

## **LEARNING THROUGH THE SCREEN: MALAYSIAN PARENTS’ PERSPECTIVES ON YOUTUBE AND THEIR CHILDREN’S ENGLISH ACQUISITION**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*YouTube is a widely used digital platform that plays a significant role in children’s daily exposure to digital content. Despite its popularity, there is limited research on YouTube’s specific influence on young children’s English language acquisition in non-Western contexts like Malaysia, where English is not the first language. Existing studies often focus on general screen time, leaving a gap in understanding YouTube’s specific role in shaping early language learning. This study addresses this gap by exploring Malaysian parents’ perceptions of YouTube’s impact on their children’s English language development. Using qualitative methods, interviews were conducted with ten parents of children aged five to six who use YouTube. Thematic analysis revealed five key themes: the duration of YouTube access, children’s improvement in English skills, the types of content consumed, YouTube’s effectiveness as a learning platform, and the role of parental supervision. Parents noted that English cartoons, nursery rhymes, and storytelling videos enhanced their children’s speaking abilities, vocabulary acquisition, listening comprehension, and spelling skills. While parents valued YouTube’s accessibility and variety, they raised concerns about inappropriate content and stressed the importance of parental supervision. Monitoring emerged as a crucial parental strategy, with parents actively selecting suitable content and setting clear boundaries to support their children’s education and uphold cultural values.*

**Keywords:** *YouTube, English language development, Parental supervision, children’s language*

### **INTRODUCTION**

The rapid evolution of digital technology has fundamentally changed how children acquire knowledge and develop new skills, particularly in the context of early childhood education. Neelam et al. (2018) stated that preschoolers now rely heavily on digital technology for both educational and entertainment purposes. As digital media becomes increasingly integrated into children’s lives, platforms like YouTube have emerged as crucial tools for both entertainment and education. YouTube offers a diverse range of content, such as movies, songs, game videos and educational videos. This makes YouTube a popular learning tool for children as well as a resource

for parents (Pertiwi et al., 2022). Consequently, a growing number of parents nowadays allow their children to utilise YouTube as a means of early English language acquisition, resulting in an upward trend.

YouTube is a social media platform that offers the dual purpose of providing both entertainment and education (Neelam et al., 2018). YouTube, a globally recognised video-sharing platform, offers a wide variety of content that has significantly impacted children's language and cognitive development. It provides content ranging from simple nursery rhymes to more advanced educational videos, which might aid in the development of vocabulary, pronunciation, grammar, and overall English language proficiency. In past studies, it was found that learners' speaking proficiency, including fluency, vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, and accuracy, improved when they frequently engaged with YouTube videos (Muslem et al., 2022; Neumann & Herodotou, 2020).

A study by Khiu and Hamzah (2018) revealed that 96.6% of children had used mobile devices, with most starting before the age of 1 and using them daily by age 2. These children, often referred to as *digital natives*, have grown up surrounded by technology and are naturally comfortable using it. This early exposure highlights how digital media has become an integral part of their lives. In contrast, older generations, known as *digital immigrants*, had to adapt to technology later in life (Riegel & Mete, 2017). This difference helps explain why young people tend to use platforms like YouTube as a learning tool, given their natural affinity for technology (Sahriana & Sugiyo Pranoto, 2018).

Despite the widespread use of YouTube by children, there is an ongoing debate among educators, parents, and researchers about its impact on children's English language skills. Some argue that platforms like YouTube offer engaging and multimodal content that supports language acquisition by exposing children to authentic speech patterns and diverse vocabulary (Osias Kit et al., 2023; Linuwih & Trihastutie, 2020). However, others raise concerns about its long-term effects, such as overreliance on screen-based learning, the variability of content quality, and potential exposure to inappropriate material, which could hinder language development and social skills (Byeon & Hong, 2015; Madigan et al., 2019). Furthermore, the quality of content is a critical factor, with non-child-focused media offering limited linguistic benefits (Christakis et al., 2009). This study aims to explore Malaysian parents' perceptions of YouTube's influence on their children's English development, examining whether they perceive it as a beneficial tool for learning or a source of challenges and risks.

