

# **How a Minahasan Child Acquires English: A Case Study of a Foreign Language Young Learner**

**Sharon Clarisa Tololiu<sup>1)</sup>, Alfrits Roul Sinadia<sup>\*2)</sup>**

<sup>1)</sup>Program Studi Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris, Universitas Klabat, Manado, Indonesia

<sup>2)</sup>Program Studi Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris, Universitas Klabat, Manado, Indonesia

\*Email Penulis Korespondensi: [alfritssinadia@unklab.ac.id](mailto:alfritssinadia@unklab.ac.id)

***Abstract.** The background of this study is the need to investigate how a foreign language young learner in Indonesian context acquires English using internet technology media. Specifically, it studied how an Indonesian child learns to speak English through the activities of watching English videos on YouTube and how the environment plays its roles in influencing the child's success of learning English through the media. This research used the qualitative case study approach, and the data were gathered through interviews and observations. The main result found in the study is that watching English videos through YouTube is effective in helping the child acquire English.*

***Keywords** – foreign language; young learner; English videos; YouTube Media*

## **I. INTRODUCTION**

Children can acquire English at home through a few common ways. Among them, children can acquire English through their hearing, what is said by their parents or those closest to them will enter their mind and they will imitate it. Parents can introduce a second language to children through their conversations at home as well as with people in the surrounding environment who are actively involved with language development in children [1]. Another way children can acquire English is to learn through media that attracts their attention, such as watching animated videos. When children see and hear words in the videos, they can imitate and increase their vocabulary. For instance, children can acquire English as a foreign language by using the internet media like YouTube, Facebook, or TikTok. This kind of technology is usually found in the form of software found in smartphones, such as the Internet, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and WhatsApp. This kind of technology is also found in hardware such as laptops [2]. In this modern era, it is very easy for children to find these sources for learning English. When compared to adults, they can use this kind of technology as a means of communication and getting information better than adults.

The role of parents in acquiring children's English is to invite their children to talk, play videos or songs, and teach them vocabulary in English. Parents also play a very important role in acquiring English for their children. Inviting children to speak in English, can help them in acquiring English, especially if it is done repeatedly. Furthermore, parents provide videos to watch for their children. The videos are in the form of animations whose conversations are in English so that children can acquire English by watching videos. And in vocabulary learning, parents teach vocabulary directly to their children, where parents provide a simple vocabulary for their children. A role in which parents actively and consciously encourage students to learn the language. In this role, the parent monitors the child's language learning performance, and to the extent he plays this role, he seeks to promote success. That is, parents supervise the child and make sure he does his homework, encourage him to do well, and generally reinforce his success [3]. Parents provide training by pronouncing vocabulary and children hear the speech and say it [4]. So, there are several ways that parents do for their child's English acquisition and parents play an important role in children's language acquisition.

The surrounding environment can help children in acquiring English. Regarding the role of the environment in language acquisition. An author [5] suggested that the theories of behaviorism used to acquire language strongly emphasize the role of the environment in providing imitation and

reinforcement stimuli and whether the reactions are positive or negative. According to this theory, only the external environment provides both the language model and the mechanism by which reactions are: (1) selected for correctness, (2) differentiated for appropriateness to a stimulus, and (3) disguised for new situations. Behaviorist approach to language acquisition, the child's environment is seen as the main influencing factor. The environment provides models that children imitate and various rewards that result in the emergence of knowledge for children [6]. Because of this, the environment around the child is very helpful in language acquisition. Through adults' conversations in the environment with children, they can help children with language acquisition.

It is believed that social media can also be used for education. A study [7] stated that "social media takes most of the student's time, so learning via social media seems interesting and new for those learners" (p. 36). Moreover, when learning English at school, it is rare to find native-speaking teachers, but through social media, native speakers are easily found. Social media can be an effective medium for learning new languages for novice students, especially international languages such as English. An author [8] believed that "children are currently most of the time connected with people through digital social media, thus on purpose or accidentally they're following that trend of language acquisition" (p. 271). Consequently, their knowledge and skills in the English language are gained.

