

FOSTERING FIRST LANGUAGE SKILLS THROUGH EARLY LISTENING ACTIVITIES: A CASE STUDY ON A PRE-SCHOOL CHILD'S LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

Irma Wahyuni

wahyuniirma96@gmail.com

wahyuni.irma@stkipm-bogor.ac.id

English language education department, STKIP Muhammadiyah Bogor, Bogor-Indonesia

Abstract

Language skills acquisition in children indicates a remarkable achievement for every parent as the ability of comprehending and producing the language is one of the most important basic skills in human's development. Approaching the age of five, a normal child's language development is in a complex-linguistic period where she is able to produce a language with a firm grammatical structure as adults conduct. Interestingly, this happened without a regular and structured grammar learning process. However, some factors play significant roles to activating cognitive systems in children (Wahyuni, 2019) which stimulates their language skills. The most basic language skill in children that is able to be fostered early is listening skill which they have needed and acquired before they reach their first year of age and will be continuously developed during their language development journey. Listening becomes crucial for them as it cognitively creates a comprehensible input before creating outputs for them to producing the language, before they start speaking. Applying an intrinsic case study on a pre-school (near five-year old) child, this qualitative research tries to describe how the process of early listening skill can be trained by parents or care-givers to stimulate children's language skills acquisition in their first language (L1) skills acquisition. Specifically it sheds some light on how early listening skill foster L1 skill in children. Some suggestions regarding improvement strategies related to establishing early listening skills in children are presented as well as additional implication of this study for future researches.

Keywords: *language skills, acquisition, language development, listening skill*

Sari

Penguasaan keterampilan bahasa pada anak-anak merupakan sebuah pencapaian luar biasa bagi setiap orang tua karena kemampuan memahami dan memproduksi bahasa adalah salah satu keterampilan dasar yang paling penting dalam perkembangan manusia. Menjelang usia lima tahun, perkembangan bahasa anak yang normal berada dalam periode linguistik kompleks di mana ia dapat menghasilkan bahasa dengan struktur tata bahasa yang kuat seperti yang dilakukan orang dewasa. Menariknya, ini terjadi tanpa proses pembelajaran tata bahasa yang teratur dan terstruktur. Namun, beberapa faktor memainkan peran penting untuk mengaktifkan sistem kognitif pada

anak-anak (Wahyuni, 2019) yang merangsang keterampilan bahasa mereka. Keterampilan bahasa yang paling mendasar pada anak-anak yang dapat dibina sejak dini adalah keterampilan menyimak yang mereka butuhkan dan peroleh sebelum mereka mencapai tahun pertama mereka dan akan terus dikembangkan selama perjalanan perkembangan bahasa mereka. Menyimak menjadi penting bagi mereka karena secara kognitif ia menciptakan input yang dapat dipahami sebelum menghasilkan output bagi mereka untuk memproduksi bahasa, sebelum mereka mulai berbicara. Menerapkan studi kasus intrinsik pada anak pra-sekolah (berusia hampir lima tahun), penelitian kualitatif ini mencoba menggambarkan bagaimana proses keterampilan menyimak sejak dini dapat dilatih oleh orang tua atau pengasuh untuk merangsang peningkatan keterampilan bahasa anak-anak dalam konteks pemerolehan bahasa pertama (L1) mereka. Secara khusus studi ini akan menyoroti bagaimana keterampilan menyimak sejak dini dapat menumbuhkan keterampilan berbahasa pada anak-anak. Beberapa saran mengenai strategi peningkatan keterampilan menyimak dini pada anak-anak disajikan sebagai implikasi tambahan dari penelitian ini untuk bahan penelitian di masa yang akan datang.

kata kunci: *pemerolehan keterampilan berbahasa, perkembangan bahasa, keterampilan menyimak*

Received 2020-01-04
doi. 10.33603/rill.v3i1.3040

accepted 2020-01-31

published 2020-01-31

Introduction

A plethora of language learning studies have shown that listening comprehension has a significant role in the process of language learning (Ahmadi, Seyedeh, 2016). It is due to the process of decoding a language in the listening comprehension process that creates inputs in human's cognitive system. With these inputs, humans can produce a language in a form of speaking skill. In other words, listening and speaking skills are closely related each other. Therefore, they cannot be separated as they involve several organs in human body which are integrated, namely brain, mouth, and ear.

