Rara and Her Bedtime Story Journey: A Case Study on Language Acquisition by an EFL Young Learner

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Abstract

This study reported four-week English bedtime story of Rara, a young English language learner from Indonesia. A case study approach was employed in this study. Fitri, Rara's mother, was asked to read five different English stories to her on the basis of the period of four weeks regularly. These stories were given as media for children to have comprehensible input. The data were taken from daily journal written by the mother and a semi-structure interview in which was then analyzed and interpreted. The result showed that the child was able to follow the storylines and was able to comprehend them. The story also helped the child acquiring some English vocabularies and fixed utterances naturally. Hence, English bedtime story program can be considered as an alternative way in introducing English to EFL young learners.

Keywords

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The second language acquisition has always been an interesting topic to discuss. Particularly, The disagreement regarding to whether second of foreign language acquisition follows exact route and stage as the first language acquisition ([Doughty & Long](#), 2008; [MacWhinney](#), 2015; [Révész & Michel](#), 2019; [Saville-Troike](#), 2012). However, the SLA researchers tend to have the same view when it comes to the relation between age and language acquisition efficiency. It is widely known that children are able to acquire a second language if they are extensively engaged to that language in their early stage of life. ([Hamilton](#), 2014). In accordance with this finding, many types of research have been conducted to prove that learning language at an early age helps the efficacy of the acquisition. Children can learn and acquire the language much faster than teens or adults do. It is also believed that children are active participants in their acquisition of language. Their language patterns are learned in social contexts while they are interacting with other children and adults. It is further explained that the development of their vocabulary in language are more advanced in children who are frequently exposed to a variety of stories ([Speaker, Taylor, & Kamen](#), 2004).

Young children naturally enjoy listening to stories being read or told. Particularly those who are not able to read yet. In addition, Children who are involved in education programs that utilized storytelling exhibit many positive behaviors related to literacy ([Siahaan](#), 2012) Story reading can improve listening skill, vocabulary development and an increased ability to organize narrative thought of children. In line with this, story as a type of literary text are good model for children to stimulate their personal development in and also facilitate to contribute to readers' cultural as well as language enrichment ([Bernhardt & Krashen](#), 1989).

Bedtime story reading will be more fruitful for the young children if it is utilized graded story reader. The stories which are divided based on level of difficulty so that learner or reader is able to choose the stories within their level of comprehension. This idea will trigger the learner's curiosity as well as motivation to listen or read more for other similar books so that reading or listening to story is not a burden rather than an enjoyable activity for them. The process of picking up the target language such as new vocabulary and grammatical structures are acquired naturally, in much same way that a mother tongue is acquired ([Mason & Krashen](#), 1997).

It is also imperative that parents or teachers play important roles in children's language acquisition. Parents or teachers are the proper model for the L2 learners in acquiring the language ([Phillips & Stern](#), 1986). Therefore, It becomes a common practice that many people do and it is proven method for teaching to read and to develop communicative skill in their native language ([Dulay & Burt](#), 1974). In line with [Dulay & Burt](#), [Whitehurst & Valdez-Menchaca](#) (1988) argues that reading picture books to children who are still struggling to comprehend word in their L1 on regular basis has many linguistic advantages. They generally build up a bigger scope of vocabulary, better comprehension skills, and a greater ability to retell their own experiences quite systematically.

Many studies have been conducted on how young learners acquired English as foreign language. However, most of them did not involve story reading and parents as two key-factors. For example, Cahyono (2003) reported Aida, an EFL learner from Indonesia who resided in Australia. The result showed that the participant acquired her English language as she was greatly exposed to variety of English literacy development during at school. Another research was conducted by Damayanti (2008), which reveals that young age has superiority on acquiring English language and should be used effectively and efficiently. Further, she stated the age was not the only factor in acquiring certain language. The quite recent study was from Hamilton (2014). His study tested the English – Japanese picture book as media for two Japanese children in acquiring English. The mothers were instructed to read the book on certain period of time. The results showed that the children were able to follow the story and acquired a number of vocabularies. Hence, this study tried to fill in the gap and give a quite novelty contribution on related field, particularly language acquisition.

Seeing the fact that bedtime story reading is highly related to children' language acquisition. As it is clearly stated on the title. The study aims to find out the process English as foreign language is acquired by young children through bedtime story reading at the level of vocabulary acquisition. Further, the study will also examine the subject' response toward the program. Hence, two research questions are formulated as follows.

1. How is the bedtime story reading implemented by the mother?
2. How does the child respond toward the bedtime story reading, and what language unit is she able to acquire?

