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Parenting Styles and Children's English-Speaking Ability in Four Bilingual Families: A Qualitative Study

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ABSTRACT
Parenting practices may shape young children's opportunities to develop English-speaking skills in bilingual family environments. This study aimed to explore parenting styles and parental communication practices in relation to children's English-speaking ability in four bilingual families in Indonesia. Using a descriptive qualitative approach, data were collected through online semi-structured interviews with parents, naturalistic observations of parent-child interactions, and children's English-speaking activities, including storytelling and picture description. The findings indicated that three families demonstrated characteristics of authoritative parenting, including emotional warmth, regular language activities, and active parental involvement. These practices were accompanied by children's reported willingness and confidence to speak English. In contrast, one family demonstrated a more permissive approach, with less structured language exposure and less active parental involvement. The findings also highlighted the role of responsive communication, shared educational media activities, and consistent opportunities to use English in everyday interactions. Given the small sample and qualitative design, the findings provide contextual insights rather than evidence of causal effects. This study highlights the potential importance of supportive parenting practices in creating opportunities for young children to use English in bilingual family settings.

Keywords: Bilingual Families; English-speaking Ability; Parental Parenting Style; Authoritative Parenting; Early Childhood Language Development

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1. INTRODUCTION

Language education in the family environment is a crucial aspect of child development, where interaction and communication through physical proximity allow parents to instill language skills effectively. Before children enter formal educational settings such as schools, they have already gained an early understanding of language through daily interactions with family members, especially parents. Thus, the family plays a fundamental role in shaping the foundation of children's language skills (Adiningsih & Anantyasari, 2025). According to Vygotsky (1934) in Anggraini (2021, p. 44), language acts as a key instrument in articulating ideas and asking questions; it also contributes to the formation of abstract concepts and categorization systems in the thinking process. In the realm of language acquisition, the role of parents goes beyond providing linguistic stimuli—it also includes providing constructive responses, emotional support, and space for children to express themselves. High parental involvement in verbal interactions with children contributes significantly to optimizing children's language acquisition and development.

Parents' attention and attitudes towards their children's language development play a significant role. Parents who consistently use two languages or introduce foreign languages such as English from an early age tend to contribute positively to the development of their child's bilingual skills (Sitepu, Sibarani, & Sumarsih, 2021). In this context, the intensity and quality of verbal interactions in the family environment contribute to shaping children's level of confidence in communication, including in speaking English.

Parenting, which refers to a consistent set of behaviors, attitudes, and strategies applied in the process of parenting and interacting with children, has a great influence on the formation of children's personality, confidence level, and communication skills. Different types of parenting—such as authoritative, authoritarian, permissive, and neglectful—have been the focus of research in the context of child development (Thompson & Baumrind, 2019). Authoritative parenting involves a balance of high responsiveness and high expectations, where caregivers offer support and affection while upholding clear guidelines. In contrast, authoritarian parenting is characterized by stringent expectations with limited emotional support, leading to strict regulations and a lack of personal connection. Permissive parenting is marked by high emotional support but low expectations, giving children greater freedom and little discipline. On the other hand, neglectful parenting features both low emotional engagement and low expectations, resulting in minimal parental involvement in a child's life (Maccoby & Martin, 1983). Among the four approaches, authoritative parenting, which integrates emotional warmth with proportionate application of discipline, is consistently associated with high levels of self-confidence and language competence in children (Kennedy, 2024).

In the context of foreign language learning, such as English, parental involvement becomes increasingly crucial. Parents who introduce English from an early age through conversations, storytelling, digital media, or structured learning activities can enhance children's familiarity with the language, promote comfort in its use, and support the development of speaking skills (Christina, 2024). Moreover, children raised in bilingual or multilingual environments where parents consistently use two languages tend to exhibit greater cognitive flexibility and more advanced language skills (Kim & Runco, 2022). Therefore, a parenting style that supports and consistently provides positive exposure to English can make a significant contribution to the child's speaking ability.

Furthermore, research has established a significant link between authoritative parenting and increased expressive language ability in children, underpinning the need for balanced warmth and discipline in developing language skills (Sadiq, Farooq, Mansoor, & Shoukat, 2024). Parents' participation in English literacy activities, including reading aloud and interactive reading, also favors children's English language skills (Hemas, 2024). Parent involvement goes beyond parenting practices to involve active contributions to children's acquisition of language. The education level of parents and their partaking in language-rich communication is important to ensure children develop English-speaking skills (Paneru & Bohara, 2025).