## **Problem Statement**

Traditional methods of language learning, such as books and classroom instruction, have long been central to education. However, the rapid rise of digital technology and the shift towards digitalisation have significantly altered media consumption patterns. Fewer people are engaging with traditional media like books and newspapers (Fourati, 2017; Moursad et al., 2023), with platforms such as YouTube becoming increasingly popular among both adults and children. Currently, YouTube's diverse and dynamic content has made it a preferred choice for children over traditional television, raising questions about its role in language development.

Although YouTube has become a dominant platform in children's media consumption, research on its influence on young children's language development remains limited, particularly in non-Western contexts like Malaysia. Much of the existing literature examines digital media's broader effects on cognitive and behavioural outcomes (Massaroni et al., 2024). For instance, studies often highlight the risks of excessive screen time, such as reduced parent-child interaction and delays in language acquisition (Byeon & Hong, 2015; Christakis et al., 2009). In the Malaysian setting, a recent study by Joginder Singh et al. (2021) explored parents' perspectives on screen time effects on children's language development, revealing that most parents believed screen exposure contributed positively to language skills. However, their study focused broadly on screen time rather than YouTube's specific role in language learning. This highlights a gap in understanding how YouTube, as a distinct platform with its unique content and features, shapes language learning, particularly in multilingual and culturally diverse settings where English is not the first language.

Therefore, this study addresses the gap by focusing on Malaysian parents' perspectives on YouTube's influence on their children's language development. As primary caregivers and close observers, parents are uniquely positioned to offer insights into how children engage with digital media, the kinds of content they prefer, and how these experiences contribute to language learning. Understanding their perspectives is critical to assessing YouTube's broader implications for early language learning in a rapidly digitising world. Additionally, the study explores parents' strategies for mitigating potential risks, such as inappropriate content, while leveraging YouTube's educational potential, thus contributing to the broader discourse on integrating digital platforms into early childhood education.

### **Research Objectives**

The study aims to achieve the following objectives:

- (1) To examine the influence of YouTube on children's English language development through parents' observations.
- (2) To determine whether parents perceive YouTube as a helpful or harmful resource for their children's English language skills.

### **Research Questions**

The following two research questions were addressed in this study:

- (1) How do children acquire English language from YouTube based on parents' observations?
- (2) Is YouTube an effective platform for children's English language acquisition according to parents' perceptions?

### **Significance of the Study**

This study addresses a gap in linguistic research by examining parents' perceptions of YouTube's influence on children's English language development in the Malaysian context. As a multilingual nation, Malaysia is home to languages like *Bahasa Malaysia*, Mandarin, Tamil, and various indigenous languages, with English coexisting alongside them. Although English is not the first language for most Malaysians, globalisation has prompted many parents, particularly in urban

areas, to introduce English to their children from an early age (Mohamed Salleh, 2024; Mohamed Salleh et al., 2022). One significant avenue through which children are exposed to English is digital media, particularly platforms like YouTube. Parents, being the closest observers of their children's learning and media habits, play a crucial role in shaping how these platforms are used in daily life. Understanding their perspectives is essential for guiding informed decisions on balancing the educational benefits of YouTube with potential drawbacks. Additionally, the findings from this study will aid educators in designing more effective and engaging language-learning experiences that incorporate digital media. By considering parents' concerns and opinions, educators can better integrate YouTube and similar tools into language-learning curricula, ultimately improving children's learning outcomes. This study contributes to the broader discourse on the role of digital media in child language development and provides practical insights into how it can support children's linguistic growth.

## **METHODS**

This study aimed to explore parental perceptions of YouTube's effectiveness as a platform for children's language learning, particularly English. It examined how Malay children, who predominantly speak Malay at home, acquire English language through YouTube based on parental observations, and assessed whether parents perceive YouTube as an effective tool for this purpose. Semi-structured interviews were employed as the primary qualitative method, which involves gathering descriptive data through written or spoken words (Auliya & Fadlilah, 2018) to gain deeper insights into participants' perspectives.

The parents involved in this study are bilingual Malay-English speakers, with English being the more dominant language they use in daily interactions, particularly when discussing their children's educational experiences. While Malay is the primary language spoken at home among these families, parents often switch to English in contexts related to their children's schooling, language development, or use of digital platforms such as YouTube. Conducting the interviews in English ensured participants could comfortably articulate their observations and perspectives regarding their children's English language learning. This bilingual proficiency allowed parents to provide nuanced responses, aligning with the study's focus on English as the target language of analysis.