Method

Qualitative descriptive method embracing case study approach is employed in this study. Qualitative method relies on text and images data. The strength of qualitative research derives primarily from its inductive approach. It focuses on specific situation or people (Creswell, 2013, 2014; Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2017). Furthermore, case study is able to portray, analyse and interpret the uniqueness of real individual and situation through accessible account (Cohen, 2007; Creswell, 2007). In addition to this, the explanation about source of data, technique of collecting data as well as data analysis procedure are displayed below.

Source of Data

The data used in this study is texts in the form of word or sentence found in a daily journal. Concerning the method of the collecting data in this study, the researcher collects the data from daily journal written by the mother of the child followed by an interview to gain more comprehensive finding. During the course of the research program, one of Indonesian mother whose name is Fitri participates in this study.

Subject pair (Fitri and Rara): Fitri is a full-time mother who has English education background. She graduated from one of the local teacher training college in Indonesia with English education major. Fitri has a daughter whose name is Rara. She is a 5- year old girl who is interested in story since she was 3 years old. Fitri likes to read her story before going to bed in her native language, Indonesian. She is not yet able to read on his own.

Fitri was given five different English story books. The titles are *bees like Flower*, *Callie Asks for Help*, *Naughty Giants*, *Thumbelina*, and *The Twelve Dancing Princesses*. Those books are

English stories that are crafted purposively for children. They contain lots of colorful pictures that enable to attract children to read it or to at least look at it and help them understand the story line. In addition to this, the words and English phrases are normally repeated along those stories and most of them are high frequency words. The former three stories consist of 100 to 150 words. Therefore, it takes around 10 – 15 minutes to finish reading them. The Later categories as medium story which consist of 150 to 300 words and are taken from children story compilation book entitled a story a day. The book covers are displayed below.

Figure 1. The Book Cover of Shorter Story

Figure 2. The Book Cover of Longer Story

Technique of Collecting Data

Data collecting is one of essential step in conducting a research (Gill et al., 2008). Fitri was asked to write her impression of how she carried out this bedtime story program on a daily journal. This journal was utilized as the source of the data. In addition to this, she was given key questions and guideline in writing her daily journal. Firstly, she was asked to write down how the bedtime story was undergone including the sequences step she took day by day. Specifically, she was also asked to jot down any English word or phrases that Rara, her daughter, asked the meaning of. It was included to record on book log any word or phrases from the selected story that her daughter utterly used during the given period. Secondly, she was highly suggested to ask her daughter Occasionally to retell the chunk of the story in

order to determine whether or not she comprehends it. In addition, she was asked to write down of any issues that she considered become the obstacle for her daughter from either enjoying or learning from the five story books.

In order to gain more in-depth finding, the semi – structure interview is employed as it is tend to be more effective in eliciting the data needed (Adams, 2015). Therefore, the interview with the mother was necessarily conducted. The interview was carried out in about 10 – 15 minutes as a talk in casual manner and within comfortable environment (Tran & Pho, 2020). where the researcher, after asking the permission, could record the interview and take a note if it was necessary. Both data resource; daily journal and interview results, then were utilized and analyzed to answer two main objectives of this research: 1). The implementation of the bedtime story reading; and 2). The language unit that the participant enables to acquire as well as how the subject responds the program.

Data Analysis Procedure

After collecting the data, the researcher conducted the analysis. Firstly, the daily journal written by the mother was collected. Secondly journal is divided into four sections: week 1, week 2, week 3, and week 4. Thirdly, the journal is then classified, analyzed an interpreted based on the objectives of this research.

Results

This section discusses the result of the program solely based on mother's daily journal which was given prior to the study and semi – structure interview in order to clarify the data and gain the finding more profoundly. The data taken from the journal written by the mother was collected after the study was completed. These data showed several insightful findings that worth discussing. The data analysis and discussion are shown as follows.

The Implementation of Bedtime Story Reading

As it is mentioned earlier, the mother was asked to write any English word that her daughter spoke anytime she had a chance to interact with her. She was also asked to write her daughter's response toward the English story being read. There are 30 pages of journal which represent each day of the period of the program. Some important point of the journal that can be drawn and analyzed. The subject firstly attracted to the story by its color, design, as the mother were given 3 different stories. Among the five stories, the child tended to begin the bedtime story by seeing the most attractive one. As the mother stated on the journal before the program was taken place below:

First week data

Excerpt 1. The mother's first impression prior to the program

My daughter love story, I often read her a story in Bahasa Indonesia. When I told her that I would read for her some different stories but change the language into English, she was quite interested (in). I showed her the five different stories and let her to pick up the story she wanted, she picked "the naughty giant". It seems to me that she picked it due to its visual features and its size.