Despite these well-documented benefits, there remains a critical research gap in the existing literature. While previous studies have broadly examined the relationship between parenting styles and general language development, limited empirical research has specifically investigated how different parenting approaches—particularly in Indonesian bilingual family contexts—influence young children's English-speaking ability during the early years (ages 4–6), which is a sensitive period for language acquisition. Furthermore, few studies have explored the specific interaction mechanisms, such as verbal scaffolding and responsive communication patterns, through which parenting styles translate into children's confidence and fluency in spoken English. This gap is significant because understanding these mechanisms is essential for developing targeted interventions that support early English language development in home settings.

To address this gap, this study aims to investigate the influence of parenting styles on children's English-speaking ability within bilingual families in Indonesia. Specifically, this research seeks to: (1) identify which parenting styles are most supportive in building children's confidence and fluency when speaking English; and (2) explore how parents' communication habits and the language input they provide at home contribute to children's early English-speaking development. The novelty of this research lies in its focus on the interaction between specific parenting behaviors and verbal stimulation in Indonesian bilingual households, providing empirical evidence grounded in Baumrind's theory of parenting styles and Vygotsky's sociocultural theory.

This study offers significant benefits for society, particularly for parents, educators, and policymakers. For parents, the findings provide practical insights into how different parenting approaches can foster or hinder children's English-speaking skills, enabling them to adopt more effective and supportive communication strategies at home. For educators and schools, the results can guide the development of programs that encourage stronger parental involvement in language learning, especially in introducing English during the early years of a child's development. For policymakers, this research contributes evidence-based recommendations for designing early childhood education policies that recognize and strengthen the home environment as a vital context for foreign language acquisition. Ultimately, by enhancing understanding of the parent-child interaction dynamics that support English-speaking ability, this study aims to contribute to improved educational outcomes and global competitiveness in Indonesia.

2. METHOD

This research applies a qualitative descriptive design to examine the impact of parental parenting styles on children's English proficiency in bilingual families. This design was chosen to enable an in-depth understanding of how parenting styles and verbal interaction at home influence children's language skills, particularly their confidence and fluency in speaking English.

The participants of this study were four bilingual families who were purposively recruited based on specific criteria: the family used both their home language and English in daily communication, they had at least one child aged between 4 and 6 years, and the parents were willing to participate in interviews and observations. This age range was selected because it represents an early and crucial stage of language development, where children are highly receptive to linguistic input from their environment.

Data collection employed three principal methods that are complementary to each other, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. First, semi-structured interviews were conducted with parents to explore their parenting styles, language use patterns at home, and the strategies they employ to support English development. The interviews were conducted online and used open-ended questions to allow parents to share their experiences and perspectives in detail. Second, naturalistic observations were conducted in the family home environment to observe real-life patterns of communication and language use between parents and children. These observations aimed to capture authentic interactions without interference from external factors, providing insight into the quantity and quality of verbal exchanges occurring

naturally in daily routines. Third, children were asked to perform English-speaking tasks, such as storytelling or picture description, within a relaxed and familiar context. These tasks were designed to explore children's spontaneous English-speaking abilities, including their fluency, vocabulary use, and confidence in expressing themselves in English.

To facilitate the data collection process, several instruments were developed and utilized. A semi-structured interview guide containing open-ended questions was designed to examine parenting behaviors, language use, and parental involvement in children's English learning. The questions were formulated based on the theoretical framework of parenting styles but were adapted to the local context of bilingual families in Indonesia. An observation checklist was also developed to record the quality and quantity of verbal interaction between parents and children, as well as the emotional support provided during communication. Key indicators included the frequency of English use, the responsiveness of parents to children's verbal attempts, and the types of language activities observed. Additionally, a set of speech cues or prompts, such as pictures and storytelling stimuli, was prepared to elicit children's spontaneous use of English. These cues were designed to be age-appropriate and engaging, encouraging children to speak naturally without pressure.

The data collection process was carried out in several systematic steps. Potential participants were identified through referrals and community networks, and parents who met the inclusion criteria were contacted and provided with an explanation of the research purpose and procedures. Informed consent was obtained from all participating parents prior to data collection. Semi-structured interviews were then conducted with parents via online platforms, with each interview lasting approximately 30 to 45 minutes and recorded with the participants' consent. The interviews explored parents' parenting styles, their attitudes towards English, and their involvement in their children's language learning at home. Following the interviews, naturalistic observations were conducted in the family homes during routine activities, such as mealtimes, playtime, or learning sessions. Observational notes were taken to document the patterns of communication and language use, focusing on verbal interactions between parents and children. Subsequently, children were invited to participate in simple English-speaking tasks, such as describing a picture or telling a short story. These tasks were conducted in a familiar and comfortable setting to minimize anxiety and encourage natural speech production, and children's responses were recorded for later analysis. All interviews, observations, and speaking tasks were documented through audio recordings and field notes, and the recorded materials were transcribed verbatim to facilitate systematic analysis.

