



Gadgets and English Vocabulary Acquisition of Rural Preschool Children in Malang

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Abstract

Gadgets are often considered to interfere with early childhood development, but gadget technology benefits children's language acquisition. This study aims to determine the English vocabulary acquisition of children aged four to six years from their habit of accessing entertainment through gadgets. The participants in this study were 53 children aged 4-6 years in a rural preschool in Malang. This research used a qualitative method with a descriptive explanation. Data collection techniques were conducted through class observation and interviews with teachers and parents. The results of this study showed that the subjects' foreign language proficiency in English was seen from the acquisition of vocabulary and understanding of the content they watched repeatedly. Second language mastery is also seen in the subject's ability to mention colors, simple verbs, nouns, and adjectives in English. The children acquired their foreign language of both expressive and receptive English vocabulary through their gadgets with the support of parental guidance. It implies that gadgets with controlled screen time and supervision can positively impact children's foreign language acquisition.

Keywords: *Gadgets, Vocabulary acquisition, Rural preschool children*

1. Introduction

Gadgets are often considered to interfere with early childhood development, but it turns out that gadget technology benefits children's development. These electronic devices have many categories that can support the learning process of commonly used children. They can be computers or laptops, tablet PCs, and cell phones (Marpaung, 2018). Gadget technology users are not only teenagers and adults; children are also technology users and adapt quickly (Yumarni, 2022).

Current research findings stated that gadgets can be used by anyone, including children under five years old, with parental supervision (Dalle et al., 2022; Sholekah et al., 2023; Wahyuningtyas et al., 2022). Many parents permit their children to use smartphones, tablets, and laptops. The number of features that are useful to be used as a source of children's lessons because they can make children calmer so that parents can do the activities they need, not worrying about children playing with things that can add to the activities of parents (Wahyuningtyas et al., 2022). Children can watch videos and follow along with the help of parents or teachers to enrich their understanding, which stimulates teaching English in an interactive and fun way. Thus, using technology can be

an essential aspect that influences language development in children. It affirms that technology has become part of children's immediate environment, and its influence on language is undeniable (Krcmar et al., 2007).

Child language acquisition is a golden period when children are 1-5 years old (golden age), where children experience a very rapid growth and development process in intellectual, emotional, and spiritual intelligence, experiencing extraordinary development that affects further development (Rahmawati 2020). In this case, gadgets are considered to affect the behavior of children of this age. Some studies reveal that gadgets in this digital era negatively influence the health, social, physical, and mental development and cognitive skills of children who spend time playing with gadgets (Zain et al., 2022; Nasution et al., 2022). However, the proper use of gadgets as a learning media for children can support creativity and innovations to present learning materials packaged in different forms, which support children's interest in imitating words, singing, and verbal expression; even parents entrust their children to learn English through one of the applications on gadgets, namely YouTube (Farahsani et al., 2020). Learning media can be given to children through audio, visual, audio-visual, environmental, and game media in gadgets (Rahmawati 2020). The benchmark for children's language learning is observable through the addition or increase in their vocabulary size.

Vocabulary growth is significant in language acquisition. All languages have a vocabulary, a set of words that are the basic building blocks used in creating and understanding sentences; without a vocabulary, language cannot be understood and produced (Miller in Anglin et al., 1993). In this case, expressive vocabulary is one of the signs of language development, and its development will depend on various factors experienced by the child (Farabolini et al., 2023). Focused language learning focuses on language features such as pronunciation, spelling, word parts, vocabulary, collocations, grammatical constructions, and discourse features (Macalister & Nation, 2019). Vocabulary has a vital role in communication. The ability to communicate is supported by the process of acquiring language skills (Indah 2008); someone who has an extensive vocabulary will find it easier to utter spontaneously to express his ideas and has a higher speech-to-silence ratio compared to a smaller vocabulary (Jongman et al., 2021). Therefore, a child who has started to master vocabulary from a young age may have the potential to be fluent in communication. Optimal learning occurs when children know where to focus their attention; this better attention is aided by child development, such as vocabulary growth (Krcmar, 2007). Children will quickly learn to speak, get vocabulary from parents, and talk alone or with toys, peers, and so on (Arsanti, 2014). In this study, vocabulary learning is assumed to be supported by the use of gadgets.