### **Participants**

Participants for this study were selected using purposive sampling to match the study's objectives (Andrade, 2021). The sample involved 10 parents of preschool-aged children, specifically those aged five to six, who reported that their children regularly watched YouTube for 1–3 hours per day. The children attended preschools located in Tangkak, Muar, and Johor Bahru in Johor, Malaysia. These locations were selected to represent a mix of urban and semi-urban settings, reflecting varying levels of access to digital media resources. The chosen preschools were known for their emphasis on English-language learning, ensuring the participants' relevance to the study's objectives.

The sample size of 10 parents was deemed appropriate for this qualitative study as it enabled an in-depth exploration of individual experiences and perspectives. Malterud et al. (2016) highlight the concept of *information power*, which supports smaller sample sizes in qualitative

research when participants are closely aligned with the study's objectives and provide rich, meaningful data. In this study, the selected parents met these criteria, contributing relevant and sufficient data to address the research questions, making 10 participants suitable for achieving the study's aims.

Conducting interviews with parents of preschool-aged children required a rigorous process to gain entry into the preschools. Approvals were obtained from the preschool administrators, who permitted the researcher to contact parents directly. Consent forms outlining the study's objectives and procedures were provided to the schools and distributed to the parents, ensuring ethical compliance and informed participation. These preschools were chosen because they allowed the researcher to conduct interviews with parents after obtaining both administrative permission and informed parental consent. This approach highlights the importance of establishing trust and adhering to ethical guidelines when working with vulnerable populations such as young children and their families.

By targeting parents whose children watched English videos on YouTube, the study ensured that participants could provide detailed insights into the phenomenon under investigation. Participants were recruited through purposive sampling, facilitated by preschool teachers who distributed advertisements about the study to parents via WhatsApp groups. This recruitment method ensured that the participants were relevant to the study's focus on YouTube's impact on children's English language development. While purposive sampling limits the generalisability of findings to the broader population (Rai & Thapa, 2015), the study's exploratory and interpretive nature justified this targeted approach.

### **Data collection and analysis**

Data for this study were collected through semi-structured interviews, comprising five open-ended questions. These interviews were designed to gain a thorough understanding of parents' views on the influence of YouTube on their children's English language development. Each interview session lasted approximately 20 to 25 minutes and was conducted online, with sessions recorded after obtaining participants' informed consent. The interviews were conducted in English to ensure comfort and ease of communication, as the participating parents were bilingual Malay-English speakers who often used English in educational contexts related to their children. The five interview questions were as follows:

*1. How often do you allow your children to watch YouTube videos?*

This question aimed to explore screen time habits and frequency of access to YouTube, providing context for the children's exposure to the platform.

*2. What types of YouTube videos do your children watch to improve their English language skills?*

This question investigated content preferences and their perceived role in children's language learning.

*3. Could you describe the specific areas where your child's English skills have improved since they started watching YouTube? This includes listening, writing, and speaking.*

This question focused on identifying and categorising the specific linguistic skills parents observed as improved.

4. *Have you noticed any positive or negative impacts on your child's English skills because of YouTube? Give examples.*

This question sought to gather a balanced perspective on the advantages and drawbacks of YouTube use for language development.

5. *How do you feel about YouTube? Do you believe it is a reliable resource for your children to learn English? Why or why not?*

This question explored parents' overall perceptions of YouTube's effectiveness as a learning tool.

### **Development and validation of semi-structured questions**

The semi-structured interview questions were developed based on a review of existing literature on digital media's impact on early language learning and parental engagement (Massaroni et al., 2024; Neumann & Herodotou, 2020). The questions were designed to align with the study's research objectives and capture rich, qualitative data on parents' observations and perceptions.

The interview questions were also reviewed by an academic peer with expertise in child language acquisition to ensure the questions were relevant, clear, and comprehensive. The expert evaluated the questions for consistency with the study's objectives, clarity to avoid ambiguity, and coverage of key aspects of children's English language development through YouTube. Based on the expert's feedback, minor revisions were made to improve the wording and structure of the questions. For example, prompts were added to question 3 to help parents focus on specific language skills (listening, writing, and speaking). Similarly, question 4 was adjusted to invite examples of both positive and negative impacts, ensuring balanced responses.