The data obtained from interviews, observations, and speaking tasks were analyzed using thematic analysis, following the steps outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). The analysis was conducted in several stages. First, all audio recordings were transcribed verbatim into written text, and the researchers read the transcripts repeatedly to gain a deep familiarity with the data and identify initial patterns. Second, the transcribed data were coded systematically to identify meaningful segments related to parenting styles, language use, and children's English-speaking abilities, with codes assigned to specific statements, behaviors, or interactions that addressed the research questions. Third, the initial codes were grouped and organized into broader themes based on their similarities and patterns, with themes developed iteratively through constant comparison between data segments to ensure consistency. Fourth, the final themes were interpreted in relation to the research objectives and theoretical framework, and the findings were reported descriptively, supported by direct quotations from participants to illustrate key points and provide authentic evidence.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, several strategies were employed. Data triangulation was achieved by combining multiple data sources, including interviews, observations, and speaking tasks. Member checking was conducted by returning the interview transcripts and preliminary findings to the participants for verification and confirmation. In addition, peer debriefing was carried out through discussions with colleagues to review the coding and thematic interpretations, ensuring that the analysis remained grounded in the data.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The results obtained from the online interviews administered to four bilingual families indicate varied parenting patterns that influence children's English-speaking abilities. The data revealed a recurring theme: the style and quality of parental involvement at home were associated with children's reported confidence and observed practices in speaking English.

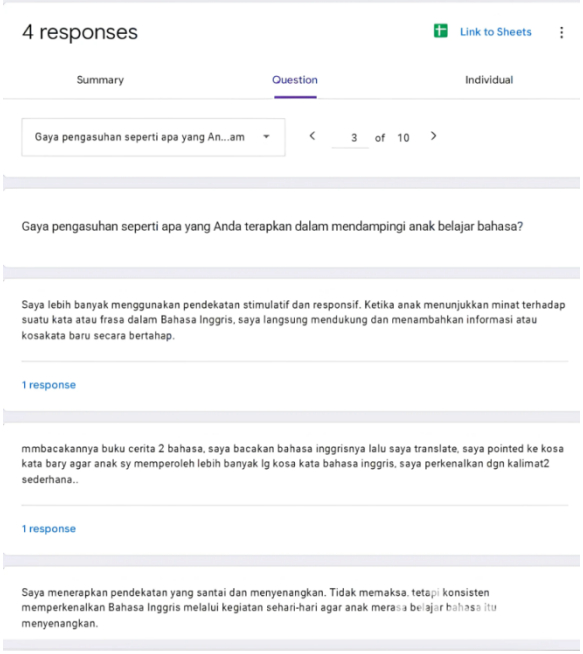

Fig. 1. Online Interview Result

Three out of four families identified in this study demonstrated characteristics of authoritative parenting, which emphasizes consistent verbal interaction, emotional warmth, and structured language routines. These parents actively engaged their children in English language activities within daily contexts. One parent shared that they routinely encourage their child to speak English before bedtime, particularly through storytelling and reviewing vocabulary learned at school:

"Saya dan suami membiasakan anak kami berbicara Bahasa Inggris setiap malam sebelum tidur, seperti bercerita atau mengulang kosakata baru dari sekolah."

Another respondent described their involvement in co-watching educational videos and initiating follow-up conversations in English:

"Saya selalu memberi semangat dan mendampingi anak belajar bahasa Inggris, misalnya saat dia menonton video edukasi, saya ikut menonton dan mengajaknya berdiskusi pakai Bahasa Inggris."

Similarly, a third participant stated that their family implemented scheduled speaking practice:

"Kami menetapkan waktu khusus setiap hari, walau sebentar, untuk latihan speaking dalam Bahasa Inggris, dan anak saya jadi terbiasa."

These practices appear to foster a supportive environment that enhances the child's willingness and confidence to speak English. The findings directly answer the first research question: authoritative parenting was identified as the most supportive style in building children's confidence and fluency in speaking English, characterized by consistent verbal interaction, emotional warmth, and structured language routines.

