Exploring Parents' Perceptions of Early Literacy Development in Early Childhood Education

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Abstract

This study explores early literacy concepts for young children among parents in low-class communities. It focuses on parents' interpretations of their children's development in early literacy and how these influence due to their children's education. The aim of the research is to illuminate parents' interpretations regarding early literacy in their children's education. Through the classical phenomenological approach, seven mothers were interviewed, and the collected data was analyzed using Colaizzi's method to describe the themes. The findings reveal that they perceived early literacy as an ability to read and write that children must achieve before they are seven years old. They also mentioned it for fulfilling entry requirements for the primary level, avoiding negative stigma from other parents, labeling smart children, and parents' anxiety for children's confidence in the future. As a consequence, it allows parents to have reading class preparation, over-involvement in children's learning activities, providing learning posters, and parents' home teaching. This study also discussed the concept of early literacy based on human development theories and how it can contribute to sustaining and empowering parents dealing with meaningful learning in cultivating literacy for children in the perception year.

Keywords: Early childhood education; early literacy development; parent's perception.

INTRODUCTION

Early literacy refers to the precursor stage of conventional literacy skills. It is important for all stakeholders, especially teachers, students, parents and the school ecosystem (Setyawan & Gusdian, 2020). It is commonly acquired in preschool children, which also means the pre-knowledge, skills, and attitudes that children acquire before formally coming to learn how to read and write (Lonigan & Shanahan, 2009). Meanwhile, home literacy is articulated as the physical, interpersonal, and emotional factors in the home that have been found to be important for children's literacy development (Li & Doyle, 2022). According to The National Early Literacy Panel, early literacy is identified in 11 skills; oral language, alphabetic knowledge, phonological awareness, rapid automatic naming of letters or digits, rapid automatic naming of objects or colors, phonological memory, concepts about print, print knowledge, writing or writing names, reading readiness, and visual processing (Lonigan et al., 2008).

The focus of developing early literacy skills is highly important because it is considered having a positive long-term relationship to their critical thinking and academic results of children's formal schooling in the following years, especially related to reading and writing skills (Lennox, 2013; Inten, 2017). This is in line with a study by Cunningham & Stanovich (1997) who argued that poor reading skills on entry to school tend to result in poor reading skills. Some studies also claimed that students who do not master age-appropriate literacy skills by the third grade are at a greater risk of dropping out of school (Snow & Matthews, 2016). Therefore, having good literacy skills will lead students to survive in their academic life since they have capability to understand not only something that stated but also implied in the text. Their knowledge is also more flourish compared to those who are not having good literacy skills. However, to achieve the stage, it starts from early literacy skill which commonly conducted since the perception years (Li & Doyle, 2022).

Several activities of the early literacy skill have been widely studied in the literature started at home by parents. For instance, the study from (Johnson & Christensen, 2021) explored parents' perception in reading home activities compared to parents whose children with and without learning disability. It revealed that there were no different activities between them but children's responses were different. Children without learning disability are more involved in the reading process and independent reading than children with learning disability. Another interesting topic raised who conducted descriptive study to examine the impact ROR (Reach Out and Read) program to parents through home literacy activity. The program asked parents to "prescriptions to read" with their child at least 10 minutes in a day. Then, they compared the result between parents who joined the program and not. Interestingly, ROR brought a positive impact for children and parents, especially related to the increase of accessing to books. Meanwhile, Solichah et al. (2022) conducted qualitative study to investigate parents' perception and roles in stimulating early literacy development to their young children. The result showed that parents had positive perceptions and believed that early literacy skills was important for their children, however, they seemed to give stimulation not in appropriate ways such as using drilling technique or memorizing.

Early home literacy also plays an important role to develop children's interest in literacy in the future (Lonigan & Shanahan, 2009). As closest people to children's live, parents or caregivers have a great influence to promote it and cultivate it (Kurnia et al., n.d.; Rosepti, n.d.). However, in some condition, children who live in low socio-economic backgrounds find a limitation in practicing it and mostly the constrain came coming from their parents' knowledge (Bowey, 1995; Davis-kean, 2005). The issue becomes interesting to be explored further because home early literacy closely relates to parental teaching and some studies showed different experiences among various factors such as socio-economic backgrounds.