Listening is the first language skill that is acquired by human before the other skills are achieved. Not similar to hearing which is a part of psychological process, listening is defined as a conscious process that requires people to be mentally attentive (Low & Sonntag 2013 as cited in Caspersz, 2015). As listening is a very fundamental skill in language learning as well, it is necessary to pay more attention to learn it (Yazdanpanah & Khanmohammad, 2014). With these importance of listening skill in relevance to language development as well as language learning process, it is no doubt that it should be learnt by language learners as early as their linguistic period in their life is begun,

especially between age of 3-5 years old. Erica Hoff (2009) in her book chapter titled *Language Development at an Early Age: Learning Mechanisms and Outcomes from Birth to Five Years* in the *Early Childhood Development Encyclopedia “language development and literacy”* stated that by the age of 5, children essentially master the sound system and grammar of their language and acquire a vocabulary of thousands of words (Rvachew, 2018). It means that at this language development stage, inputs can be provided for children through natural language learning process which might be conducted outside of the formal classroom setting. In relation to it, this research aims to present one of the possible strategies to deliver the inputs in order to stimulate outputs in children language skills acquisition process through conducting early listening skill.

In the listening process, bottom-up, top-down, and interactive processing is involved. In bottom-up processing, listeners use the acoustic message, individual sounds, or phonemes, together make up phrases, clauses, and sentences then combine the sentences to create ideas and concepts and relationship between them, while top-down processing emphasizes the use of prior experience and the surrounding context which enables listeners to comprehend input (Wolvin 2010, as cited in Binti Abu Bakar, 2019). Interactive processing, however, involves both bottom-up and top-down processing (Wolvin, 2010, as cited in Binti Abu Bakar, 2019). This complex process creates a perspective that although it is perceived as the most fundamental language skill to learn, listening comprehension is one of the most difficult language skills as well.

In relation to it, some researches had explained about listening obstacles faced by language learners especially children are due to Auditory Processing Disorder (APD) present with normal hearing, but have barriers in comprehending speech, particularly when surrounded with background noise (Roebuck & Barry, 2018). As originally perceived, the disorder was specific to the auditory inputs processing. However, the APD status as a reliable diagnostic category is still questioned and debatable (Wechsler, as cited in Roebuck & Barry, 2018). Besides, the listening difficulties in normal children also caused by immature hearing during the first decade of life is more strongly influenced by top-down mechanisms than in adulthood (Moore, 2012). The other difficulties are due to first language acquisition problems, namely: grammatical errors,

phonological errors, incorrect utterances, imitation, repetition, correction, indicating the question, learning by experiences, and laziness (Hutauruk, 2015).

Apart from those problems, many researchers pointed out the solution to the language skills (including listening) problems for adult language learners. However, only a few researches discussed the strategies to fostering language skills acquisition in children. Hence, utilizing the case study approach on a pre-school child, this research gives insight to parents, language learners, teachers, as well as researchers on how the early listening skill can foster first language skills acquisition in children. This research may also anticipate the listening barriers in language learners by early listening skill since they achieve their formal education at school institution. The early listening skill presented in this study is conducted by employing direct listening technique through reading bedtime stories aloud, and let the child listening to it. This early intervention explained in this research would clarify whether and how it affects the other language skills other than listening as well.

Methods

Research Design

This research utilized qualitative descriptive design. It means a research studies that investigate the quality of relationships, activities, situations, or materials (Fraenkel, Wallen, Hyun, 2012). Unlike the quantitative research, there is a greater emphasis on holistic description in this research – that is on describing in detail of what goes on in a particular activity or situation rather than on comparing the effects of a particular treatment (Fraenkel, Wallen, Hyun, 2012). Thus, this theory underlying the design of this research that comprehensively describes the process of early listening skills as a particular activity and how it foster language skills acquisition.