In contrast, the remaining family exhibited a permissive parenting approach, characterized by minimal structure and limited active involvement in language learning. English exposure was less

consistent, and the parent assumed a more passive role in the child's linguistic development. As noted by one respondent:

"Saya tidak terlalu menekankan Bahasa Inggris di rumah, biarkan anak belajar sendiri. Kadang kalau dia nonton YouTube Bahasa Inggris, saya biarkan saja, tidak ikut mendampingi."

This lack of structured engagement appeared to correlate with lower levels of fluency and confidence in the child's English-speaking ability compared to children raised in more supportive environments. This finding addresses the second research question: parents' communication habits and language input significantly contribute to children's early English-speaking development, with consistent, engaged parental involvement producing notably better outcomes.

The findings indicate that beyond the quantity of English exposure, the quality of interaction significantly influences children's language acquisition. Parents who displayed positive attitudes towards English and engaged their children with interest and support tended to foster greater motivation and speaking confidence. These results reinforce previous research highlighting that authoritative parenting, enriched verbal communication, and emotional support within the home environment are key factors in developing children's English-speaking skills in bilingual contexts.

Discussion

The results of the study indicate that parenting styles have a significant influence on children's English language skills. Three out of four families studied practiced authoritative parenting, which combines emotional warmth with consistent discipline. Children from these families tended to show higher self-confidence and fluency when speaking English. These findings are consistent with research conducted by Sadiq, Farooq, Mansoor, and Shoukat (2024), which established a significant link between authoritative parenting and increased expressive language ability in children. This parenting style allows children to feel safe and free to express themselves in verbal interactions, including in English. The sense of security provided by authoritative parenting creates an environment where children are willing to take risks in language use, which is essential for developing fluency in a foreign language (Kennedy, 2024).

Active parental participation in language activities at home has also been proven to strengthen children's speaking skills. For example, activities such as reading together, discussing educational videos, and scheduled speaking practice provide children with opportunities to use English naturally. According to Alfira and Siregar (2024), parental involvement in supporting children's English literacy activities can make a significant contribution to the development of their language skills. Hemas (2024) similarly found that parents' participation in English literacy activities, including reading aloud and interactive reading, significantly favors children's English language skills. These findings underscore that consistent, engaged parental involvement provides the foundation for effortless language acquisition, as children learn best when language is embedded in meaningful, everyday activities.

Families that adopt a permissive parenting style, with low involvement in their children's English learning, show less satisfactory results. Children from these families have lower levels of fluency and self-confidence. This is reinforced by findings from Paneru and Bohara (2025), who state that parental education and involvement in language-rich communication are key to children's success in learning English. Holidazia and Rodliyah (2020) also found that education and parental involvement in language-rich communication are key to children's success in learning English. The permissive approach, characterized by minimal engagement and inconsistent language input, fails to provide the structured support that young children need to develop confidence in speaking a foreign language. This finding aligns with the broader literature on parenting styles, which consistently shows that children benefit most from a balanced approach that combines emotional warmth with clear expectations and consistent involvement (Maccoby & Martin, 1983).

Another aspect to consider is the use of digital technology. While excessive use of devices can hinder children's language development (Massaroni, Delle Donne, Marra, Arcangeli, & Chieffo, 2023), technology can still be an effective tool when used interactively with parents. Priyoambodo

and Suminar (2021) state that parent-child interaction has a far greater influence on language development than passive use of digital media. Therefore, watching educational videos together and discussing them in English is a highly recommended strategy. Obojska and Vaiouli (2025) further emphasize that appropriate use of digital technology may offer rich possibilities for language acquisition, especially in multilingual households. The key lies in the active, guided use of technology, where parents transform passive viewing into interactive learning experiences through discussion and vocabulary reinforcement.

The quality of verbal interaction between parents and children also plays a very important role. Afriliani, Ayesha, Fajriyah, and Warsha (2023) emphasize that the quantity and quality of vocabulary taught to children at an early age greatly determine the size of their vocabulary and language capacity in the future. Smith, Kelley, Jeon, Ispa, and McMurray (2024) further emphasized that not only the richness of language input but also the timing of parental responses—such as consistent, well-paced interactions—significantly predict children's vocabulary size. This shows that it is not only the quantity of interaction that is important, but also the quality and responsiveness in communication. Donnelly and Kidd (2021) found that conversational turn-taking fosters vocabulary development and indicates children's growing involvement in co-constructing interactions, suggesting a mutually reinforcing developmental connection.