In Indonesia, early literacy learning for young children could be coming with different perceptions among parents. However, the related studies among parents based on social groups are still limited although there have many discussions to be explored such as based on family conditions (Davis-kean, 2005) or parental teaching (Bowey, 1995). Therefore, to highlight this recent study, it gives a wider perspective compared to the previous ones. It focuses on the exploration of perception in home early literacy among parents whose young children and they are categorized in low socioeconomic status (SES).

This study aims to elaborate parents' perception in formulating the concepts of early literacy to their young children at home and how these influences on their children's education. Not only describing the concept, but it also investigates parents' involvement and expectations towards early literacy in the perception year. Since nowadays is also in a digital era, the engagement to the role of technology is also explored. Therefore, it addresses three research questions, namely 'how parents perceive their children's early literacy', 'what

impacts of the perceptions to their children's learning experiences', and 'what is the role of technology in assisting children for home literacy learning". The significance of this study is believed to give description in advance regarding the concept of early literacy based on community context in Indonesia and it can contribute to sustaining and empowering parents dealing with meaningful learning in cultivating early literacy for young learners at home.

METHOD

This study employed classical phenomenology within the frame of the qualitative method. This refers to describing one or more individuals' consciousness and lived experiences of a particular phenomenon (Johnson & Christensen, 2021). In more detail, the focus of this design was the participants' life world. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to explore parents' perceptions, experiences, and involvement related to early literacy for young children at home. In this study, the data was collected regarding the participants' beliefs, points of view, experiences, and responses via face-to-face in-depth interviews.

There were seven participants from At-Ta'awun Learning Centre (ALC) voluntarily participated in this research. All of them were mothers because they were actively involved in the children's learning experiences in the place. ALC is a non-formal educational institution to support children in learning some additional materials provided for the low-class communities. It is located in Tangerang District, Indonesia, which is free of charge for people in its surroundings. The institution aims to promote learning experiences at the childhood level or from kindergarten to primary. Therefore, we specifically limit the participants to mothers whose children are between 4 and 5 years old.

They are categorized as class communities based on the theory. It is argued that low socioeconomic status (SES) is a group of people with less income than their needs. Income here means money or goods obtained by their effort in a job. They also have limited access to financial, educational, social, and health resources, which is different from those with a higher SES. In this research, the respondents' monthly income is tentative. It means there are no fixed total numbers, but apparently 1 to 3 million rupiah in a month.

Table 1. Demography data of participants

Initial	Age	Occupation	Education	Child's age
Dwi	30	Housewife	Lower secondary	5
Murni	27	Housewife	Lower secondary	5.5
Difa	29	Housewife	Lower secondary	5
Manda	29	Housewife	Lower secondary	5
Ririn	31	Housewife	Lower secondary	5.5
Rona	28	Housewife	Higher secondary	4.5
Mariam	32	Merchant	Higher secondary	5.5

There are two primary instruments in this research, namely observation and in-depth interview. Observation is used to see the parental attitudes during parents-children learning experiences at ALC. Meanwhile, an in-depth interview is used in a format of open-ended questions related to parents' interpretations of early literacy for young children at home. In more detail, the interview was conducted in Bahasa and took about 30 – 45 minutes for each participant. Both instruments explored three aspects: parents' perception of the concept of early literacy and its impact on parents' involvement and expectation of children's reading mastery, and the use of technology in assisting children's learning experiences at home.

The data collected from parents was obtained from in-depth interviews and observation