Meanwhile research approach employed is intrinsic case studies. It is a research in which the researcher is primarily interested in understanding a specific individual or situation. He or she describes, in detail, the particulars of the case in order to shed some light on what is going on (Fraenkel, Wallen, Hyun, 2012). In correlation with the theory, as this research primarily studies the first language skills acquisition in a pre-

school child as a specific individual was observed, and early listening skill as a specific activity, therefore intrinsic case studies is the most appropriate approach for it.

Participants

The voluntary participants involved in this research is a pre-school child (female) aged 4,5 years old, named Alesya, and her parents.

Data Collection Technique

The data collection techniques employed in this research were observation, field notes, and semi-structured interview. Semi-structured interview aims to search for more information on a particular topic and to entirely understand the answers provided (Harrel & Bradley, 2009).

Data Analysis Technique

Data collecting technique in the present research is based on stages of qualitative data analysis (Lacey & Luff, 2009) consist of; transcription, organizing data, familiarization, and coding.

Data Presentation Technique

The research results are presented narratively in explanation form as well as descriptively in a form of quantitative chart or diagram where relevant.

Results and Discussion

The existing language development of the main research participant

Before explaining the process of how early listening skills are conducted, it is necessary to provide information on how the language development stage of the participant at the present time is. Alesya (4,5 years old) has not enter the formal school yet. Her language skills learnt through fun learning and playing regularly. Routines and patterns are useful to build social relationship and act as intake in the process of creative construction (Ratnaningsih, 2017). Specifically, she has experienced a natural language learning process through picture books, telling story, listening/watching animation movie,

playing vocabulary games, etc. in her everyday life. These were occurred since she was three years old.

Based on the direct observation and interview with her parents, her first language acquisition that existed when the research was conducted can be illustrated briefly by the following table;

Table 3.1, participant’s existing language development

Language aspects	Development
Phonology	She could pronounce every words in her L1 (bahasa Indonesia) correctly but with some errors in specific phonological sounds for consonants; ‘r’ that is pronounced ‘l’ such as in the word “pergi”, she kept saying “pelgi”, and ‘s’ that is pronounced “sy” such as in the word “bakso”, she kept saying “baksyo”.
Lexical resource	She has known various lexical ranges that can be seen from the way she is talking, and guessing various names of animals, plants, and tools when she was playing vocabulary games with her parents. For example when her parent said “can you mention the animal with initial letter ‘A?’” (<i>bisakah kamu sebutkan nama binatang dari huruf A?</i>), and she directly answered “ <i>Ayam</i> ” or even “ <i>Angkilosaurus</i> ”.
Syntax	She is able to structure her sentences with an understandable and consistent pattern in forms of simple sentences, compound, and complex sentences. For example she said, “ <i>Aku lagi ngantuk, males ngomong</i> ” (I am sleepy, lazy to talk”), or “ <i>Bunda, kalau habis makan buah, bijinya ditanam biar tumbuh banyak pohon, terus, udara kita gak panas jadinya</i> ” (“Mom, as soon as you finish eating fruits, plant its seeds in order to become trees, then the air around us won’t be hot”). These are some examples of a simple and complex-compound sentence. Even though her sentence patterns were not always grammatically and literally correct, but it is understandable for adult version in everyday situation.
Semantics	She is able to understand the meaning of what was told by her interlocutors in her everyday speech. It can be seen from the way how she actively communicates with her peers, and family members. For example, when her father told her to hear and follow what her mother said during playing with her peers, she clarified by questioning, “ <i>Maksudnya kalau Bunda bilang “iya” berarti boleh, tapi kalau Bunda bilang “jangan” berarti gak boleh?</i> ” (“Do you mean if mom says ‘yes’ so I

can do it, but if she says 'no' it means I am prohibited to do it?").

Pragmatics

She has been able to express something she want to say in indirect way in a form of allusive language or "bahasa sindiran". For example, when she was on travel with her parents, she suddenly saw a retailer brought a bunch of colorful balloons with various characters of cartoon picture, and she wanted to buy it. Her parents actually saw it as well, but they pretended to not recognize it. Then, She intended to indirectly tell her wish to purchase the balloons by questioning, "*Ayah, itu barusan tukang apa?*" (Dad, do you know what is that?). Her father replied "*Apa ya... Ayah gak tau*" (ummm... I don't know). Then she continued in a slightly angry tone, "*masa Ayah gak tau sich...?*" ("It's impossible that you don't know it"). Her father laughed, and finally Alesya said what she meant with a louder voice, "*aku mau beli balon tadi, yang gambar sponge-Bob*" (I want to buy a balloon I have seen just now, the one with Sponge-Bob image").

