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# EXPLORING PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT OF THE SEA-GYPSY TRIBE IN THEIR CHILDREN'S ENGLISH LANGUAGE EDUCATION

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## Abstract

This study examines the involvement of the Sea-Gypsies tribe in their children's English education and the factors influencing their participation. The research is guided by two questions: "To what extent are the Sea-Gypsies involved in their children's English education?" and "What motivates or discourages parents from participating in their children's English education?" Employing a qualitative microethnographic design, the study was conducted in the Samabahari Village, Wakatobi Regency, a rural and underdeveloped area in Indonesia. The study involved 45 participants, including 20 students, 24 parents, and one English teacher. Data collection methods included in-depth interviews, observations, documents, and visual materials. The data analysis process encompassed familiarization with the data, creating initial codes, collating codes, grouping codes into themes, reviewing and revising themes, and narrating the findings. The results indicate that most parents support their children's English learning. This support is rooted in three main beliefs: (1) English proficiency will facilitate their children's pursuit of higher education; (2) speaking English will enhance their children's job prospects; and (3) the ability to communicate with foreigners is advantageous.

**Keywords:** *English language education; parental involvement; rural area; Sea-Gypsy tribe.*

## 1. Introduction

As one of the stakeholders of school community, parents have a central role in education because their support and involvement in teaching and learning is a determining factor in the success of children's education. Irrefutable, parents who are actively involved in their children's education provide a solid foundation for success. Kalayci and Ergul (2020) emphasize that parental involvement in the classroom affects students' interpersonal, emotional, psychological, and transactional development in addition to their academic performance. It suggests that if their home environment is supportive, students have a higher chance of succeeding academically.

Scholars have directed their attention on the subject of parental involvement and support in English teaching and learning, and they largely concur that parents play a significant role in fostering students' favorable attitudes toward the language. In his classic and seminal work, Gardner (1986) asserted that children are purposefully demoralized by parents who harbor negative attitudes toward studying foreign languages. Some researchers think that parents' participation in their children's English language instruction affects their

language skills (Al-Mahrooqi, Denman, & Al-Maamari, 2016; Chavez, Adalia, & Alberto, 2023, Kalayci & Ergul, 2020; Orhan, 2022). Parental encouragement is thought to be the most important factor in the development of motivational intensity, desire to learn English, and attitude toward learning the language (Daniel, Halimi, & Al-Shammari, 2018).

The current study is predicated on the assumption that the majority of parents in remote and rural areas do not have the support systems and dedication necessary to aid in their children's English language acquisition. This issue has been widely documented in notable research studies conducted around the world (for example, Masturi, Kosnin & Zainudin, 2022; Halik & Nusrath, 2020). Students in rural areas are performing worse in English than their urban counterparts, and one possible cause for this could be a lack of support and parental involvement (Hossain, 2016). Nevertheless, virtually almost no research on the same topic has been done in the Sea-Gypsy tribe up to this point. This research is typically important as it is intended to fill this knowledge gap by investigating how parents in the Sea-Gypsy community are involved in their children's English education.

Sea Gypsy is the name given to the Bajau or Bajo tribe as formerly many of the Bajau people are sea nomads who live all year round on their small boats (Nagatsu, 2017). Because of the demand to determine their citizenship status, they begin to settle in one place and build civilization in several places in the Southeast Asia, including in Indonesia. Samabahari village is one of the many settlements of Bajau tribe located in Wakatobi Regency, Southeast Sulawesi, Indonesia. The village is built on the sea about 5 kms from the south coast of Kaledupa Island. Their houses are mounted on wooden poles; most of the houses are made from wood and palm leaves. This village is isolated from the outside world. They do not have access to land. In 2022, the population of this village was around 1,999 (Ariando & Arunotai, 2022). This community is marginalized in every aspect of life including politics and development and is very left behind in the field of education (Ariando & Arunotai, 2022). This village does not yet have access to electricity, internet and cellular networks, including clean water sources. An elementary school was opened in their village in 1990 and nineteen years later, in 2009, a junior high school followed. The locals barely attended school prior to the opening of these schools. To guide the investigation two research questions are set up:

1. To what extent do Sea-Gypsy parents involve in English education of their children?
2. What encourages or discourages parents to involve in their children's English education?

