
YOUTUBE AS A LEARNING TOOL: SHAPING ENGLISH PROFICIENCY AND DAILY PHRASES IN A YOUNG DAYAKESE

Novely Esterika Paulina¹, Elanneri Karani², Indra Perdana³, Joni Bungai⁴

Universitas Palangka Raya; Indonesia

Correspondence E-mail; novelyesterika07@gmail.com

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Abstract

This study explores a young Dayakese individual's acquisition of English spoken expressions through YouTube as a learning medium. Employing a qualitative case study design, data were collected from naturalistic observation, semi-structured interviews with the subject's mother and aunt, and documentation of daily English utterances from video recordings spanning the subject's development from infancy to age seven. The population consists of children in a multilingual Dayakese-speaking environment, with a purposive sample focusing on one child with frequent exposure to English content on YouTube. Data were analyzed through transcription, categorization, and thematic analysis to examine pronunciation, vocabulary acquisition, fluency, and grammatical development. The findings highlight YouTube's potential as an accessible and effective language learning tool in communities where English is not the dominant language, offering valuable insights for educators, parents, and language learners.

Keywords

Language acquisition, Young Dayakese, YouTube.



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INTRODUCTION

Technology now aids English learning through social media, apps, websites, and videos (Latifah, 2019). Innovative tools significantly increase student satisfaction (Alobaid, 2020). Learning needs complexity, adaptability, and long-term life skills, requiring effective digital mediums. The COVID-19 pandemic forced rapid adaptation to online learning (ABIDA, 2020), replacing traditional classrooms. YouTube is a popular 21st-century learning platform (Sahayu, 2020), growing since 2005 (Yusuf, 2020). It offers opportunities to practice speaking with native speakers. YouTube significantly impacts children's language development (Poramathikul et al., 2020).

Interaction with proficient adults in natural settings helps language acquisition (Rudd & Lambert, cited in Poramathikul et al., 2020). Exposure to other languages boosts bilingualism and language skills (Listiani et al., 2021). Digitization makes English information accessible. The internet makes learning sources affordable and limitless. English remains crucial for global connection, offering better learning support for children in the digital age. Many toddlers speak English before school (Nugroho, 2020), influenced by digital media and parents. Global media exposure impacts early English learning in Indonesia. English is found everywhere, not just in classrooms.

Children can learn through YouTube's educational videos with engaging audio-visual content like songs and stories. Researchers agree that YouTube improves speaking abilities (Saed et al., 2021; Albahlal, 2019; Balbay & Kilis, 2017; Rusgandi & Ashari, 2019; Shofatunnisa et al., 2021). Teachers view YouTube as valuable for speaking skills (Binmahboob, 2020), motivating struggling learners. YouTube can be a key tool for young bilinguals in English Language Teaching (ELT). However, parents must ensure meaningful and continuous learning. Technology should not replace family interaction in early development (Kilag et al., 2022).

Parents need to support their children's cognitive and language skills development. They should reinforce learning from the media with real-life examples. Early language acquisition is influenced by surrounding speech and media. More exposure leads to better recall and imitation. Interaction involves a physical and emotional connection. Proper English use is vital for 21st-century life, a challenge for multilingual learners. For Dayakese children in Indonesia, English is a foreign language after Indonesian and their local language. An English introduction is crucial for global participation without losing cultural identity.

This study analyzes a young Dayakese's English spoken expressions from daily life due to YouTube's positive impact on communication skills and vocabulary. Inspired by a young Dayakese

learner acquiring English from age one via YouTube, this research investigates YouTube's impact on her spoken expression development, vocabulary, pronunciation, and natural usage adaptation. YouTube offers accessible, engaging, and varied content supporting interactive learning for young children. The findings are expected to shed light on how digital media can support early language acquisition in minority communities.

METHOD

This descriptive qualitative case study investigates the English spoken expression development of a young *Dayakese* individual. The data were in the form of seven years of video recordings, were collected and transcribed. These expressions were then classified based on meaning and communicative function within the child's daily life. A longitudinal approach tracked vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, and language use changes across different contexts. The analysis focused on qualitatively describing the improvements in language proficiency and shifts in language use.