The increase in vocabulary indicates the acquisition of the first language and the second language. In Indonesia, English is a second language that is the main subject in schools, starting from elementary school to university level. The importance of mastering English is that it is needed to communicate because it is an international language (Dewi &

Anggraeni, 2023). In addition to mastering the mother tongue (local language and Indonesian), children can learn English as a second language and foreign language, starting from toddlers aged 2-3 years, producing simple phrases or sentences (Farahsani et al., 2020).

Children's English vocabulary skills are supported by applications in gadgets by watching videos, listening to music, and playing games. Gadgets are now not only a technology for communication but have developed as an entertainment medium for watching videos, listening to music, or capturing moments through a camera. Several studies found that children's English language skills can be seen from their understanding of the movies and music they watch, the ability of children to mention objects around them and know the names of days using English (Dewi, 2021; Fardischa, 2020; Irawan, 2022; Pehala et al., 2022). Watching English improves language skills through exposure to vocabulary obtained from children's songs (Farahsani et al., 2020). This ability is obtained due to repetition or habit that ends at creating understanding, and application occurs. Therefore, children can hone their English language skills through videos and music.

Internet technology is a familiar thing, especially in big cities. Still, media such as television, gadgets, internet, smartphones, and laptops are useful in urban areas and have reached remote villages. Gadgets at an early age are primarily used to play games and see cartoon animations, which can then maximize the available technology as a means of learning that is exciting, not dull, and trains children's creativity with engaging animations and cheerful songs (Rahmawati, 2020).

This study seeks to explain the process of gadget use on language development in early childhood, especially in English. Several studies show that school children acquire words at a rate of not hundreds but thousands per year, not a few per week but a few per day (Miller 1977, 1991; Miller & Gildea, 1987; Nagy & Anderson, 1984; Nagy & Herman, 1987; Smith, 1941; Templin, 1957 in Anglin et al., 1993). Mastery of English is critical in various aspects of life; almost all global information sources use English; therefore, English has begun to be introduced to children early on. The role of parents in supervising the use of gadgets is also very much needed; utilizing technology properly according to its portion will reap good results as well. The scope of this research is preschool children aged 4-6 years in the village.

The current research on the impact of gadgets on children's English development has focused on the utilization of gadgets in children's English learning process (Dwi 2023), the impact of gadgets on language development, both negative (Kurniati et al., 2021; Nirwana et al, 2018; Putra et al., 2022; Wahyuningtyas et al., 2021, 200) as well as positive ones (Sari, 2020; Probowati, et al., 2022). Also, they are concerned about the impact of gadgets on children's language development seen from the platform that children often access, namely YouTube (Dewi, 2021; Dewi & Anggraeni, 2023; Farahsani et al., 2020). Research on vocabulary acquisition is common in formal teaching (Andaz,

2020; Nur et al., 2023; Afrianty, 2018; As'ad et al., 2023; Sardi, 2022; Samad, 2021). Thus, there is still a need to explore vocabulary acquisition from natural settings outside the teaching context. Limited research examines how gadgets can impact the English vocabulary development of young children in rural settings. Based on the exposure of these trends, this study aims to fill the research gap on the factors that cause gadgets to develop English vocabulary.

In general, this study aims to explore gadgets' impact on English vocabulary acquisition in early childhood. Specifically, this study aims to identify the impact of gadgets on early childhood English vocabulary acquisition. Secondly, this study investigates the factors that support early childhood English vocabulary acquisition from gadgets. The purpose of this study is to provide answers to the question of why gadgets can affect children's English vocabulary.