of the daily interaction during the instructional process in a classroom setting. It employed a purposive sampling method, which focuses on parents categorized in low SES. Besides that, not all of them had higher education degrees. The interview was conducted simultaneously in one day by face-to-face interaction done on August 27, 2022. The timeline of data collection was one week at the end of August 2022, from 22 to 27. However, since the researcher was also a teacher in the institution, she has had an understanding of the real condition, but in this case, an observation during the timeline is meant for a more deep exploration of the purpose of this research. After conducting the observation and in-depth interview, the data gathered was stored in the form of the researcher's field notes, voice recording, and spreadsheet. To obtain comprehensive data, a careful analysis of the interview transcript was conducted to acquire the information needed. The data collected during the interview and observation was analyzed by using Colaizzi's method (Praveena & Sasikumar, 2021). There are seven steps of this data analysis: bracketing the general sense, extracting significant statements, formulating meanings, clustering of themes, describing the phenomenon, describing the fundamental structure, and validating the findings. The taped interviews and field notes are transcribed verbatim and reviewed regularly. Moreover, since the interview was conducted in Bahasa, member checking was also done to make some corrections and produce a similar understanding to the aim of this study. Triangulation was also employed to ensure the internal validity of this study. This was aimed to best converge information from various sources in different ways and times (Creswell & Creswell, 2017).
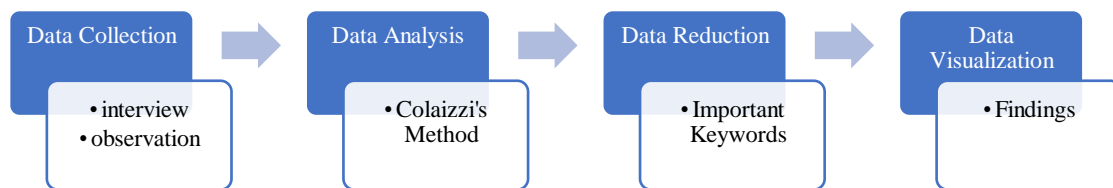

Figure 1. Research steps

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The research findings are arranged based on the research questions, which consist of three subsections. The first describes parents' interpretations of the concept of early literacy. The second discusses how the concept influences them to perceive their children's learning experiences. The last elaborates on the role of technology parents use to assist their children's literacy learning at home.

1. Parents' Perception of the Literacy Concept

The main idea of qualitative study is to understand a social phenomenon in its natural setting and investigate why certain phenomenon occurs (Díaz et al., 2020). Therefore, this subsection will focus on elaboration data regarding how parents perceive early literacy to their young children. The first question was asked to explore parents' perception which was sounded: *"What do you think regarding early literacy?"* To analyze the data gathered, the responses were organized into the following table.
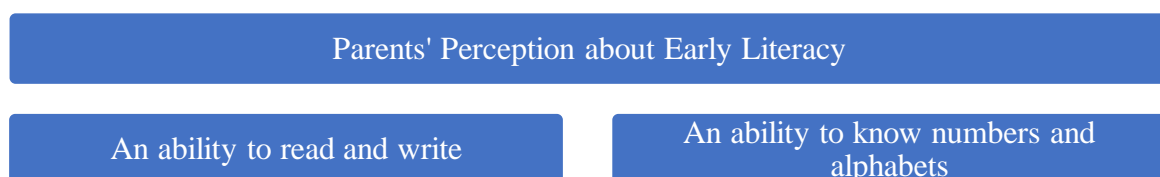

Figure 2. Parents' perception of early literacy

All respondents have a positive attitude toward having early literacy learning for their young children. However, the above table shows their different perceptions regarding the concept of early literacy. Some of their responses were, *"In my understanding, early English literacy is children's ability to read and to write, mentioning basic words such as writing names or reading a long text"* (Mariam). Another respondent also said, *"For me, early literacy is defined as an ability to mention alphabet and numbers orderly"* (Ririn).
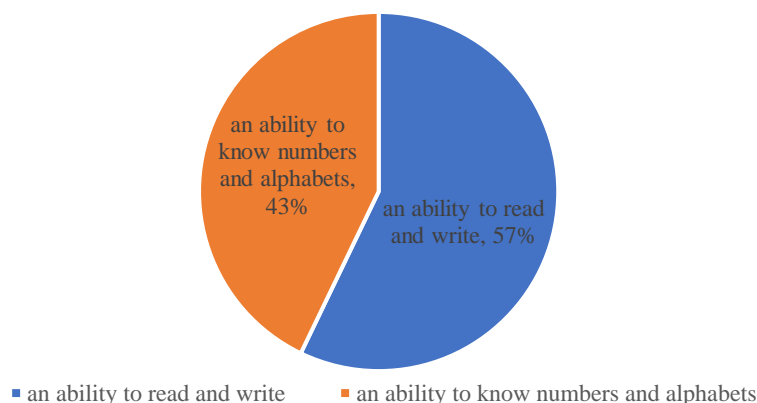