The usage of YouTube videos in learning is imperative to meet the educational needs of the younger generation. While text-based resources have been the norm for centuries, YouTube videos are now frequently used in teaching and learning due to the rapid speed of technological advancement. There are numerous YouTube accounts that host English language learning videos, allowing a large audience to view them. In a previous related study conducted by a few researchers [9], it has revealed that using Cocomelon's YouTube channel can affect the addition of new vocabulary for children. Similarly, a study [10] found that YouTube is a good way to learn English because of some advantages it has. First, it offers a variety of language learning resources on one platform. Second, it has a variety of materials that can promote immersive learning, which is essential to learning a new language. Third, we are able to pause and rewind YouTube English language videos whenever we need to. Fourth, videos offer visual or audio lessons or both. Fifth, learning a new language on YouTube is free. In addition to its advantages, there are many different English language channels on YouTube that people of all ages may use to learn the language.

Some recent studies' findings showed that watching English videos on YouTube is beneficial in helping young learners learn English. A few researchers [11] studied the use of Cocomelon YouTube channel as a medium for introducing children's English vocabulary. It was a case study, and the researchers collected the data through observations and interviews. Children between the ages of six and twelve participated in this study. The results indicate that children's use of Cocomelon YouTube channel can influence their acquisition of new vocabulary based on feedback from the children and interviews with parents. According to the findings of this study, it is simpler for children to pronounce and remember English words. The second related study was conducted [12] as a qualitative descriptive study about teaching vocabulary to young learners using videos on YouTube in an English course. The data were gathered through observations and documentations where seven young students in grade two participated in this study. This study found out that most young students in an English class were engaged while the YouTube videos were being used to teach vocabulary on YouTube. They also liked the learning activity and preferred watching YouTube videos to learn English vocabulary.

Like the previous related studies, this current research studied how a foreign language young learner acquires English through the media of YouTube. The subject of this study was a child whose mother tongue is Indonesian. She comes from the Minahasa tribe or more precisely from the village

of Eris, Minahasa district, North Sulawesi, Indonesia. This child's mother tongue is Tondanonese or Manadonese. Her family at home only uses the Tondanonese. Her friends also only use their mother tongue, namely Tondanones or Manadonese. She speaks her mother tongue, but she is different from other children who live in her neighborhood. This child is known with her ability to speak English and use it in everyday language, but her friends from the same age in the neighborhood do not speak English. When this child was talking to her friends, the researcher heard that his child's language was combined with English. The other children did not combine their Tondanonese or Manadonese with English while talking. She was the only one among the children who can bilingually speak Manadonese and English altogether.

To test this child's ability to speak English, the researcher decided to speak English directly with this child. This is the conversation between the researcher and this child:

Researcher: *"How is your day, Britney?"*

Britney: *"Not well, Ka Nona (her sister) not come, not come. Ka Nona not picking up my call".*

Researcher: *"How are you, Britney?"*

Britney: *"Good."*

Researcher: *"Do you like animals?"*

Britney: *"Yeah."*

Researcher: *"What animals?... Dog?"*

Britney: *"No."*

Researcher: *"Chicken?"*

Britney: *"No... lion."*

Researcher: *"Wow... Do you like lions?"*

Britney: *"Yeah.... tiger."*

Researcher: *"Wow amazing."*

Britney: *"And jerapah."*

Researcher: *"Oh giraffe?"*

Britney: *"Yeah."*

Researcher: *"What are you doing here?"*

Britney: *"I like playing balloons."*

Researcher: *"Oh... You are playing balloons?"*

Britney: *"Yeah."*

Researcher: *"What's your favorite fruit?"*

Britney: *"Apple..."*

Researcher: *"Apple and..."*

Britney: *"Strawberry and anggur."*

Researcher: *"Oh grapes?"*

Britney: *"Yeah."*

Researcher: *"Only three?"*

Britney: *"Yeah."*

Seeing the child's impressive ability to speak English that makes her different from other children in the neighborhood, the researcher curiously wanted to conduct a research and find out how this child acquires her English. Specifically, it sought answers to some research questions. First, what sources of learning does she use to acquire her English? Second, who helps her to speak English? Third, what is the role of her parents in helping her acquire English? Fourth, how does the surrounding environment help her acquire English? Because it is something rarely found in Indonesia, the researcher treated this as a special and unique case to study.

## **II. METHODS**

This study used the qualitative research approach. It was a case study conducted upon a six-year-old female child who was attending the first grade of elementary school. This child is from Minahasan, an ethnic group living in one area of North Sulawesi, Indonesia. At the time when this study was being conducted, she was living in Eris Village, Eris District, Minahasa Regency, North Sulawesi, Indonesia.