Description regarding the process of how early listening skill is conducted

The mentioned early listening skill was conducted through reading bedtime stories to the main research participant (Alesya). This reading process was demonstrated regularly, clearly, and expressively by her parent since she was 3 years old. As Alesya has not had the ability to literally reading yet, the reading was conducted by parent beside her. She may also look at the text and picture in the book while her parent is reading. It means that the main purpose of this activity is not to teach her literacy skills or how to read literally by spelling the each of word. On the other hand, it is more to stimulate her to pay attention to the story that was being told and read by her parent. During this process, her listening skill is naturally built even without the intervention of audio recording media.

In corresponds to this activity, reading and telling stories to children has been studied and proven in correlation to its effect toward children's cognitive system in acquiring language skills. For example, Pelletier and Astington (2004) perceived that children with more advanced understanding of mental entities are better able to connect settings, events, and actions described in a story with the characters' thoughts, motives, and

emotions (Ebert, 2019). Furthermore, in correlation to its cognitive-psychological aspect in children, Ebert (2019) as well stated that according to Bruner (1986) idea, “children with more advanced theory of mind may integrate the landscape of action with the landscape of consciousness more easily when listening to or reading a story. In addition, an advanced ability to represent mental states and processes also promotes metacognitive knowledge and skills, which may further support text comprehension”. From these statements, it can be defined that activities leading to reading and listening skills have a strong connection to children’s mind particularly in developing their language skills. Since both reading and listening are receptive skills in language learning process, this is also relevant to one theory of reading and reading instruction capitalizes on the connection between listening and reading. It is referred to as the simple view of reading (Gough & Tunmer, 1986, (Swain, Friehe, & Harrington, 2004) . Listening is at the core of this simple view of reading, as listening and phonological skills are highly correlated with early word decoding (de Jong & der Leij, 2002, Swain, Friehe, & Harrington, 2004).

During telling a story through reading with the child, parent as a story teller should make sure that the child pays attention and listen carefully to the story. The story telling process can be limited to maximum 15 minutes. The ability of mimicking in the story telling process is also important to influence child’s attention toward the story content. Once the story is finished, parent asks for the child’s personal opinion regarding the story. For instance, they can address some questions like “what do you think about the story?”, “do you think the story is sad, happy, or amazing?”, “do you like the story?”. Let the child express her feelings and opinions about the story. Listen to her, then follows up with some questions related to the story to train and foster her comprehension skills. It will be better to organize the questions with good sentence structures, started from a simple question such as “who is the main character of the story?”, or “where does the story take place?”. The child would enthusiastically answer the questions. Then, continue with rather complex questions such as “how does the bear survive during a very long winter in the jungle?”, or “how does giraffe help the bear in difficult period of time?”. Complex questions in this context can be meant by the structure of the sentence which is made in a complex sentence structure or questions

that lead a listener (the child) to think carefully about the answer as the questions cannot be directly answered or guessed. On the other hand, the listener should rather carefully remember the story content that she had comprehended in order to answer the questions. In addition, on the last questions parents or a story teller could give the most complex questions related to the story such as, “what lessons you can get from the story?”, “do you think honesty is important for us?, and why is it important?”, “Can you give other examples of honesty in your daily activities?”. The most complex questions in the early listening skill process can be defined as questions that stimulate the child’s critical thinking skills by drawing inference from the content of the story, formulating the implicit meaning and message of the story, and connecting the story she heard with her everyday life and activities. The process of how early listening skill is conducted can be briefly illustrated by the following chart.

