participant is passive in educating their children with special needs about English. Then she tends to be involved in emotional and spiritual support instead of financial support when her son is learning English.

Conversely, the second participant practises all the support, such as emotional, spiritual, and financial support, when her daughter learns English. She is also active and creative in educating her daughter about English. This is due to 3. several problems that emerged while practising their advocacy in helping their children with special needs learn English such as, insufficient knowledge, little experience, inadequate skills in using English, limited time, and financial instability. Therefore,

4. there are three strategies that the participants apply to cope with family-centered, parent-school collaboration, and participating in seminar or volunteering activities. By recognizing the conclusion above, a couple of suggestions are proposed which expectedly will be worthwhile for parents; mainly all the parents are supposed to advance their knowledge about English since English is pivotal nowadays to be fully involved with their children with special education needs when learning English.

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(reviewed twice)

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