An interview protocol was developed to guide the data collection process systematically and ensure consistency across all interviews. The protocol included clear instructions for conducting the interviews, outlining the steps to be followed before, during, and after each session. Procedures for obtaining informed consent were detailed to ensure ethical compliance, including explaining the study's objectives and securing participants' agreement to record the sessions. The protocol also provided guidelines for using follow-up questions to encourage participants to elaborate on their responses, leading to richer and detailed data collection. Additionally, strategies were included to ensure participant comfort during the online sessions, such as establishing a relaxed conversational tone and addressing any technical or logistical concerns before the interviews began.

### **Triangulation of data**

To ensure the validity and reliability of the findings, triangulation was applied through:

- a. cross-checking interview data: Participants' responses were compared across the dataset to identify recurring themes, ensuring the results were supported by multiple participants.

b. relating findings to existing research: The identified themes were compared with past studies on digital media and language acquisition to contextualise the results within broader academic discussions.

This approach strengthened the findings by grounding them in both participant data and established research, providing a clear and well-rounded understanding of the research questions.

## **Data analysis**

The interviews were transcribed using ELAN (Sloetjes & Wittenburg, 2008), a software to annotate and analyse audio and video data. ELAN enables transcription by synchronising audio with text, making it particularly useful for qualitative studies. Approximately 100 to 150 minutes of transcribed data were generated for this study. To ensure reliability, an academic peer validated the transcriptions for accuracy and consistency. Thematic analysis, as outlined by Clarke and Braun (2017), was then applied to systematically analyse the data. This process involved familiarising with the transcripts, identifying key phrases, coding recurring ideas, and grouping related codes into themes. Each theme was interpreted in relation to the research questions and supported by insights from the literature review. The results were presented thematically, with detailed descriptions provided for each theme, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of the findings.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The analysis of parents' responses provides a nuanced understanding of how YouTube contributes to children's English language development. Five key themes emerged from the data: *the duration of YouTube access, the improvement of children's English skills, the types of content children engage with, YouTube's effectiveness as a learning platform, and the role of parental supervision*. These findings offer crucial insights into the opportunities and challenges parents encounter when using YouTube as a language learning tool for their children.

### **Duration of YouTube Access**

Parents reported varied strategies for managing their children's screen time with YouTube, balancing its educational benefits against concerns about overuse. While some parents strictly limited usage to weekends, others allowed daily access, reflecting varying attitudes toward screen time management. One parent stated, "*I only allow my children to watch YouTube three times in a week, and it's only on weekends.*" Another explained, "*I allow them to watch YouTube only on weekends, so it is about two times per week.*" These restrictions stemmed from concerns about overexposure and the potential impact on other developmental activities, such as physical play and social interactions.

The parental strategy to limit screen time is supported by research demonstrating that reduced screen exposure promotes children's participation in physical and social activities, which are essential for holistic development. For example, Madigan et al. (2019) show that limiting screen time enhances opportunities for active play and face-to-face interactions, which are crucial for developing social and motor skills. Similarly, Vohr et al. (2021) highlight that balanced

routines incorporating non-screen-related activities lead to improved cognitive and emotional development.

In contrast, some parents allowed daily access to YouTube, highlighting its dual role as an educational resource and a tool for managing parenting challenges. One parent shared, *“Two or three times per day, depending on the situation, such as when the child is having a tantrum. To calm the situation.”* Another parent noted, *“Every day, and not exceeding five hours per day.”* However, the majority of parents—six in total—limited YouTube use to 1–3 hours daily. One parent explained, *“My children only watch YouTube for one hour per day,”* while another stated, *“I only allow my children to watch YouTube for one hour to one and a half hours, three times per day.”*

The American Academy of Pediatrics (2024) recommends that children aged 2 to 5 years have less than one hour of screen time per day. While limited screen use within these guidelines can support developmental benefits, such as improved language skills and cognitive abilities when paired with educational content, exceeding the recommended duration may lead to negative outcomes. Research highlights that prolonged screen time, particularly beyond three hours daily, is associated with delayed social skills, reduced physical activity, and challenges in managing emotions (Madigan et al., 2019).