The data were collected using a purposive sampling technique through interviews and observations. More than one source of data is needed to make sure that the data secured in this study were valid. The interviews were conducted to gather information from the child's closest people around her. These people consisted of her mother, her aunt, her grandmother, three neighbors around her house, and her homeroom teacher at school. During the interviews, the researcher asked questions about how she acquires English in her daily activities and the roles of her environment toward her ability to speak English. Besides the interviews, the researcher also collected information through some observations on the child when she did her daily activities. To make sure the validity of the data gained through the observations, these were done three times on different times.

The data analyses were conducted based on [13] a theory of qualitative analyses. The analyses were done in three steps consisting of data condensation, data display, and drawing and verifying conclusions. First, the data gathered through interviews and observations were transcribed to texts and then went through the process of selecting which data should be displayed. Second, the transcribed and selected data were displayed. Finally, the displayed data were categorized in patterns and then conclusions were drawn based on the patterns found.

## **III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS**

The qualitative analyses conducted through the three steps of analyses generated some findings. These findings are related to how the subject, the child, being studied in this research, learn to speak English and how the surrounding environment affects her ability to speak English. A few interesting facts that appeared in the findings are closely related to the use of information and technology at home. The use of online media at home clearly affects nonnative English speakers' way of learning English nowadays.

### **A. Learning English through YouTube Videos**

During the interviews, there were three central questions and three sub-questions followed by several follow-up questions to the responses given. The questions asked to Britney's family and neighbors were:

1. How did Britney start learning to speak English?
2. How does Britney hone her English skills?
3. How is Britney's English ability compared to other children around her house?

On the other, the question asked to Britney's teacher was "How is Britney's English ability compared to students in her class? Based on all the questions that have been asked to the respondents, the researcher can conclude that the source that Britney used to acquire her English is through watching English videos on YouTube. The result of the interview excerpt was as follows.

According to the first respondent, Britney started to learn English from YouTube by watching English videos on YouTube. Britney started watching YouTube when she was little at that time, she had started to say one-by-one. Since she started watching YouTube, she had talked with her family at home using English.

Researcher: *“How did Britney start learning to speak English?”*

Mother (Respondent 1): *“Oh... Britney started to speak English for the first time when she... when she mmm... learned how to speak, she had watched YouTube. She has watched YouTube since she was little and at that time, she had started saying one by one like “Mama I’m hungry, Mom help me, make me milk. Mostly she said that. Then when she started playing, she called her brothers and sisters. She called like, “My brother, My sister”. Sometimes, if she needs something she will say, “Mom, help me.” That’s the way she started to learn English.”*

According to the second respondent, Britney started to learn English from smartphones through YouTube application.

Researcher: *“Does grandma know how Britney learned to speak English?”*

Grandmother (Respondent 2): *“Yes, she understands. Understands, she immediately learns through cell phones and YouTube”.*

Researcher: *“So, my question is, has Britney ever read a book in English at home?”*

Mother (Respondent 1): *“Oh no, she never has. Until now she has just learned to read. She can't read now so she's just, I just turned-on YouTube and she watches English Cartoons with English films.”*

From the results of interviews with her mom and grandmother, it is known that Britney started learning English when she was about one year old by watching English YouTube videos. She started watching English videos and when she spoke at home, she used English. In addition, Britney has also never read English books and is currently still learning to read.

## **B. People around the Child Contribute to Create the English-Speaking Environment**

During the interviews, a few people around Britney were found contributing to Britney’s ability to speak English. They help create the English-speaking environment where she can exercise her English-speaking skills.

Researcher: *“Do parents help Britney speak English?”*

Mother (Respondent 1): *“No, she knew it herself, and conversely, we learned from Britney. Sometimes she plays with her dolls. She plays with two dolls; she made one ask questions and she made the other one answer the questions. In the conversation that she made, she uses English, she talks very long in English. For example, there are two doll friends she will call to talk, let's play together, let's play together, but using English. We understand what she says because we have learned from her.”*

According to this respondent answer, Britney learned English without her parents teaching her, and her parents learned English from Britney. When she studies English she only uses the YouTube application by watching English videos on the application. And she practices speaking English by playing with dolls.

Researcher: *“Is there any contribution from other people at home to help Britney learn to speak English, for example her aunt, or grandmother?”*

Respondent (1): *“Sometimes her cousin comes, and they speak English. When they talk at home, they use English with her, but it is rarely done.”*

According to this respondent answer, her cousin sometimes comes to her house and when talking to Britney, her cousin uses English.