The research subject was a seven-year-old *Dayakese* child from Palangka Raya, exposed to a multilingual environment and YouTube educational videos. Purposive sampling was employed based on specific criteria: age, YouTube exposure, English fluency, consistent exposure, and engagement with educational content. This single case study was chosen due to its unique nature as a relevant example of the phenomenon. Data collection involved analyzing existing video recordings and applying an analytic rubric to assess the child's English speaking skills, focusing on spoken expressions.

Data analysis involved descriptive methods to detail the characteristics of the acquired spoken expressions. The researcher directly and indirectly observed the child's language use through the recordings, relating different aspects and grouping data into categories. The analyzed data were then classified based on the assessment rubric's key points: accuracy, fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary, and comprehensibility of the spoken expressions. This systematic categorization enabled a clearer understanding of the child's linguistic strengths and areas for improvement.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

Data were collected through observation, interviews, and documentation. Observations spanned from the subject's infancy to her current age of seven. The researcher documented the child's English speech in daily activities. This study focused on English spoken expression acquisition resulting from YouTube use. The child's parent and aunt were interviewed using five questions following observations. Video recordings of the child were transcribed and analyzed as primary data sources. The child's natural spoken expressions, including sentences and phrases, were captured.

Direct observation began in the subject's infancy, as the researcher lived nearby. Indirect observation involved collecting videos of the child's daily English conversations from 2019 to 2025. Few videos were available from before 2019, when the child was under two. Thus, observable daily spoken expressions were primarily from the age of two to the present. An assessment rubric was used during observation to enhance data reliability and validity. This approach, as supported by Ayhan & Türkyılmaz (2015), promotes consistency and objectivity by establishing reasonable expectations for learners. The observations result in the following tables:

Table 1. Table of Language Acquisition Milestones

Age Range	Period	Key Milestones (English)	Characteristics (Non-Native Context)	Implication
0-12 Months	Pre-linguistic	Crying, cooing, babbling Responds to sounds, voices (English) Recognizes familiar words (English)	Primarily exposed to English. May show early preference for English sounds.	Focus on exposure to English sounds and rhythm. Use songs, rhymes, and interactive play. Parent/caregiver interaction in English is crucial.
12-18 Months	One-word stage	Uses single words (English) (e.g., "mama," "dada," "ball") Understands simple instructions (English) Starts to imitate words (English)	Vocabulary is likely limited to high-frequency English words in the home.	Introduce basic English vocabulary related to routines and objects. Use visuals and gestures. Repetition and simple commands.
18-24 Months	Two-word stage	Combines two words (English) (e.g., "more juice," "baby eat") Vocabulary	Grammar is not fully developed. Overgeneralization may occur.	Focus on simple English sentence structures and word order. Encourage communication through play.

		expands rapidly (English) Starts to use simple phrases (English)		
2-3 Years	Telegraphic stage	Uses short sentences (English) (e.g., "I play ball") Asks simple questions (English) (e.g., "What's that?") Uses pronouns (English) (e.g., "I," "me")	May struggle with complex English grammar. Pronunciation may be influenced by L1 (Dayak or Indonesian). Limited spontaneous output in English outside the home.	Expand English vocabulary. Introduce basic grammar through games and stories. Create a low-anxiety environment for speaking.
3-4 Years	Early multi- word stage	Uses longer sentences (English) (3-5 words) Starts to use plurals and past tense verbs (English) Tells simple stories (English)	Grammatical errors are common. Exposure to Indonesian may lead to code- switching or language mixing. Comprehension in English may exceed production.	Focus on English fluency and confidence. Provide opportunities for interaction with proficient English speakers. Address code-switching sensitively, emphasizing the value of English proficiency.
4-5 Years	Developing the multi- word stage	Uses more complex sentences (English) Asks more complex questions (English) (e.g., "Why?") Understands and follows multi-step instructions (English)	Vocabulary expanding. Grammar is becoming more accurate. Self-correction begins. May show greater awareness of language differences.	Encourage storytelling and creative expression in English. Introduce more complex grammar gradually. Focus on English pronunciation.
5-7 Years	Fluency stage	Speaks fluently and confidently (English) Uses a wide range of vocabulary (English) Engages in conversations on various topics (English)	Occasional grammatical errors may occur. Accent may be present. Reading and writing development in English is crucial. May demonstrate metalinguistic awareness (understanding of language as a system).	Refine English grammar and pronunciation. Encourage extensive reading and writing. Focus on communicative competence in English.