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 Parental Involvement in Children Education**

McNeal Jr (2014) defines parental involvement as the actions parents take to improve their children's academic performance in collaboration with teachers and other school employees. Hakyemez-Paul, Pihlaja, and Silvennoinen (2018) explain that parental involvement is another term of parental participation, educational partnership, and parental engagement. Parental involvement can be seen in various ways, for example, in completing homework or children's homework (Benner, Boyle, & Sadler, 2016; Silinkas & Kikas, 2019), providing stimulation and learning enrichment activities (Benner, Boyle, & Sadler, 2016), and involvement in parent-teacher organizations (Benner et al., 2016; McNeal Jr., 2014). Parental involvement, according to Grolnick (2015), has an impact on children's academic proficiency. It is a key factor in how well children successful academically as it contributes to the development of cognitive and motivational attributes within the child.

Parental educational involvement is a multifaceted construct that encompasses

parents' educational involvement at home and at school as well as parents' academic socialization (Hill & Tyson 2009). Home-based involvement includes any activities parents implement in the home that reinforce school-based learning, including monitoring homework completion, checking homework, and educational enrichment activities. School-based involvement entails parents' active involvement in the school setting through activities such as participating in school organizations, volunteering in the school, or communicating with teachers during parent-teacher conferences or other on-campus activities. Academic socialization encompasses indirect messages about school that communicate parents' educational expectations for the child and their views around the importance of education as well as the more concrete discussions in which parents directly promote the development of their children's future educational and occupational plans. Academic socialization allows parents to give their children the tools necessary for independence and educational success (Hill & Tyson 2009). All the aspects of parental educational involvement are positively linked to students' academic success, including higher grades in school, better scores on achievement tests, greater school engagement, and grade promotion (Cheung & Pomerantz, 2011).

The involvement of parents in their children's education plays significant effect in the development of children's education. Nonetheless, there are some impediments that prevent parents from being as involved as they ought to be. Williams and Sanchez (2011) identify some factors that can hinder one's ability to become involved in education of his/her kids, namely poverty, limited access, insufficient financial resources, and low awareness. Parents who have lower levels of education and who live in poverty may experience less success with helping their children in their homework (Lin & Lv, 2017; Orhan, 2022). Numerous sociopolitical issues, including parents' bad school experiences and socioeconomic status, might have an impact on involvement of parents (LaRocque, Kleiman, & Darling, 2011). Domina (2005) finds in her earlier research that parents in higher socioeconomic status make more of an effort to get involved than parents in lower socioeconomic status. Additional research has demonstrated that the educational background of parents is one of the elements influencing the degree of parental involvement in their children's education (Lee & Bowen, 2006; Bæck, 2010). As an instance, Lee and Bowen (2006) found that parents who have completed two years of college or more are more likely to expect the children to do well in school, attend meetings and events sponsored by the school much more frequently, and have more frequent conversations with their children regarding education.

## **2.2 Parental Involvement in Children English Language Education**

Numerous studies on parental engagement in English language instruction have been conducted from various angles and in different nations. Al-Mahrooqi, Denman, and Al-Maamari (2016) examine Omani parents' involvement in their children's English education and the results indicate that Omani parents are generally aware of the importance of their involvement in their children development and believe that they should be involved in a number of home-and school-based activities. However, despite this their actual involvement in their children's English language studies was somewhat limited.

In Philippines, parental support strategies and motivation in aiding their children learn the English language was studied by Chavez, Haydee, Adalia, and Alberto (2023). The findings suggest that parents see English as an important language that can direct their children towards their career path. Parents were motivated by how the English language can

shape the aspirations and enthusiasm of their children. Competency, applicability, reputation, and positivity were that major predictor of the motivation of the parents in teaching the English language to their children.

In Turkey, parental involvement in teaching English to young learners from teachers' perspectives was studied by Kalayci and Ergül (2020). The results indicated that the teachers are aware of the importance of parental involvement, yet they do not use any specific strategy to foster parental involvement. Also, teachers view themselves as the lead and main figures in young learners' English development whereas they regard the parents only as the factors that assist young learners in learning English. Meanwhile, from students' perspectives, Daniel, Halimi and AlShammari (2018) explore the impact of motivation and parental encouragement on English language learning from Arab students. They conclude that parental encouragement is perceived to play the most significant role during the development of motivational intensity, desire to learn English, and attitude toward learning English.