2. Method

The method used in this study uses a descriptive qualitative approach to explore a phenomenon to gain a deep understanding of the phenomenon (Lambert & Lambert, 2012). In this study, the phenomenon to uncover is the impact of gadgets on vocabulary acquisition by creating a comprehensive and complex picture presented in words, reporting detailed views obtained by informant sources, namely the rural preschool children. Data collection techniques in this study are interviews with parents and children through conversations between speakers and interlocutors. Researchers asked several questions about the input of English vocabulary obtained from gadgets by children aged 4-6 years. An in-depth approach is needed to obtain valid research results at an early age. So, this research uses the snowball method. The snowball method is a method to ensure the subject under study, sampling in chains (multi-level). This method scrolls from one respondent to another to narrate the communication of a particular community (Salganik & Douglas in Lenaini, 2021). This research wants to reveal the influence of gadget media on English vocabulary acquisition in the village. This research analyzed and presented facts systematically to understand in depth about English vocabulary in early childhood.

The subject of this research is toddlers or children aged 4-6 years in Sumberoto village, Donomulyo sub-district, Malang Regency, at a playgroup RA Perwanida 1 because the result of preliminary observations showed that the children in the RA show high enthusiasm to have English vocabulary potentially. One of the reasons for choosing the playgroup children is because English is not taught formally; the teachers stated that English song is given as a support to joyful learning. The children's parents or caregivers need to guide them in learning English. It is confirmed that children's English vocabulary is from acquisition, not from teaching. This research tried to confirm how far gadgets influence English vocabulary, while the object of research is children's habits towards gadgets as a medium for learning English.

This research used interviews and observations as the main instruments. Before the research was conducted, the researchers first asked the person concerned to fill out a concern form whether he/she was willing to be a respondent in this study. During the observation, the teacher acted as a facilitator in conditioning the time to distribute the questionnaires to the children's parents and as an informant to select the students who were fit the criteria of the research subjects. At the same time, the observation was done to examine how much receptive and expressive language vocabulary found. Interviews were conducted the day after the observation to confirm the observation results.

The data collection technique of a qualitative descriptive study should be specific in discovering the nature of the events in the interview. The research sample criteria are; (1) the sample age is between 4 and 6 years old. (2) using gadgets as a means of playing every day. From these criteria, the researchers got 65 children. However, among them only 53 parents were willing to be respondents. Therefore, the children chosen as the participant are 53. In the interview process, the researcher tried to be a friend so that the children felt comfortable and provided a lot of information. The language used in the interview was local language and Indonesian. Occasionally the interview process is interspersed with opening gadgets for children to show content that is usually accessed by children, and the researchers give vocabulary guesses according to the content that children watch.

Data analysis in this study used a qualitative approach with the following steps: (1) data reduction, (2). display data (3). conclusion and verification. Data collection and analysis instruments used were notes, laptops, and researchers as human instruments. The narrative analysis was also reviewed when talking or playing with the family. The participant must be responsive when answering several questions submitted to fulfill this research. Data presentation is a summary of information from data that has been organized so that the data is accurate.

3. Results

3.1. Findings

From the observation, the participants performed several English vocabularies categorized in table 1.

Table 1. List of words acquired

No	Part of Speech	Expressive Vocabulary	Receptive Vocabulary
1	Adjective	black, white, purple, pink, green, brown, red, yellow, blue.	beautiful, good, happy.
2	Verb	brush, clean, play, save, kiss, look, start, finish.	cry, help, pick, put, take, say, search, see, give, keep, listen, make, order, jumping, go, dance,

				sing, fly, love, sleep, fail, like, paint.
3	Noun	cow, horse, cat, dog, rabbit, shark, fish, duck, bear, book, lamp, bicycle, car, bottle, water, toothbrush, ball, train, bus, truck, brother, sister, mother, father, baby, apple, rain.	goat, camel, monkey, kitten, crocodile, snake, turtle, spider, owl, frog, pig, mouse, mosquito, flag, plate, spoon, shoes, plane, family, house, vegetable, mouse, mango, banana, school, bag, rainbow.	

In general, three parts of speech were found: adjectives, verbs, and nouns. Receptive vocabulary dominates children's vocabulary acquisition because they access content containing these vocabularies regularly, while expressive vocabulary owned by children is obtained. After all, it is repetitive to watch the content because it is included in the category of favorite content. Children's English vocabulary is acquired from something that they find interesting. One example is the mastery of vocabulary about family members and surrounding objects, which comes from watching the daily content of a family that usually calls according to English designations and introduces surrounding objects in English. Therefore, exciting shows or videos support children in acquiring a lot of English vocabulary.