Figure 3. Percentage of answers about parents' perception

We can see that most parents assume that early literacy starts with the ability to know and mention numbers and the alphabet in an orderly (43%) and the ability to read and write (57%). Most parents elaborate their responses based on their perceptions of children's natural development, in which literacy becomes a need in their lives. All of them also expected that their children, who were still young, could read before 7 years old or at least before coming to the primary level. One of the respondents said, *"I think literacy is the basic skill for my child, especially for school matters, and it means he should be able to read and write before 7 years old"* (Dwi). Another respondent also commented, *"Literacy for me is when my child can count at least one to ten and can mention the alphabet in a good order because it is a need for his life at school"* (Manda).

## 2. The Influence of Early Literacy Concept

The types of responses allow parents to perceive early literacy as a part of their children's learning in the perception year. Although they live in a small village with limited facilities and access, all parents have a big concern for their children having the ability to literacy mastery. This is because they have low educational attainment, which provokes them to dream that their children will be better than them in the future. Most of them believed literacy skills become one of the main tools to achieve that dream.

There are four common reasons for parents to illuminate the importance of early literacy for their young children. First is parents' information, which is one of the entry requirements for the primary level. Second is parents' perception to avoid negative stigma from their environment, in which when children could not read and write at seven, they were considered to be stupid children. Third is parents' claim that basic knowledge is needed to get a label of 'smart children'. When children were able to read, write, or count at an early age, people would claim them as smart children. The last is parents' anxiety about their children's self-confidence in the future. This means that if their children are not able to read and write, they will face academic problems in school, which will probably impact their cognitive development.

Table 2. Interview transcript for the influence of parents' perceptions in early literacy

Transcript	Concept
"As I know, children have to be able to read before coming to Primary school because it becomes one of entry requirement. That is why I expect my child to master literacy in this recent age" (Dwi)	Primary school entry requirement
"I experienced my neighbor's child could not read although he had been 8 and other people brought up a negative stigma for this. I won't my child experience the same" (Murni)	Avoiding negative stigma from environment
"Children who are able to read and write in kindergarten are considered as smart children because they can achieve it in early ages. I hope my child also becomes one of smart child" (Difa)	Perception of smart children
"I am worried my child would get a stigma of stupid child from her friends if she cannot master early literacy well" (Manda)	Avoiding negative stigma from environment
"Early literacy is a must today because it is a need to register our children to primary school" (Ririn)	Primary entry requirement
"I expect my child can have literacy mastery before 7 because it becomes the entry requirement in primary level" (Rona)	Primary entry requirement
"I am worried if my child cannot read or write before 7 he would get a problem during his school time and can foster him an inferiority sense, because all materials need a reading skill" (Mariam)	Anxiety for children's self-confidence

In responding to their positive perception of early literacy mastery, they perceive literacy as something that needs to be integrated into their children's lives from an early age. This influences them to support early literacy programs for their young children at home in some ways: joining reading class preparation (in this case, ALC), over-involvement during children's learning activities (such as doing children's tasks), providing posters of alphabets and numbers at home to see, and accompany children's learning at home.
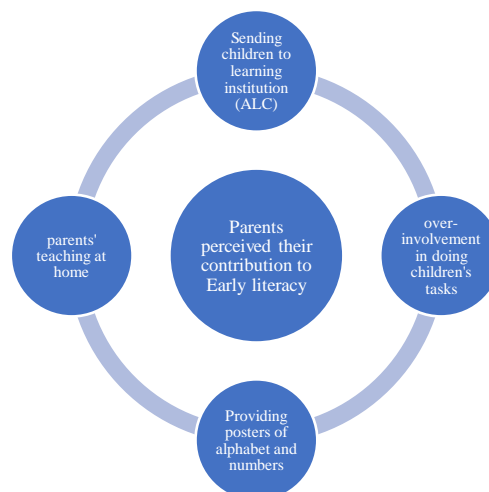
Figure 4. Parents' Involvement in early literacy

The most common response was that parents registered their children to At-Ta'awun Learning Course (ALC) because they realize their limited capability in teaching at home. This included all respondents who mentioned this such as *"I have a high expectation for my child to be able to read, so that I always accompany her to learn at ALC and review the materials from the given worksheet at home"* (Mariam). Another response sounded *"I am not patient to teach my child at home for reading, therefore, I send my children to ALC to teach my child how to read, write, and others"* (Murni). The majority of respondents commented that the main reason they sent their children to ALC was to assist their children in attaining early literacy at an early age.