The mother was also expressed her first experience when she read English story for her daughter. She said that her daughter was not really into the story at first. The child just looked at the picture to understand the storyline. The child even asked her to reread the story in Bahasa Indonesia. Therefore, she struggled quite so hard and allocated more time to read the story. This happened for three day respectively as she stated below:

Excerpt 2. Taken from mother's journal on the first day.

I began to read Naughty giant for Rara, she didn't really understand what I read for her. She just interested in the picture inside the story. She even asked me to retell the story in Bahasa Indonesia.

As stated above, the mother facilitated the subject to understand the story by telling in her native language. This is a natural respond as the subject did not start a second language acquisition with a clean slate(Butzkamm, 2007) and she just commence to interact with the foreign language for the first time. Therefore, the subject naturally utilized her L1 language competence to comprehend the story in order to make it specifically accessible for consolidation into the L2. The child tried to, as Hamilton (2014) say, use contextual competences as a way to acquire certain language units and gain comprehension in her first language.

Excerpt 3. Taken from mother's journal on the second day

I showed her five different stories and let her to pick of the story she wanted as I did yesterday. Today, she picked different story, it was the naughty giant it seems to me that she loves it due to its visual features and its size.

Excerpt 4. Taken from mother's journal on the third day.

I showed her the three different stories and let her to pick of the story she wanted as I did yesterday. Today she picked different story, it was Sheriff Callie. it was the last book that she hasn't read yet,

The first week of the program, the mother did not write a lot of new information. However, there was another interesting point on the journal written by the mother. On the seventh day of this program, she explained that her daughter had her read the story in the morning when the story was read last night.

Excerpt 5. Taken from mother's journal on Seventh day

Rara woke up earlier. To my surprises. She asked me to read the "naughty giant "the story I read for her three days ago. I asked her why I should read her the story in the morning. She said that she had a dreamed to be the giant as she showed in the book.

This finding may indicate that the child was getting used to the story being read. The mother was probably quite successful on undergoing the program. It was supported by the interview finding. The mother stated that she read story aloud enough, and had an conversational interaction (Muho & Kurani, 2011). She also asked her daughter to guess what the story about was and made an improvisation to gain the child' interest. Therefore, it was quite meaningful and enjoyable experience for her, and she started to enjoy the program.

Second week data

As the story were often read to the child multiple times, the child was getting used to the storyline, she was even able to retell the story in her native language. Each of the story read at least 5 times during the period of four week of the research. The subject did not seem feeling bored with repeated the story. The mother was even pointed out that her daughter used to have delirious moment using several English words. Only did the mother feel reluctant to repeat the same story for several times.

Excerpt 6. Taken from mother's journal on Tenth day

I caught a moment when Rara was sleeping, she was murmuring several English word such as, book, no, and little sister and some other fuzzy word I couldn't catch. She never had a moment like this before.

In regard the vocabulary acquisition, Rara was able to acquire some of the following English words and phrases during two weeks of trials; "green, help, banana, strawberry, milk shake, little girl, playing, bees likes flower, and some of fixed language expressions such as *that is mine! Help me!*. Those words or utterances can be found in the given stories. The mother reported that her daughter used several terms such as "help me", hello "good morning" spontaneously at appropriate times as it was stated in the journal.

Excerpt 7. Taken from mother's journal on Twelfth day

I found several times Rara greeted me "good morning" or "Hello" when we met in the morning, she was even said "help me *mamah*" when she wanted to change her cloth, or when wanted to take her toys beyond her reach. Sometimes she used other expression "that is mine" when she pointed out the toys belong to her

The child's interest in understanding English word/phrase show positive attitude. During the course, Rara told her mother that she wanted to go to Sheriff Callie' country and speak with her. She also asked her mother whether she could have another different English story. She was also able to identify English language compare to other foreign language such as Russian as it was stated below.

Excerpt 8. Taken from mother's journal on Thirteenth day

One of my daughter favorite TV program is Marsha and the bear. A cartoon program from Russia. Once she watched its Russian version, then she spontaneously said "*ini mah bukan Bahasa Inggris ya?* { it is not English, isn't ?} ". She also used to ask me to go to a bookstore to buy another English story for her.