Based on the interviews with parents, it can be seen that gadgets influence children's language acquisition. Through gadgets in the form of smartphones, tablets, laptops, and PCs, they acquired various vocabulary, both expressive and receptive vocabulary. The results of the vocabulary spoken by the subjects in this study were 12 adjectives, 31 verbs, and 54 nouns. One participant showed his understanding of the shows he watched by describing that the Frozen movie he watched was about a beautiful princess with the power of snow. The Rapunzel movie tells of a princess kidnapped by an evil witch and locked up in her house. In addition, his understanding is also seen in the subject's ability to mention the colors in the surrounding objects using English. Another participant demonstrated vocabulary acquisition through music videos such as the song Let It Go, Barbie and children's songs from Cocomelon, Baby Chacha, or Babybus. Although the subject forgot the lyrics several times and his pronunciation needed to be fluent, he can produce some words. This ability he got because of repetition or habit. He watches videos repeatedly and continuously so as to create understanding, habits, and application. Some participants mentioned using social media in the gadgets widely used today, such as YouTube/YouTube Kids platform, games, and TikTok, that can support children's English vocabulary acquisition.

Concerning the children's familiarity and interest in gadgets, some questions were given to the parents. The first question is on the access to play gadgets. Out of 53 respondents, all parents answered that their children are given access to play gadgets.

Children indicated that they access gadgets to watch and play games. With their age still around 4-6, they can even operate their cell phones with parental supervision.

Regarding children's familiarity and interest in gadgets, several questions were asked to parents. The first question was about access to play gadgets. Out of 53 respondents, all parents answered that their children are given access to play gadgets. Some of the parents' responses showed enthusiasm in answering the researcher's questions *"Iya mbak, anak saya kasih izin buat main hp, biasanya 2 jam setelah pulang sekolah terus tidur siang dulu baru boleh main hp lagi, terus boleh main hp lagi sekitar 1 jam terus siap-siap mau ngaji, pulang ngaji habis maghrib itu baru boleh main hp lagi 1 jam terus belajar"* [Yes, my child is allowed to play smartphones, usually 2 hours after school and then take a nap first and then allowed to play smartphones again, then allowed to play smartphones again for about 1 hour and then get ready for the Koran, after the Koran after maghrib it is only allowed to play smartphones again for 1 hour and then study].

There are also parents who limit their children's access to gadgets. *"Anak tak kasih izin main hp Cuma 2 jam sehari"* [Children are not allowed to play cell phones for only 2 hours a day]. There are also those who do not limit playing gadgets *"Anak tidak saya batasi mbak main hp yang penting tontonannya tidak aneh-aneh, yang penting anakku ga rewel mbak"* [I don't restrict my kids from playing with their cell phones, as long as they don't watch anything weird, as long as my kids don't get cranky]. Children indicated that they access gadgets to watch and play games. With their age still around 4-6, they can even operate their cell phones with parental supervision.

The parents were also asked about the kind of gadgets their children often play. All respondents use mobile phones, and two children also use laptops, tablets, and PCs. Children often access platforms such as YouTube/YouTube Kids, games, TikTok, and Netflix. It is undeniable that nowadays, gadgets not only attract the attention of adults, but also children. They can browse interesting content or play games using their phones, tablets, PCs, and laptops. From the respondents' statements, it can be concluded that children's familiarity with gadgets is because of interesting platforms. They will access and enjoy these platforms with gadgets if they are interested.