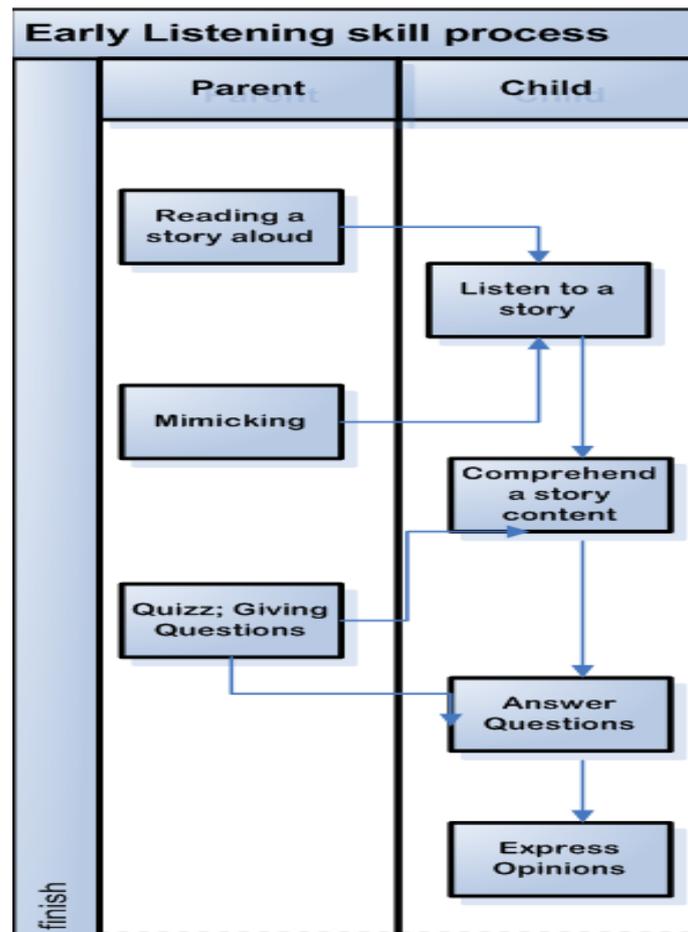


Figure 3.1; the early listening skill process

The process of how the language skills acquisitions are fostered through early listening skills

The activity of fostering early listening skill as described above affected participant (Alesya) in many ways of cognitive development particularly language skills acquisition. One of the most clearly seen language skills acquisition is L1 listening and speaking skill in participant. When this activity is conducted regularly, the child is trained to have a good listening comprehension. Besides, the speaking skill of the child is trained as well through the process of question and answer session after the reading process. However, this intake is not enough for the success of language acquisition. Language acquisition, will be more successful by providing input where the routines and patterns have a small but important role in language acquisition (Ratnaningsih, 2017). In other words, the early listening process given to the child cannot have much impact on her language acquisition without dialogue sessions after the story telling is finished. The dialogue process is conducted through question and answer session as soon as the reading story aloud is finished well. In this process, the story tellers (parents or care givers) can give some feedbacks to the child regarding the story content. The language skills acquisition in the pre-school child conditioned and studied in this research is illustrated in the figure below.