Other than the parents' educational background and family's financial situation, which have already been covered, there are other factors that can prevent parents from being involved in their children's English education. Skepticism about novel concepts was noted by Murray, Liddicoat, Zhen, and Mosavian (2020) as a barrier to English instruction and learning in isolated places. The skeptical point view in this concern can be designated as a tendency to diminish the importance of English. According to Coliva and Pritchard (2021) skepticism is an all-encompassing attitude of doubt or questioning toward one or more seeming instances of knowledge that are asserted to be nothing more than doctrine or belief. Skepticism arises because of the limitations of the mind (Greco, 2011). In addition, du Plessis and Mestry (2009) affirm the tendency to undervalue the worth of English is because the learners are skeptic that English will not enhance their quality of their lives.

Meanwhile, Ho (2003) observed that in many EFL situations in Asia, it might be difficult to motivate people in rural locations to learn English; they struggle to perceive the value of studying English since they have limited contact with native English speakers. The same issue with motivating rural students who feel they will never come into contact with English speakers occurred in Mexico (Izquierdo, Zúñiga, & Martinez, 2021) and Columbia (Holguin and Morales, 2016). Holguin and Morales (2016) believe that many parents in rural areas feel that teaching their children anything more than the fundamentals of reading, writing, and math is useless, thus they do not provide their children adequate support to learn English. Such an issue is prevalent in Indonesia, where a lack of access routes to other sites makes many rural communities seldom visited by outsiders. One of the main reasons why parents do not participate as much in their children's English education is likely that they do not perceive how learning English relates to their everyday lives. This has a direct connection to Krashen's (2003) affective filter theories. The affective filter is a barrier that arises from negative emotional responses to one's surroundings that impedes the learning or acquisition of a second/foreign language. According to the affective filter hypothesis, feelings like self-doubt, worry, and plain boredom might hinder learning a second/foreign language. Even though the earlier studies have shed some light on the topic, more investigation is still needed into the flaws and deficiencies of these investigations. By building on the results of previous research, this study aims to provide a deeper understanding of the topic at hand.

### **3. Research Method**

#### **3.1 Research Design**

This study was a qualitative and employed a microethnographic research as it focused on a specific aspect cultural group and setting. It entails observation and learning from the scene in which the researcher took on the role of an active participant-observer and immerse himself in the community to investigate the behavior and viewpoints of the participants (Creswel & Creswel, 2022; Denzin, 2013).

#### **3.2 Participants**

This research was conducted in the settlement of Sea-Gypsy i.e. Samabahari Village, Wakatobi Regency, Indonesia. In this village, there is a junior high school which was built in 2009 and when this research was carried out there were 62 students registered in this school. There were five teachers in charge of this school; one teacher concurrently serves as the English teacher. The research's participants consisted of 24 parents (18 fathers and 6 mothers with an age range of 38 to 55), 20 students (12 boys and 8 girls with an age range of 13-16 years old), one and the only English teacher (a 40-year-old man civil servant teacher).

#### **3.3 Data collection**

The data were collected through interviews, observations, reviewing documents, visual materials, and artifacts. The investigation lasted for four months (from July to November 2023). During the interview process, the researcher recorded each conversation with the participants. Field notes were used to recall the details of the observation. Documents and visual materials related to citizenship were retrieved from Sampela Village Office and Kaledupa District Population and Statistics Bureau. This study employed an unstructured interviewing method (Creswell & Creswell, 2022), which means that the researcher did not follow the meticulously designed interview guidelines intended to elicit information from participants. The interviewer's inquiries for the parents were on finding out any kind of support they may have provided for their children's English language learning and the reasons of their involvement or not involvement. The English teacher was asked to share his experience while serving at this school, particularly in relation to the parents' attitudes and engagement in English education of their children. It was also asked of the students what kind of parental support they receive for their English language studies. The questions posed to the participants evolved in line with the flow of their responses.

#### **3.4 Data Analysis**

The data was manually transcribed and verbatim transcription was chosen. It captures every word, including pauses, shutters, and filler words, from an audio file in the text exactly as it was said. The data collected were hand-analyzed that entails reading the data, marking it by hand, and segmenting it. The steps of the analysis cover: (1) data familiarization, reviewing the transcripts and taking note of the recurrent themes of dataset and meanings; (2) creating a set of initial codes for the thematic analysis processes that are representative of the patterns and meanings discovered in the data; (3) utilizing a pen and paper to group all the passages that pertain to a certain code, cutting out the passages, and then arranging the groupings in accordance with the code to compile codes with supporting material; (4) organizing codes according to potential themes in order to group them together; (5) reviewing and revising topics by carefully examining the initial ideas and ensuring that each

theme is supported by enough evidence and is original; and (6) finally, constructing a story from the data.