Responding to whether the children are interested in learning something from gadgets, especially English, 49 parents stated that their children started learning from their interest in existing platform content. The children can learn many things from there unconsciously. Most parents agree that their children like to watch songs in English, watch English cartoon movies, and usually play games, based on parents' quotes when answering interviews *"Saya ga pernah ngajarin nyanyi nyanyi Inggris tiba-tiba anak saya bisa nyanyi Inggris, sering dia tiba-tiba Frozen"* [I never taught my child to sing English, suddenly my child can sing English, often my child suddenly Frozen]. Another parent said *"Dari nonton video di Youtube sama biasanya nonton film anak saya jadi tau bahasa kosakata warna, atau benda-benda, sesekali saya kalau ada waktu longa r anak saya*

kasih tebakan kecil tentang kosakata” [From watching videos on Youtube and usually watching movies, my child knows the vocabulary language of colors, or objects, occasionally if there is free time I give small guesses about vocabulary to my child]. They can memorize and sing songs like Let It Go, Barbie, Anne Marrie 2002, etc. The songs are well memorized, and children can sing anytime, even if they are not browsing the platform. Only four respondents stated that their children used gadgets for playing random games and streaming YouTube.

On the last question concerning the type of content children prefer to watch using gadgets, the preference is shown in table 2.

Table 2. The Preference

No.	Preference	Percentage	Source	Vocabulary Acquired
1.	Non-English videos	19%	Javanese art, Malaysian cartoons	play, start, finish, save, order, go, dance, sleep, love, ball, beautiful, good, happy.
2.	English Songs & Movies	29 %	Interactive Song Video: Cocomelon, Baby Chaca, BabyBus, Alfablocks, Kids Song	black, white, purple, pink, green, brown, red, yellow, blue, beautiful, good, happy, brush, clean, kiss, play, cry, help, pick, put, take, say, goat, camel, monkey, kitten, crocodile, snake, turtle, spider, owl, frog, pig, mouse, mosquito, flag, plate, spoon, shoes, plane, family, house, vegetable, mouse, mango, banana, school, bag, rainbow, cow, horse, cat, dog, rabbit, shark, fish, duck, bear, book, lamp, bicycle, car, bottle, water, toothbrush, ball, train, bus, truck, brother, sister, mother, father, baby, apple, rain.
			Movie: Frozen, Snow White, Cinderella, Rapunzel, Finding Dory, Up, etc.	kiss, dace, sing, fly, love, sleep, fail, like, paint, look, save, help, take, say, go, see.
3.	Games Online	32%	Freefire, Cooking, Makeup, etc	clean, play, save, look, start, finish, cry, help, pick, put, take, say, search, see, give, keep, listen, make, order, jumping, go, dance, sing, fly, love, sleep, fail, like, paint.

In Figure 1, 19% of the respondents stated that their children do not access English content but watch Javanese art shows and Malaysian cartoons. 29% mentioned English content such as Cocomelon, Baby ChaCha, BabyBus, Alfablocks, Kids Song, The Creative Classroom, Bebefinn, Rainbow Ruby, and many more. In addition, they watch Disney cartoons such as Frozen, Snow White, Cinderella, Rapunzel, Finding Dory, Up, etc. While 32% of the children played online games such as Freefire, cooking, makeup,

and so on that also use English. From the respondents' statements, many children are interested in learning something from gadgets, and parents can take positive benefits that gadgets can be a medium for learning.

3.2. Discussion

As shown in this study, vocabulary acquisition for young children is observable through how they can respond to the conversation, including the ability to understand words and label some vocabulary (see Table 1). Children's vocabulary develops in line with their age. However, in the context of English language acquisition, the children's vocabulary develops in line with their interests. With the rapid development of technology, children can get more facilities to develop their interest in learning languages through gadgets with parental supervision (Wahyuningtyas et al., 2022).

Parents in this study agreed that the gadgets provide a facility for children to learn. It also includes acquiring English vocabulary because of the many exciting features, where children have characteristics that are easily attracted to current technology to learn something (Farahsani et al., 2020). The types of gadgets that children usually use are smartphones or tablets, laptops, and PCs; most of them use their parents' smartphones. The importance of parental supervision when children access gadgets to maximize their learning is because children cannot yet sort out what they can watch (Wahyuningtyas et al., 2022).

Children who access gadgets can master a lot of English vocabulary, both expressive and receptive. Children can mention in English such as numbers, letters, nouns, verbs, colors, fruit names, and singing (see Table 1). Children who watch movies or videos can understand what the movie is about. Watching English improves language skills through exposure to vocabulary obtained from the songs they listen to (Farahsani et al., 2020). There is repetition in watching a video or music repeatedly and continuously so that it creates understanding, habits, and application.