Above statement might indicate that the child might acquire intrinsic phonological memory skills in which may influence the learning of new word by constraining the retention of unfamiliar phonological sequences. The English exposure that was received by the child might help her in differentiating the phonological features between two different languages at initial phase, but in addition, extent vocabulary will affect the ease of generating appropriate phonological frames to support the phonological representation.

Excerpt 9. Taken from mother's journal on Sixteenth day

Today Rara asked me to bring her to Bookstore, she asked if I could buy her (another) English story.

her interest in English indicated that although the girl was asked to listen to the same story book several times, she might feel that it was enjoyable and addictive activity, this routine implicitly has ignited to literacy habit as it was shown on her mother's daily journal in which Rara asked for more story to be told.

After two weeks of the program, the mother started to introduce the longer story, *The Twelve Dancing Princess* and *Thumbelina*. At the beginning, Rara was not really into the story, she asked her mother to translate several words/phrases including the title. What drew her attention was the picture illustration displaying princesses who were dancing. According to her mother, Rara loved everything about fairy tale. She even collected some princess stories in Bahasa Indonesia, such as Upik Abu, Cinderella and Rapunzel. Therefore, she is quite familiar to those stories. Fitri further explained that Rara asked her several phrases meaning that can be found in *The Twelve Dancing Princess*. Those phrase like; invisible cloak and worn out, and each night. It also took her longer time to finish reading story as she stated below:

Excerpt 10. Taken from mother's journal on Eighteenth day

This story (the twelve dancing princess) was challenging for me, it was not like previous story. I need to work harder to read it for my daughter, she also asked me to repeat the story in Indonesian version, and explain some unfamiliar words (phrases) for her like invisible cloak and worn out.

Third week data

As she just acquainted to English bedtime story less than three weeks, One of the main concerns heading into this bedtimes story program might be child would not tolerate listening to story in English excessively, and to encounter unfamiliar vocabularies that may be too difficult for her to grasp the language.

In the third week, she began to enjoy the longer story, according to Fitri, Rara even begun to imitate and remember some of familiar words, and she articulated those words along with her mother reading the story. To her surprise, in the twentieth day, Rara had already prepared the story and ask her to read it several times.

Excerpt 11. Taken from mother's journal on Twentieth day

Rara was already know the flow of the story, she even remembered several phrases of the story and spoke those (words) loudly as I read along for her. Once I tried to skip some parts of the story, and she protested that I didn't read the story for her well. She even initiated to bring the story book to me and asked me to read for her. She asked me to read it again and asked if I could change the voice to indicate different characters. This happened several times.

The girl's response implicitly showed her growing interest toward English story. Although the later story, twelve dancing princess, is longer and contains more words/phrases than the formers, after having several times of repetition, she began enjoying the story and doing some sound imitation and grasp the meaning of the whole story. The way the mother read the story to her became the media to acquire essential vocabulary from the utterance she produced. Luckily, the mother has sufficient English background and a quite good conduct of English, so she has positive exposure from her mother. This finding also indicated that parent, the mother, plays important role in fostering and introducing Rara to new English words/phrases unconsciously.

Another finding that interesting to discuss is that girl started to what we call as children's language creativity. This one indicating that the girl started to understand the context and was able to insert the word into the phrases properly. In was found on 23rd day of the program, as stated on the journal below:

Excerpt 12. Taken from mother's journal on Twenty third day

Rara asked me what son was in Bahasa Indonesia, I told him that son is a boy child her Alta, her brother, then it is follow with another question " *kalau Rara ?* (how about me ?) ". I told her that she was daughter, then she showed face expression indicating that she understood and said "the twelve dancing daughters and sons "

This finding indicate that Rara tried to negotiate her L1 language competence with the L2 that she was being exposed to. She just simply associating the language with her inner circle language competence. This way is effectively proven be a natural way to acquire the basic vocabulary by children.

Excerpt 13. Taken from mother's journal on Twenty fourth day

I tried to read naught giant and Callie asks for help, Rara still loved it though, and still remember the plot, and some utterances, but she was not as enthusiastic as I read the story about princess or other similar type.

It is understandable that as the story are read to Rara multiple times, it made her grew tired of hearing the same story. Furthermore, those two stories are not her top preferences as it is stated below.

Excerpt 14. Taken from mother's journal on Twenty sixth day

I asked Rara to choose her story before bed. She chose the twelve dancing princesses. Actually, this story has been told for many times. Rara really loves this story, when I read it for her, she kept imitating every single words almost the end of the story, once I asked her " *enggak bosen?* (Don't you feel bored with it?) ". She said that she never feel bored with the story, because she loves princess story and everything about fairy tales.