## **4. Results and Discussion**

### **4.1 Results**

The objectives of the research were to divulge the extent to which parents of the Sea-Gypsy tribe involve in English education of their children and what encourage or discourage them to involve in their children's English education. When presenting the findings, codes were used to identify the participants: P-01 to P-24 stood for parent 1 through 24; S-01 to S-20 for students 1 through 20; and ET for English teacher.

#### **4.1.1 To what extent does parents of Sea-Gypsy tribe involve in English education of their children?**

Data from Kaledupa District Population and Statistics Section (2023) show that 62.23% of the parents of the Sea-Gypsy did not finish elementary school, 23.14% have an elementary education, and 14.63% have a secondary education or equal. The lack of access to schools is the reason for the parents' low level of education. An elementary school in this village was first opened in 1997 and a junior high school was opened 14 years later (in 2009). The majority of parents, despite their low educational attainment, were found to be sufficiently involved in their children's English language education, even though their involvement is confined to controlling homework completion and encouraging their children. A parent confessed: "I constantly motivate my children to learn English ..." (P-08). Another parent confessed: "I always remind my kids to complete their English homework." (P-11). A parent added: "I am not able to help my children in doing their English homework because I am not educated but I encourage them to learn English as I believe the language is useful for my children's future." (P-24).

In line with the parents' statement, the students admitted: "My parents constantly remind me to learn English; they believe that the English language is important for my future." (S-18). What was conveyed by parents and students was reinforced by the English teacher's statement. "Some parents ask me to give additional English course to their children; the parents want their children to be competent in English." (ET).

#### **4.1.2 What encourages parents to be involved in their children's English education?**

The study found three interwoven themes that arose as the foundation of parents' support for their children's English education, namely: (1) the belief that English proficiency will help their children pursue further education; (2) the conviction that speaking English is useful their children find a good job; (3) the wish for their children to have abilities to communicate with foreigners.

##### **4.1.2.1 English proficiency will help children pursue further education**

Parents' belief about English is essential for their children's academic future has led to an increase in their support of their children's English language learning. A parent stated: "I think English language proficiency is crucial for my children to pursue a higher education degree." (P-07). A father added: "My dream is for my children to speak English well enough to be admitted to a higher education." (P-16). A student admitted: "My parents kept reminding me to study English because it is important for the continuation of my studies." (English teacher statements reinforce what parents and students say. "Most parents

understand the value of their children learning English, and they are inspired by the numerous foreign visitors who frequent visit this area.” (ET)

#### **4.1.2.2 The conviction that speaking English is useful their children find a good job**

Approximately 87% of the population of Sampela Village live below poverty line with an average income of around 900,000 rupiahs per month or equivalent to US \$60 (Statistic Bureau of Kaledupa Regency, 2023). Their source of income is solely from marine products which are completely dependent on the weather and season. They have no access to land to enable them to do agricultural activities. Therefore, they exchange marine product for agricultural yields to meet their food needs. Parents want their children’s lives to change and be better than their current lives and mastering English, in their view, will help their children get better jobs. A parent said: “I want my children to live a life of honor. I’m sure if they can speak English it will be easier for them to get a good job.” (P-01). They desire to be freed from the chains of poverty and backwardness and have a different life. When their children become fluent in English, it will help them succeed in the future. A student added: “My parents encourage me to learn English because they believe it would be useful for finding a good job.” (S-03).

#### **4.1.2.3 The wish for their children to have abilities to communicate with foreigners.**

Samabahari Village is one of the tourist destinations in Wakatobi Regency. The presence of international visitors causes parents to get fixated on their children learning English so they can interact with foreign visitors as illustrated in the following excerpts. A parent stated: “My desire is for my kids to be able to converse with visitors from other countries who frequently visit our village.” (P-18). The same opinion was voiced by another parent: “I am proud of my children if they can communicate directly with foreign tourists. I thus encourage them to learn English.” (P-12). The students’ statements were in line with what their parents said. A student stated: “My parents want me to be able to converse with international visitors to this area.” (S-9). Another student added: “My parents have always encouraged me to learn English, and they hope one day I am able to converse with international visitors.” (S-3). The English teacher stated that the parents often communicate with the English him to discuss anything related to their children’s development in English teaching and learning.