The second major idea was to help children learn at home. It meant parents reminded children to do homework/worksheets and accompany them to finish it. In the meantime, they also teach students to review materials by asking them to mention some alphabets or numbers or read a word. The focus in this area was parents trying to get involved in their children's learning by assisting them to practice reading or counting. This is like one respondent said: *"I try to get involved to my child's learning by showing her a word and then ask her to spell"* (Rona). Another respondent also said, *"I assist my child in reading by showing some pictures labeled with a name and asking him to guess. It is good to develop his memory and his ability in reading mastery"* (Difa).

The next idea regarding how parents perceived their contribution is using digital platforms as a learning tool. YouTube is the familiar one among them, and only one participant downloaded literacy learning software (consisting of alphabetic, colors, and numbers songs) for kids on her smartphone. They mostly use YouTube because it provides any materials they need in an easy way. Based on their responses, they said that they also accompany their children in watching YouTube and are fully attentive during their learning time. *"I give my phone to my child, who is watching YouTube for self-learning. I think it helps because he remembers numbers from a song"* (Manda). One respondent also commented, *"I downloaded software for my child's learning. She obtains information about many words, numbers, etc., through it. Unfortunately, she gets easily bored and can change to another software such as YouTube"* (Ririn).

Last was to provide posters of alphabets and numbers and stuck them on the wall at home. All respondents mentioned this as their way of determining early literacy for their young children. They hang the posters on the wall to visualize their children with the alphabet or other words. The posters included simple vocabularies such as animals, fruit, numbers, or colors, and most of them had more than one category poster at home. They believe this way can assist their children to memorize the words and help them to read and write as well. The responses can be described as follows:

"I bought posters (alphabet and numbers) to support my child's learning experience in early literacy". (Mariam)

*"I hang some posters at home for my child **to** see and memorize some vocabularies. The posters that we have are numbers, colors, names of fruit and animals." (Rona)*

This research elaborated the perceptual concepts of early literacy among parents in low-class communities and how they perceived those perceptions. The development of technology was also explored to know its contribution on children's learning experiences at home. This provokes several questions to be answered, ranging from the basic knowledge of the early literacy concept, the perceptions, and the contribution that parents do to assist their children for its learning.

The research findings show that parents see early literacy as the ability to read and write in early ages (under 7). All respondents mentioned that reading skill is very important and they expect their children to be able read and write before 7 or before sending them to primary school. They believe literacy skill is highly crucial for their children's school because if they cannot read, they will find difficulties in understanding materials from teachers. All respondents in this research perceived positive attitude in responding to the learning of early literacy although to some extent they seemed too ambitious of it. In more detail, some of them forced their children to be able to read to avoid a negative stigma of having 'a stupid child'. However, some of them believe an ability to read before 7 would help their children to get ease while they come to the primary level. Although it sounded in positive manner, but there is also a misconception about the role of literacy and how it relates to a child's ability throughout time. This is because most parents desire that their children learn to read and write as soon as possible, therefore instead of introducing literacy, the focus is on encouraging young students to develop their reading skills.

Facilitating extra budget for learning in the prestigious institutions is one of the most demanding challenges for parents in low social economy status. They could possess the incapability related to the access and search another way to be facilitated. They provided their children at home with any learning media which is affordable for them, such as posters, books, or videos. Sending their children to non-profit learning course, ALC, was also helpful because it supports them through teaching model of reading and writing. In this case, some of respondents always accompanied children to learn and ensure that their children were engaged to the process. They show their eagerness to foster literacy mastery for their children from early. Based on the conditions, parents not only expected their children to be able to read and write, but also tried to facilitate the learning with any supporting assistances in their limited capacity. What they had done at home like a regular review seems the effort to achieve the literacy mastery.