Fourth week data

On the fourth week of the program, surprisingly, Rara asked for more story to be read every night, she wanted her mother told 3 story respectively for her in a night, so her mother had to spent more time to read the story, and Rara was able to follower her.

Excerpt 15. Taken from mother's journal on Thirtieth day

Today Rara chose three stories altogether. She wanted me to read them at once. I told her that it was too many, but she insisted and begged to me to read them all. Three stories were the twelve dancing princesses, Cinderella and little mermaid. Just like yesterday, Rara repeated almost every single word of the story. After finishing the story, I asked her why she didn't choose naughty giant or Callie asks for help, she said that she didn't like those two stories as much as she liked fairy tale. According to her, those two stories were more compatible for her brother

As the program begin to end, Rara demanded the mother to keep reading her a story. However, the mother felt quite reluctant to keep reading the same stories almost every day.

In addition to this, as she stated on the interview. She sometimes did not have a chance to read it. Finally, she took an initiative to read the story books aloud and record it. After that, she played the audio. Rara, according to her mother, was quite happy with this approach. This finding can probably call a mother's creativity.

Discussion

The child response toward the program and language unit she can acquire

Rara's four weeks bedtime story journey might consider successful in helping her to introduce, acquire some English vocabulary and increase the motivation to comprehend English naturally and enthusiastically. It also has shown some interesting points that worth in-depth discussion particularly about Rara's response, story choice, and parent's role.

Rara showed positive attitude toward the program. She was able to understand the story clearly and comprehended the story line utilizing her contextual skills. She was able to grasp some vocabularies such as *green, help, banana, strawberry, milk shake, little girl, playing, bees, flower*, and some of fixed language expressions such as "that is mine!", "help me please", "once upon a time,". Those words or expressions can easily be found in the given stories. The mother reported that her daughter used several terms such as "that is mine", hello "good morning 'spontaneously at appropriate times as it was stated in the journal. It may indicate that repetitive input allow the language item to be stored in her long – term memory that lead her to make it become procedural and automatize (Robinson, 2005; Criado, 2009) In addition, she persisted to show positive respond toward English story even after the program ended. According to her mother, she continued read Rara story with more varieties of story. She added, Rara also started learning few English words and felt that it was joyful activities.

Parent's persistency and language competency cannot be put aside. The key success of the program is also related to the parent's role. Her persistency in reading the story to her child every night before bed had helped the program underwent well according its plan. The parent admitted herself that it was not easy to read the same 5 story books every day for four weeks. However, she was able to endure until the program ended. She also facilitated Rara to have more stories and keep reading them for her. Apart from the provided story, parent's creativity also played important role. In this research, based on the interview session, the parent without any instruction took an initiative to make an audio version of several stories. She read the storied aloud and recorded them. Then, the recording was played while she showed or read the story to her daughter.

Another key factor that worth -noting relates to parent's English competency, having 4-year of study English in tertiary level and holds English Education diploma are the privilege that Fitri has, the subject child mother. It was understandable that reading English story for Rara is not a big issue for her. In contrast, most parents in Indonesia do not possess English background or confidence to read English story to their children. Therefore. It is highly advisable to equip both parents, mother, and father with proper English skill. It is a necessity to make bedtime story reading in English program work well in larger scope.

Rara was also fond of listening to fairy tales, she chose the twelve-dancing princess over the other stories. The parent has succeeded to give Rara's liberty in choosing the story type. Therefore, the child herself showed less or even no resistance to the story and gained

maximum story exposure during the program. In addition, the Child's story preferences should be facilitated for the long-term plan. It certainly helped her/him to be more actively engaged and more endure to listen to the story. Facilitating every child's preference would also become a factor that helps him/her to sustain and get more exposure to the story being read.

Conclusion

This study has reported the bedtime story program intended for Rara, an EFL young learner who was acknowledged to English for the very first time. Although it cannot be generalized, the study showed that the repeated story read by her mother has helped Rara in acquiring several English words and utterances. Rara showed positive attitudes toward English story. She often used English words phrases or fixed utterances spontaneously at appropriate times during the course given. Apart from the linguistics finding, she also seemed to enjoy and was able to comprehend the story quite well. Choosing appropriate story theme also helped the child to endure along the program given. In addition, her mother has important role as the first role model in articulating certain English words/phrases. Hence, this finding may indicate that English bedtime story reading can be considered as an alternative approach in introducing English to EFL young learners in particular.

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