These findings indicate the diverse approaches parents take to regulate their children’s YouTube use, reflecting varying attitudes and circumstances. While some parents closely adhered to recommended limits, others balanced perceived benefits against practical parenting needs. The study also highlights the need for clear and practical strategies to help parents manage screen time effectively while supporting their children’s overall development.

### **Children’s Improvement in English Skills**

A unanimous theme among parents was the observable improvement in their children’s English skills, which they attributed to consistent exposure to YouTube content. Parents provided detailed insights into how their children’s English language skills improved through exposure to YouTube content, focusing on speaking, vocabulary acquisition, listening comprehension, and, to a lesser extent, spelling skills.

#### **Speaking Skills**

Speaking skills were the most commonly reported area of improvement. One parent shared, *“I can notice that my children slowly improved in their vocabulary and speaking skills. With repeated exposure to new words, they start to understand them and use them in their daily life.”* Another parent highlighted, *“As he watches English cartoons and hears English words repeatedly used, he slowly mimics or tries to say the words. Therefore, his speaking skills improved.”* Similarly, a parent stated, *“His speaking skills improved when they watch English videos on YouTube.”* These observations indicate how consistent exposure to spoken English in engaging formats supports children’s ability to articulate and use new words in conversation.

## **Vocabulary Acquisition**

Parents also emphasised their children's increased vocabulary because of YouTube content. One parent shared, *"In listening, they repeat simple words like 'ball' several times to remember them."* Another noted, *"When he hears English words on television or radio, he is able to translate the words without my help. When the characters in the cartoon say certain words, my child will repeat them."* These accounts show how repetitive audiovisual input enables children to internalise and apply new vocabulary in daily contexts. This finding is consistent with studies showing that repetitive phrases in songs and rhymes enhance children's ability to recall and use new vocabulary (Linuwih & Trihastutie, 2020; Grofcikova & Macajova, 2021).

## **Listening Comprehension**

Parents frequently observed improvements in their children's listening comprehension. One parent explained, *"Based on my observation, my child listens carefully to what is being said in the videos and then applies what she heard in her speaking."* Another parent added, *"Listening to nursery rhymes and songs helps my children understand and remember words better."* These experiences suggest that audiovisual content, particularly songs and rhymes, is an effective tool for enhancing children's listening skills by exposing them to natural speech patterns and word usage.

## **Spelling Skills**

Although less commonly reported compared to speaking and listening, some parents observed their children making progress in spelling skills. One parent noted, *"My children are starting to be able to spell simple English words."* Another shared, *"Sometimes I use YouTube to teach him to spell simple words after he hears them in the videos."* These observations highlight the potential of YouTube to support early literacy development by exposing children to written words in engaging and contextual formats. The reported improvements also suggest that pairing YouTube content with parental involvement—such as guiding children to connect spoken words with their written forms—can enhance spelling skills. While this area was not a primary focus of YouTube use, it illustrates how audiovisual content can encourage the development of foundational literacy when integrated with intentional learning activities at home.

In summary, parents consistently reported improvements in their children's speaking, vocabulary, listening comprehension, and spelling skills due to regular exposure to YouTube content. These findings highlight the effectiveness of YouTube as a language-learning tool, especially when combined with parental supervision and complementary learning activities at home.

## **Types of Content Children Engage With**

The type of YouTube content children watched significantly influenced their language learning experiences. Many parents observed that their children gravitated toward entertainment-focused videos, such as nursery rhymes, cartoons, and storytelling. One parent shared, *"She mostly watches English cartoons such as Thomas and Friends, Didi and Friends, and Cocomelon."* Another added, *"English songs, cartoons, and learning movies like Animal Planet help my children learn."*

These videos were appreciated for their engaging and repetitive nature, which parents noted helped their children acquire new vocabulary and improve pronunciation. For instance, a parent remarked, *“Nursery rhymes like Didi and Friends really help them understand and repeat words.”*

In addition to entertainment, some parents emphasised the value of educational content. One parent explained, *“They can only watch channels with educational content, arts and crafts, or even educational gaming channels.”* Another shared, *“I use the YouTube Kids app for my children to learn English.”* These preferences reflect a deliberate effort by parents to balance entertainment with structured learning, allowing their children to engage with content that not only entertains but also explicitly teaches language skills such as vocabulary and phonics.