Gadgets present a lot of content that the audience can choose from. The appeal of learning English through gadgets cannot be avoided when children feel engrossed by the features of gadgets (Rahmawati 2020). There are many children's contents that can be an alternative for children. Some parents mentioned Cocomelon, BabyChacha, and Babybus as the most favorite. These videos contain easy-listening children's songs and procedures for doing things that are very interesting to watch. Children also mimic what the characters do besides listening to the songs. Therefore, characterization is an essential factor in attracting viewers.

The various platforms in the gadget present a lot of content that the audience can enjoy. Most parents show their children stories, songs, cartoons, and art in Indonesian, English, or Javanese. It can be one way to learn language and other things. However,

learning from gadgets can improve children's language skills, both mother tongue and English (Faradischa 2020). What they watch can be imitated by them. They can imitate what others do or say at a young age, just like when they watch a video and enjoy it. They not only watch the video but also try to get an idea of what the video is about. After that, they start to imitate, for example, trying to sing the song, saying the words, or dancing like the characters in the song.

Gaps are a medium to start learning English because, from gadgets, children's English vocabulary acquisition will increase over time, provided that the content accessed by children is related to English. Controlled screen time and parental supervision are also crucial factors since, at an early age, children cannot yet determine what is good and bad to watch. In this case, the preschool children in the rural area of Malang benefit from the excellent use of gadgets for acquiring English vocabulary. Compared to preschool children aged 2-6 years in a village in Kenya, their receptive and expressive English vocabulary is influenced by their parent's literacy (Knauer et al., 2019). It occurs since the position of English is their official language. Disparities concerning vocabulary size are shown in Kenya and rural preschool children in southern Chile. The preschool children aged 3-5 years from Araucania village performed lower receptive and expressive vocabulary of Spanish as their second language (Munoz et al., 1989).

However, there are some limitations of the findings in this study. Since this study only took one school in a remote area, it is significant to acknowledge that the findings may not be applicable to children in different geographical areas or educational settings. This study did not involve longitudinal observation or phenomenological analysis for a longer duration. It took the data from the interviews with parents and children who might be subject to self-report bias. Parents might overestimate or underestimate their child's exposure to gadgets and their impact on vocabulary. Children might not accurately recall or describe their experiences. Therefore, further research might address this issue to explore more with a more significant number of students in some areas with a longer duration of research to see whether it influenced the scope and depth of the study.

4. Conclusion

This study explored the impact of gadgets on English vocabulary acquisition in early childhood living in a rural area in Malang. Specifically, this study aims to identify the impact of gadgets on early childhood English vocabulary acquisition. The research results show that receptive and expressive English vocabulary was obtained through gadgets children usually access, such as smartphones, tablets, and laptops/PCs. For example, their language development can be seen in naming the colors of surrounding objects using English. Through music videos, children also gain the ability to sing using English as a foreign language. Apart from that, they can also name various adjectives, nouns, and verbs. The repetition of watching content supports the emergence of understanding, which leads to the addition of children's receptive and expressive vocabulary.

Secondly, this study investigates the factors that support early childhood English vocabulary acquisition from gadgets. The English vocabulary acquisition in rural preschool children observed in this study shows that entertainment content for children using English has become an alternative foreign language learning media for children. Audio and visual stimuli from content presented on children's gadgets make it easier for them to imitate what the characters do, either through songs, movies, or various games. Therefore, character settings are a significant factor in attracting early childhood audiences. Children in the golden period of language development have brain memories large enough to store the vocabulary they have acquired for quite a long period if they continue to train. The more often a child hears English, the more he will absorb English vocabulary and understand it slowly. Children aged 4-6 can acquire English vocabulary through audio-visual media from gadgets.

These facts bring on some recommendations. As parental involvement is considered substantial, screen time control and guidance in gadget use can balance the children's learning experience. The content creators are also expected to develop more edutainment materials to improve children's receptive and expressive vocabulary in English. Further studies are also needed to explore the long-term effect of gadgets on preschool children's vocabulary acquisition, not only in English but also in other languages.

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