Research also shows that parents' attitudes toward English language learning have a strong influence on children's motivation. Su (2024) demonstrates that when parents show enthusiasm and a positive attitude toward English, children are more likely to be motivated to speak. A home environment filled with enthusiasm, emotional support, and consistent language exposure is crucial in developing children's speaking skills. Children who receive active support and verbal stimulation from their parents show significant progress compared to children who receive less involvement (Fernandez, 2024).

These findings are further supported by Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, which states that social interaction plays a significant role in children's language development. Parents who are active and engaged in conversations and provide verbal scaffolding can help children develop language structure and fluency (Etnawati, 2022). Consistent language input and parental support also have a positive correlation with children's English-speaking fluency. This theoretical lens helps explain why authoritative parenting—which emphasizes responsive, interactive communication—is consistently associated with better language outcomes than permissive approaches. The scaffolding provided by engaged parents enables children to move beyond their current linguistic abilities, gradually building confidence and competence in speaking English.

The findings of this study also reveal important insights regarding the specific interaction mechanisms through which parenting styles influence English-speaking ability. The three authoritative families in this study demonstrated responsive verbal scaffolding, where parents actively adjusted their language use to match their children's developmental level, providing appropriate challenges and support. This finding extends previous research by identifying concrete practices—such as bedtime storytelling, co-viewing of educational media with follow-up discussion, and scheduled speaking practice—that mediate the relationship between parenting styles and language outcomes in Indonesian bilingual families.

4. CONCLUSION

This study aimed to investigate the influence of parenting styles on children's English-speaking ability within bilingual families in Indonesia, with two specific objectives: (1) to identify which parenting styles are most supportive in building children's confidence and fluency when speaking English; and (2) to explore how parents' communication habits and the language input they provide at home contribute to children's early English-speaking development. The findings of this qualitative

descriptive study, drawn from interviews, observations, and speaking tasks with four bilingual families, provide clear answers to both objectives.

Regarding the first objective, the study found that authoritative parenting—characterized by emotional warmth, consistent discipline, and structured language routines—was consistently associated with higher levels of speaking fluency and confidence among children. Three out of four families in this study demonstrated authoritative practices, including bedtime storytelling, co-viewing of educational videos with follow-up discussion, and scheduled speaking practice. These parents actively engaged their children in English language activities and provided responsive verbal scaffolding, which enabled children to develop both competence and willingness to speak English. In contrast, the family that adopted a permissive parenting style, marked by minimal engagement and irregular language exposure, showed notably lower levels of fluency and confidence.

Regarding the second objective, the study found that parents' communication habits—including the quality and consistency of verbal interaction, emotional support during communication, and positive attitudes toward English—significantly shape children's English-speaking development. Beyond the quantity of English exposure, the quality of interaction emerged as a crucial factor. Parents who displayed enthusiasm and actively participated in language-rich activities with their children fostered greater motivation and speaking confidence. The use of digital technology, when accompanied by active parental guidance and discussion, also contributed positively to children's language development, whereas passive screen time without parental involvement showed limited benefits.

These findings reinforce Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, which emphasizes the central role of social interaction and verbal scaffolding in language development, and Baumrind's theory of parenting styles, which positions authoritative parenting as optimally supportive of child development. The study contributes empirical evidence from the Indonesian bilingual family context, highlighting the importance of nurturing, structured, and consistently supportive parenting practices in optimizing early English language acquisition.

Several limitations of this study should be acknowledged. First, the small sample size of four families limits the generalizability of the findings to broader populations. Second, the study relied on self-reported data from parents during interviews, which may be subject to social desirability bias. Third, the observational data were collected within a relatively short timeframe, which may not fully capture the long-term effects of parenting styles on language development.

For future research, several recommendations are proposed. First, larger-scale studies with more diverse samples across different regions in Indonesia are needed to examine whether the patterns observed in this study hold across broader populations and contexts, including different socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds. Second, longitudinal research should be conducted to examine the long-term effects of parenting styles on children's English-speaking development over multiple years, providing insights into how parenting practices interact with formal schooling and other environmental factors over time. Third, future studies could adopt a mixed-methods approach that combines qualitative insights with quantitative measures, such as standardized language assessments, to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between parenting and language outcomes. Fourth, comparative studies across different types of bilingual families—for example, those with parents who are fluent English speakers versus those with limited English proficiency—could provide valuable insights into how language input quality varies and affects children's development. Finally, intervention studies could be designed to examine whether parent training programs that promote authoritative parenting practices and effective verbal scaffolding lead to measurable improvements in children's English-speaking abilities, providing practical, evidence-based strategies for parents and educators.

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