## **4.2 Discussion**

The objectives of the research were to disclose the extent to which the parents of the Sea-Gypsy tribe of Samabahari Village involve in English education of their children and what encourage parents to involve in their children’s English education. The findings show that the majority of parents provide children with the support they need to learn English, even though parents’ contribution is only limited to providing motivation and encouragement to their children to learn English; it can be understood that they are not educated and therefore cannot teach their children English. However, parents consistently make sure their children finish their schoolwork. Most of the parents always get in touch with the English instructor to talk about everything pertaining to their children’s growth in the English language. They are aware that English, nowadays, is the language of technology and has become an added and preferable qualification for employability. The results diverge from those of previous studies carried out in isolated and rural parts of the globe (e.g., Halik & Nusrath, 2020; Masturi, Kosnin & Zainudin, 2022). According to these studies, parents in

distant and isolated locations do not provide enough support for their children's English language development because of a variety of factors, including low parental education and economic status.

The socio-economic status of the Sea-Gypsy community, which tends to be below the poverty line, cannot hamper them to be involved in the English education of their children. Even though the parents spend most of their time earning a living, collecting marine products to meet their daily needs. They are still having time control their children's schooling. This phenomenon contradicts with what have been documented in previous research (e.g., Domina, 2005; LaRocque et al., 2011; Williams & Sanchez, 2011) who thought that that lack of financial resources can affect parental involvement their children education. Samabahari Villagers, however, their economic and educational backwardness have triggered their awareness and determination to change and get out of this unlucky condition. They realize that education for their children is the best way for change, and mastering English is a necessity that can facilitate children to continue their education to a higher level. Akbari (2015) as well as Crystal (1997) stated that English acquisition can guarantee the availability of opportunities for employment, travel, higher education, and even a better life. Improving one's education level is a powerful means to escape poverty (Lin & Lv, 2017). The parents realize that marine resources around their area are currently being depleted as a result of the growing number of fishing enterprises using advanced technologies to exploit them. Because of this, the villagers, who are only traditional fishermen, are aware that they will eventually have to leave the sea in order to find employment elsewhere. People naturally want things to change in their lives; nobody wants to constantly be poor and deprived. The Sea-Gypsies people too want to live on an equal basis with other people, and they know that education is the way to achieve this. The parents wish for their children to live different lives from their own. They want their children to be more educated. They realize that investments in education can pull people out of poverty.

Another reason why the Sea-gypsy parents support their children's English language education is the wish for their children to have abilities to communicate with foreigners. This finding negates Holguin and Morales (2015) who claimed that parents in rural areas do not give children enough encouragement to learn English because many of them think that teaching their children anything more than the fundamentals of reading, writing, and math is pointless. Samabahari Village is a tourist destination that is regularly visited by foreign tourists. The Samabahari Village that is built on the sea, their traditional culture, language and unique life are a special attraction for tourists. Contact with foreign tourists makes them realize that English is an important language to master. The horizon of people's thinking is increasingly developing, so there is awareness of the importance of English in this era. Dörnyei and Csizér (2005) believe that intercultural contact and tourism effects on language learners' motivational disposition. Interethnic contact creates opportunities for developing language skills and acts as a powerful influence shaping the learners' attitudinal/motivational disposition, thereby promoting motivated learning behavior.

## 5. Conclusion

The present study investigated the extent to which Sea-Gypsies parents participate in their children's English language education. The results showed that the parents of Sea-Gypsy tribe have enough support in their children' English language education. The family

socioeconomic status, parents' educational background are the trigger factors of their support. The absence of contemporary technology (i.e., electricity, cellular networks, and internet access), and the lack of parental access to education has made them aware and opened their horizons of thinking that this backwardness can only be overcome by education. Even though they are poor and uneducated but it does not mean that they have shut the door on one big way of life change. Foreign visitors' frequent visits let them realize how crucial it is to learn English. Apart of these research findings, however, it still important to carry out research on the same topic on Sea-Gypsies who live in other remote areas by using different research methods.

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