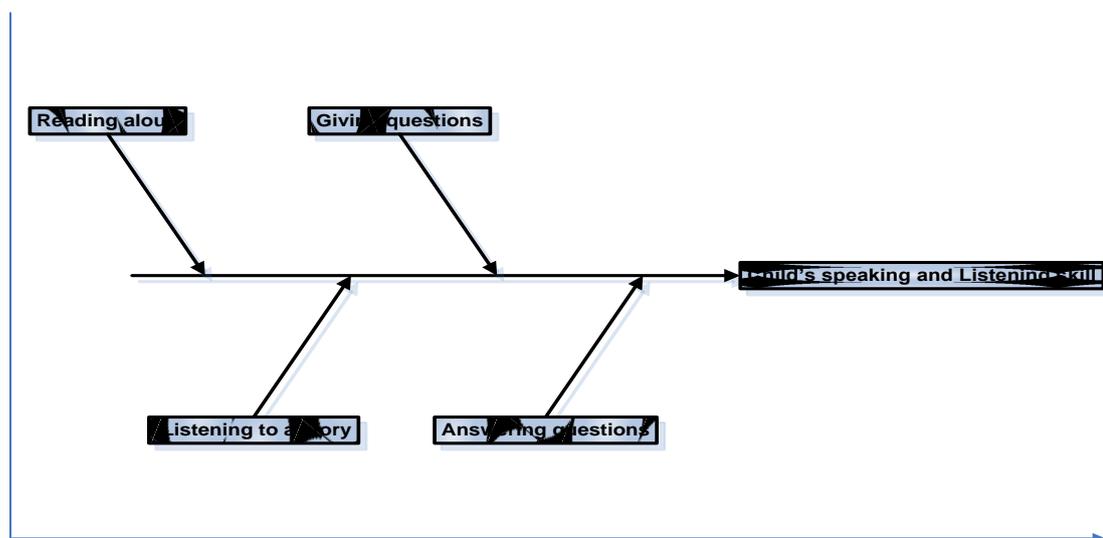


Figure 3.2; the early listening skill impact on language skill acquisition in pre-school child

The early listening skill in this study is trained and given to the pre-school child whose L1 reading and writing skill was not literally formed yet. Thus the impacts can be seen

are more to the listening skill and speaking skill acquisition of the child. This technique might be utilized in fostering the language skills acquisition in normal children who has been entering formal elementary schools (5-8 years old) as well since their literacy has been well established. It means that it seems more language skills acquisition can be developed in them rather than in pre-school children. In this view, understanding written text is the product of decoding and listening comprehension. Decoding refers to the ability to convert print into sound and to read fluently (see NICHD Early Child Care Research Network, 2005). The simple view implies that when decoding skills are poor, they will place important constraints on reading comprehension. In contrast, when decoding skills are stronger, listening comprehension becomes a more important influence on reading comprehension (Lervag, Hulme, & Melby-Lervag, 2018).

Besides, the early listening skill through reading bed time stories with parents that is established as a habit in the elementary school children might train their reading skill. The parents can also be more creative in combining the techniques and strategies. They may let the children read the story as well, and then give them questions to train their comprehension. A study of reading for early childhood is an important thing as preparation for their reading readiness. One of the methods that were given for introducing a reading concept for children is using attractive games and activities (Juwita & Tasu'ah, 2015), and reading bedtime stories is one of the examples. Again, it can be more attractive when parents are creative enough to stimulate the child's enthusiasm regarding the content of the story by providing some questions about the content of the story read, and relate it with the children's daily activities. It corresponds to the theory that learning is more than a combination of inputs and outputs; it also involves the process or learning environment as a key factor (Huerta-Wong & Schoech, 2010).

Conclusion & recommendation

The early listening skill that is well-established in the pre-school child in this study is done through the reading bed time story aloud by the parent or care-giver. Language skills acquisition influenced and developed by this activity is mainly listening and speaking skill. This is due to the habit of listening comprehension that is trained

regularly through reading and listening to the story. The story tellers is highly encouraged to give feedbacks through questions answer session conducted as soon as the reading story is accomplished, which, in turn, it can also stimulate speaking skill in children. The speaking skill is fostered through expressing their opinions, and answers in the dialogue session after the reading and listening process.

The activity of early listening skill explained in this research needs parent's good listening skill. The importance of listening skill is highlighted here since it relates to the expression of empathy and attention even in the context of nursing and health care. In relevance to it, Shipley (2010) stated,

“The concept of listening is acknowledged as an essential component of effective communication by many disciplines. Listening has always been considered a crucial component of nursing care, and its benefits have been documented in nursing literature. Certain characteristics that are essential to listening have been identified in all of the reviewed literature. These defining attributes includes empathy, silence, attention to both verbal and non-verbal communication, and the ability to be nonjudgmental and accepting”.

From the statement above, in terms of the communication with children, it can be said that a parent with a good listening skill would likely to transfer a good listening skill as well to their children. The early listening skill can be developed according to the cognitive development in children without or with a well-established literacy skill. For those with a well-established literacy skill, the story tellers may combine the strategies with some games or media to stimulate more improvement and development of their language skills acquisition.

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Author biography

Irma Wahyuni, S.S., M.Pd is a lecturer and researcher at English language education department of STKIP Muhammadiyah Bogor. Her research interests are English language teaching in EFL and ESL context, Language Acquisition, Language Development.