Researcher: *“OK, has Leony (one of the neighbors) ever helped Britney speak English?”*

Neighbor (Respondent 4): *“Hm... No. Never.”*

According to this respondent’s answer, as a neighbor of Britney, she never helps Britney in learning English.

Researcher: *“Oh, that’s correct. Have you ever helped Britney in learning English?”*

Neighbor (Respondent 5): *“Eh, if I help her in learning, never, but because I understand a little what she says, I join with her to talk in English.”*

Furthermore, according to this respondent’s answer, she never helps Britney learn English. But she plays a role in Britney’s acquires English because she often joins to talk with Britney in English.

### **C. The Child Hones her English Skills by Watching YouTube every Day and Playing**

The child is found not only learns English through YouTube, but she also hones her skills by watching YouTube videos and playing every day. Her mom and aunt revealed how she does this.

Researcher: *“How did Britney hone her English-speaking skills?”*

Mother (Respondent 1): *“She always watches YouTube every day. Then she talks to us every day, that makes her speak English better. She watches YouTube then she practices with us. She talks to us about our, what.... For example, if we don't know what it means, we'll look it up in the dictionary and we'll add a little English to what she’s talking about. So, we ourselves have studied through her because we want to reply to what she says.”*

According to this respondent’s answer, Britney hones her English skills by watching YouTube every day. She also practices talking in English to her family at home. Through this technique, her family members also learn English along with her.

Researcher: *“As Britney's aunt, do you know how she hones her English skills?”*

Aunty (Respondent 3): *“Eh... like this... She learns anyway, she takes her dolls, hm... then she will make them talk in English, she holds two dolls, one for her to talk, she makes a talk with the one, she holds the doll one with one doll then she made them talk, e... we were confused, what she said, she spoke... She has been good at speaking English. Hearing her English, ... style of speaking, her way of speaking has been good like she really knows it, and then she plays...”*

From these results, Britney hones her English skills by herself by watching English videos on YouTube and plays her dolls. By doing these, she increases her ability to speak English.

### **D. The Child’s English Language Skills are Different from Friends around Her and in Her Class**

The child looks different from other children around the neighborhood because of her English ability. The interviews with her mom and teacher at school revealed this fact. They stated that when playing with her friends, she speaks English, but her friends do not.

Researcher: *“When compared to other children around the house, how is Britney's English-speaking ability?”*

Mother (Respondent 1): *“Oh, so different, even though, what I saw, her friends also watch YouTube. Watching YouTube, it's just what I see. For example, when they play and Britney speaks English, they don't know. They only know yes and no, compared to Britney. For Britney, I notice she truly knows. If for example, she was playing with her friends, if she used English and they didn't understand, later, we parents would say, oh... she said this, “Let's play with her, she said like that”. She will say, “Hey, play with me.” Her friends don't know what to answer, so I as a parent say, come here, come play with her, like that.”*

According to this respondent’s answer, when compared to other children around the house, Britney’s English skills is very different. It is because her friends around her only know yes and no and when Britney talks in English to them, they don’t understand.

Researcher: *“Oh... The next question, uhm, when compared to her classmates, how is Britney's English ability?”*

Teacher (Respondent 7): *“Um, her ability to speak English is not bad, it's good, because if her friends, if Ma'am asks them, they just answer yes no and they ask back. They use Indonesian. But for Britney, she still uses English...in her sentences.”*

According to this respondent's answer, Britney's ability in English skills is good and different from her friends. This is because when the teacher asks her friends in English, the only responses they know are yes and no.

### **E. The Observations Strengthened the Finding that She Learned English through Watching English Videos on YouTube**

Besides the interviews, the researcher also used the method of observations to verify the data secured from the interviews. These observations were carried out by the researcher three times and were made at the house of Britney. The first observation was made on Sunday, the twenty-ninth of January 2023. It started at 2 pm until it was finished. During the observation, the researcher noticed that Britney was playing with her cellphone. She was watching YouTube videos and what she watched were cartoons in English. It was seen when she watched YouTube, she was very focused. During this first observation, Britney never talked to other people because she always played with her cell phone. She also didn't play with her friends around. The second observation was carried out on Sunday, the fifth of February 2023. It started at eleven a.m. and continued until it was finished. In this observation, Britney told her mother to buy ice cream and when she ate the ice cream, she described how delicious the ice cream was and the explanation was in English. After having the ice cream, she played with her cell phone. While playing with her cellphone, there were several sentences in English that she said. The third observation was carried out on Wednesday, the eighth of February 2023. It started in the evening at 7 p.m. and continued until it was finished. During the third observation, Britney watched videos on YouTube in English and while watching, when her mother and uncle spoke to her, she didn't answer because she was focused on watching. From the results of the observation, it can be concluded that Britney always watches English videos on YouTube. When she watches, she is very focused.