Concerns about inappropriate content frequently arose in parents’ discussions. One parent cautioned, *“There can also be negative impacts, as some content is inappropriate. It is the parents’ responsibility to filter and select suitable content.”* Another parent highlighted, *“Many videos in English contain pictures that are not in line with Islam. It is important to filter out videos that may not align with our values.”* These remarks highlight the need for active parental mediation in curating content to ensure its appropriateness with cultural and religious values.

Research supports these parental observations, showing that entertainment-based videos capture children’s attention and encourage language learning through engaging formats. Educational videos, on the other hand, provide structured learning opportunities that target specific linguistic skills, such as vocabulary building and pronunciation (Anshary & Perangin-Angin, 2024).

The role of parental supervision in managing content and guiding children’s screen time is critical. Study highlights the need for careful monitoring to minimise risks, such as exposure to inappropriate material, even on platforms designed for children like YouTube Kids (Knorr, 2021). Parents’ active involvement ensures that children benefit from the educational potential of YouTube while avoiding potential drawbacks.

In summary, the choices parents made in selecting content—whether entertainment, educational, or a combination of both—greatly influenced their children’s language-learning experiences. By combining engaging content with educational value and ensuring appropriate material, parents are able to reap the maximum benefits of YouTube for their children’s English language development.

### **YouTube as an Effective Learning Platform**

Parents expressed diverse perspectives on YouTube’s effectiveness as a platform for their children’s English language learning. Many appreciated its accessibility, variety of content, and engaging nature. One parent remarked, *“YouTube provides a different learning experience compared to traditional books. It helps children learn English anytime and anywhere.”* Another shared, *“YouTube is a good platform for learning, especially for children. As long as it is under supervision and not excessive, a lot of knowledge can be gained.”* These perspectives resonate with the study by Kumar et al. (2023), which analysed the academic quality of children’s videos on YouTube and highlighted the platform’s potential as an educational resource.

Parents highlighted the diversity and richness of YouTube content as one of its greatest advantages. They observed that the platform enabled their children to learn English in meaningful and engaging ways. One parent explained, *“My children watch English cartoons, songs, and stories, and they learn new words by repeating what they hear.”* Another noted, *“The variety of videos helps my children pick up new vocabulary and improve their pronunciation, even when they are just having fun watching.”* This observation reflects research suggesting that multimodal content—combining visuals, audio, and storytelling—supports language development by engaging multiple senses and making learning experiences more interactive and memorable (Anshary & Perangin-Angin, 2024).

Despite its benefits, some parents expressed caution regarding YouTube’s limitations as a learning tool. One parent commented, *“YouTube can be fun and engaging but may contain inaccurate explanations or strong accents that confuse children.”* Another stated, *“Parents need to monitor their children’s usage because some content might not be suitable.”* These concerns are consistent with studies highlighting the variability in content quality on digital platforms and the potential risks of relying on unregulated material (Knorr, 2021; Garlen & Hembruff, 2021).

Moderation was a recurring theme among parents. One parent emphasised, *“Excessive watching is not encouraged. Parents need to control and monitor their children’s usage.”* Another elaborated, *“YouTube is not a replacement for traditional learning. It is a tool, but it must be used responsibly and with limits.”* Research supports this view, showing that while platforms like YouTube can enrich traditional learning, they cannot substitute structured educational practices that involve clear goals and consistent instruction (Massaroni et al., 2024).

Additionally, parents recognised that the platform’s effectiveness largely depended on their involvement. One parent explained, *“It is a reliable source as long as parents are there to guide and monitor what the children are watching.”* This highlights the importance of active parental engagement, which research has shown improves children’s understanding and interaction with digital content (Kaya, 2020).

In conclusion, while parents generally recognised YouTube as a useful and accessible platform for English language learning, its effectiveness was enhanced by active parental involvement and thoughtful regulation of its use. By offering diverse and engaging content, YouTube can complement traditional learning approaches. However, addressing concerns about content quality, overuse, and moderation remains essential to ensuring that its advantages outweigh its drawbacks.