In terms of technology, the use of it influences parents to aggressively engage their children with the literacy experiences. The provokes parents giving handphone to their children as one of accessible media to support the learning. Most of them use YouTube channel and learning software to show any materials related to words or numbers. Some of them together with children watch the videos, but some do not. In this case, parents need to develop their awareness regarding the use of technology since it can bring positive and negative effects for children development (Aamodt & Wang, 2011; McDevitt & Ormrod, 2021 ; Santrock, 2017).

However, they found a problem in securing their children from unwanted channels. Some mentioned that their children could easily change the videos because of getting bored or random choices. One respondent also said that sometimes there was a new unnecessary application in handphone. It was probably downloaded by children while parents cannot assist them watching handphone for long duration. In another instance, they realize the media helps them to develop their children's speaking skill such as having new words and its pronunciation. This was aligned with research from (Wahyuni et al., 2021) which illuminated the use of YouTube video as a media to encourage people developing speaking skills.

Along the perceptual concepts parents have in early literacy, it shapes parents' expectation that their children can read and write before 7 because it is a need for primary entry requirement. They also believed it would help them to understand materials and avoid a negative stigma from their children and build their self-confidence during the learning process. Therefore, they assumed that early literacy became a must to be mastered since young to provoke their not being left behind when they come to primary school. On the other

hand, they realize their limited capability in teaching for children at home. Sending their children to ALC, which is notably free, is their way to facilitate children's learning.

After discussing the research findings, there are some main highlighted points with other research following this idea. One of them is proposed by (Husnaini, 2018) who claimed that the emphasis of early literacy in Indonesia is mostly not on literacy introduction, but rather on targeting children to grasp literacy from an early age. It is aligned with the result in this study in which parents focused on children's ability to read and write and hoped to achieve it during the period. In fact, all parents want their children grow and develop their milestone well, but in this case, they showed their sufficient knowledge how to teach early literacy based on their children's appropriate development. For example, the learning characteristics of early childhood is by visualizing something that is abstract (Piaget, 1976), therefore, the choices of learning media considers as the important part. Most parents in this study seemed getting confused how to do it and they used a guidebook or printed worksheet provided from school.

Although reading and writing ability for young learners under 7 is still on controversy among scholars, it is considered to be acquired since it can produce positive impacts on a child's language development (Clark, 2020; Garton & Copland, 2018; Iriani et al., 2018). In addition, a study from Snow & Matthews (2016) found that students who do not master age-appropriate literacy skills by the third grade are at a greater risk of dropping out of school. In this instance, introducing early literacy since preschool can be considered as a good thing because they still have a good memory and easy to absorb many lessons (Santrock, 2017). However, some points also need to be highlighted based on human development theory in which young children are very active people who love to move and explore many things, so the learning method needs to be appropriately designed based on their own characteristics.

CONCLUSION

In this study, seven mothers categorized in low SES were interviewed and asked regarding their perceptions of early literacy. This also highlights their expectation of children's learning experiences and the influence of technology towards the learning process. All respondents delineated the positive perceptions for early literacy in young ages, but they admitted that they have limited ability in teaching it at home. Meanwhile, they face a challenge to facilitate children with good leaning environment at home since based on the interview they still used conventional ways, such as reading practice through books and without playing. Some of them are also busy with their daily jobs and some felt no capacity in teaching it, so they have limited time for teaching children at home with good preparation. However, they have tried their best effort to be involved to children development such providing poster and accompany children to finish homework from ALC. However, this research still needs to be improved, such as numbers of participants. Interviewing fathers could be more interesting to explore further their perception and contribution in the learning process of early home literacy. Geographical coverage is also one of the limitations of this research. It is hoped that this research can be beneficial for researchers, authorities, parents, and educators' views on early literacy in the perception year. The perspective of early literacy from low SES is hoped to be responded as a well-planned program to develop its awareness among other people in the same or lower SES. Therefore, further research is supposed to give better and wider understanding related to early literacy to improve our education quality that will formulate a best method or early literacy learning for young children.

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