### **F. Discussions**

The first finding from the results of the interviews and observations show that the source used by Britney in learning English is YouTube. When comparing the results of interviews with observations, the results are the same. Britney uses the YouTube application to learn her English. She watches English videos on YouTube application. She has watched YouTube since she was just over one year old. These results are in accordance with the results of a research [14]. According to the study, YouTube channels can enhance children's English vocabulary and improve their communication skills. YouTube is believed to be an effective medium that can improve early childhood communication skills, even under parental supervision.

The second finding from the results of interviews and observations show that in Britney's English learning process there is a direct role from parents as well as an indirect role. When interviewing Britney's mother, she said that she never taught Britney, but when Britney spoke in English to her, she also sometimes answered in English. Based on this, it can be concluded that Britney's mother played a direct role by speaking with Britney in English. Furthermore, the role was indirect, when the researcher observed that Britney's mother played English videos on YouTube. So, it can be concluded that Britney's mother also plays a role indirectly by providing the facilities that Britney uses to watch

English videos on YouTube and play English videos. Related to this, an author [15] explained that knowing another language is very important in the age of science and technology, when relations with other nations are growing. Nowadays, it is stated that parents begin teaching their children foreign languages very early. They educate their children so that they can learn new languages. In this way, parents play a role in their children's foreign language acquisition.

The third finding from the results of interviews with Britney's mother and some of Britney's neighbors show that sometimes Britney's cousins come to the house and her cousins speak English with Britney. This indicated that that the people around Britney played a role in the acquisition of English from Britney by talking to Britney. There are also several Britney neighbors who don't play a role, but some even play a direct role by speaking directly to her in English. There is one of Britney's neighbors who often speaks English with her. In other words, Britney's neighbors play a role in Britney's mastery of English.

The fourth finding of the results showed that the way Britney hone her English skills is by watching YouTube every day and playing. There were some Channels that Britney used, the Channels were BabyBus, Vlad and Niki, ChuchuTV, Patty Shukla Kids, and Eli Kids. Every day she watches English videos on YouTube and when watching YouTube, she got some new vocabulary. Sometimes, she plays with her dolls and makes her dolls talk to each other. The findings of this study were similar to the findings of a research [16] previously done. It explained that children's English language skills, such as naming foods, fruits, and animals and using simple English verbs and phrases, are shaped by their repeated exposure to English. Through the exposure to YouTube channel every day, children can hone their English skills.

The last finding showed that Britney's English skills are different from her friends around her. When Britney plays with her friends around her house, she is the only child who speaks English, her friends did not. In daily activities, when she talks to her friends using English, her friends do not understand what Britney says. Similarly, when in class, Britney can talk using English with her teacher. However, she is different from her friends because her friends only know to say "yes and no" when talking with their teacher. Most experts agree that a child's mastery of a foreign language increases earlier when he or she is exposed to it [17]. Britney's friends around the neighborhood cannot probably speak English because they have never studied or have ever but not often. To be able to speak like Britney, takes them similar earlier exposures to English.

## **VII. CONCLUSION**

Following the findings generated in this study, a few conclusions were drawn. First, YouTube is very beneficial for kids who use it well. The early exposure to English YouTube videos proved to be efficient techniques for young children to acquire English. When combined with parents or adults involvement around the children, the maximum effectivity of using YouTube as a channel of learning English could be achieved. In practice, children may wath English videos through the following channels: BabyBus, Vlad and Niki, ChuchuTV, Patty Shukla Kids, and Eli Kids. These channels use young kids as the main characters who speak English in the videos. These young characters may seem attractive to children who just start learning English that the young English learners may position themselves as children who should and could speak English too. Concerning the use of these channels, parents and teachers should be aware that they need to supervise their children's watching activities and assist them in choosing suitable videos for their needs as children. By supervising and assisting their children, parents and teachers may make sure that their children only watch character building videos.



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