### **The Role of Parental Supervision**

Parental supervision emerged as a repeated concern throughout the interviews, with parents emphasising its importance in making YouTube an effective tool for children’s English language development. Parents consistently highlighted the need to be actively involved in their children’s viewing habits. One parent explained, *“Parents play an important role in constantly monitoring the videos their children watch and watching them together.”* Another shared, *“I only allow my children to watch channels with educational content, like arts and crafts or educational gaming*

*channels.*” These responses illustrate the approaches parents used to ensure that their children’s screen time was beneficial and appropriate.

Many parents described co-viewing as a key strategy for enhancing learning. One parent remarked, *“When I watch videos with my child, I can explain new words and discuss what they see.”* This interactive approach transformed passive viewing into a shared activity, enabling children to better engage with and understand what they watched. Researchers support this practice, showing that co-viewing helps clarify content and promotes meaningful discussions that enhance language acquisition (Neumann & Herodotou, 2020; Imaniah et al., 2020).

Setting clear limits on screen time was another major aspect of supervision. One parent noted, *“YouTube is a good platform for learning, but parents need to control and monitor their children’s usage. Excessive watching is not encouraged.”* Another parent added, *“I allow my children to watch YouTube for one hour to one and a half hours per day, but it is under strict supervision.”* These strategies are consistent with studies recommending controlled screen time to minimise potential risks such as overexposure and dependency, while allowing children to engage with educational content effectively (Joginder Singh et al., 2021).

Parents frequently expressed concerns about the appropriateness of content available on YouTube. One parent observed, *“Many videos in English contain pictures that are not in line with Islam. It is important to filter out videos that may not align with our values.”* Another warned, *“Even YouTube Kids can contain inappropriate content. Parents need to monitor their children’s usage.”* These comments highlight the challenges parents face in ensuring that their children are exposed to materials that follow family and cultural values. Several research (Chuttur & Nazurally, 2022; Neumann & Herodotou, 2020) has shown that even child-focused platforms can include unsuitable content, making parental oversight crucial.

In summary, parental supervision was crucial in shaping children’s YouTube experiences for language development. By carefully selecting content, setting boundaries, and actively participating in their children’s viewing, parents created an environment where YouTube could complement traditional learning methods while addressing potential risks.

## **Ethical Considerations**

This study adhered to ethical principles to ensure participant well-being and privacy. Parents were fully informed about the study’s objectives and methods before providing written consent. Participation was voluntary, with the option to withdraw at any time without consequences. To protect confidentiality, interview responses were anonymised, and audio recordings securely stored with restricted access. Online interviews were conducted in a familiar virtual setting to minimise disruption. Recognising the involvement of parents as proxy informants for preschool-aged children, questions were carefully phrased to avoid discomfort. The research methods underwent peer review to ensure cultural sensitivity and ethical compliance, ensuring the study was conducted responsibly and respectfully.

## CONCLUSION

This study demonstrated that Malaysian parents observed notable improvements in their preschool-aged children's English language skills through regular YouTube use. Key areas of development included speaking abilities, vocabulary expansion, listening comprehension, and early spelling skills. These improvements were linked to engaging content such as English songs, nursery rhymes, and cartoons, which, while primarily entertainment-focused, were recognised by parents for their educational value in promoting language learning. Most children in the study accessed YouTube for one to three hours daily. When combined with active parental involvement, this usage supported language development, highlighting YouTube's potential as a supplementary tool for early language acquisition.

Parents praised YouTube for its accessibility and variety of content but raised concerns about potential risks such as exposure to inappropriate material, excessive screen time, and dependency. These concerns highlighted the necessity of supervision, with parents playing an active role in curating content, setting screen time boundaries, and engaging with their children during viewing. This approach allowed parents to optimise YouTube's educational potential while addressing its limitations.

The study had certain limitations, including its focus on parents of preschool-aged children, which limits the broader applicability of the findings. Future research should involve a more diverse participant pool, including children from different age groups and socio-economic backgrounds, to provide a more comprehensive understanding of YouTube's role in language acquisition.

In the digital age, YouTube offers a valuable platform for language learning, combining accessible and engaging content with opportunities for early childhood education. However, parental guidance remains essential to ensure that children are exposed to appropriate material and maintain a healthy balance between screen time and other developmental activities. This study contributes to the growing understanding of how digital platforms can support language acquisition, emphasising the importance of integrating these tools into early learning environments with thoughtful supervision and management.

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