Source: Source Description

The data in table 1 provide a clear developmental trajectory of English language acquisition by a non-native young Dayakese learner, shaped significantly through YouTube exposure and home interactions. The interpretation of each developmental phase is as follows:

1. 0–12 Months (Pre-linguistic Stage): Although verbal communication was not yet present, the child showed early auditory preferences toward English sounds due to consistent exposure. The

ability to recognize familiar English words indicated an early imprint of English phonology.

2. 12–18 Months (One-word Stage): The child began using isolated English words commonly heard on YouTube or spoken by caregivers. The words were mostly nouns and simple verbs, and imitation played a key role in vocabulary development.
3. 18–24 Months (Two-word Stage): There was a noticeable increase in vocabulary, and the child began stringing together short phrases. The influence of media content was evident in word choice and repetition, showing that digital exposure was shaping the structure of early expressions.
4. 2–3 Years (Telegraphic Stage): English sentence structures became more recognizable. Although grammatical inaccuracies existed, the child's intent was conveyed. The growing influence of YouTube content encouraged the formation of subject-verb-object constructions (e.g., "I watch a video"), which are typical in English.
5. 3–4 Years (Early Multi-word Stage): During this phase, the child displayed an emerging ability to tell short stories and form more complex thoughts using English. Code-switching between English and local languages appeared, suggesting simultaneous internalization of multiple linguistic systems.
6. 4–5 Years (Developing Multi-word Stage): The child's use of English became more spontaneous and grammatically structured. Increased exposure to storytelling and educational content from YouTube correlated with a richer vocabulary and improved comprehension of multi-step instructions.
7. 5–7 Years (Fluency Stage): By this stage, the child demonstrates fluency and confidence in expressing herself in English across various topics. Though a slight accent persisted, it did not hinder comprehension or fluency. The child's speech reflected vocabulary expansion and metalinguistic awareness—an ability to reflect on language itself, which is advanced for her age and indicates strong cognitive engagement with English as a second language.

These milestones collectively highlight how digital media, especially YouTube, coupled with supportive caregiver interaction, can significantly influence language acquisition in early childhood. This is particularly notable in non-native contexts like Dayak communities, where English is not commonly used in everyday conversation. The provided table outlines typical language acquisition for young non-native English speakers in environments with limited English exposure. These are general guidelines, and individual development varies based on exposure, motivation, and

instruction quality. Acquisition may differ from immersion settings for children learning English as a foreign language (EFL) with limited exposure.

This context often leads to a smaller early vocabulary, potential native language influence on pronunciation and grammar, and possible language mixing. Teaching EFL to young learners requires considering their developmental stage. Early stages should prioritize engaging activities and exposure to English sounds and rhythm. The focus shifts to vocabulary building, basic grammar, and communication encouragement as they advance. Interaction with native speakers, if feasible, significantly aids fluency. Visuals, gestures, songs, rhymes, and storytelling are valuable teaching tools throughout this process.

The following table results from an analysis that employed the practical spoken language assessment framework developed by Jacobs et al. (1981). This rubric focused on key communication elements: accuracy (grammar), fluency (ease of speaking), pronunciation (sound clarity), vocabulary (word choice range and appropriateness), and comprehensibility (ease of understanding). Each aspect was rated on a 1-to-3 scale, with 3 indicating the highest proficiency. This systematic approach allowed for identifying the learner's strengths and areas needing improvement in spoken English, thus offering valuable insights into their language acquisition journey.

Table 2. Average Total Score Based on the Rubric Analysis

Year	Scores					
	Accuracy	Fluency	Pronunciation	Vocabulary	Comprehensibility	Total
2025	2,5	2,5	3	3	3	2,8
2024	2,5	2,5	2,75	3	3	2,75
2023	3,36	2,72	2,45	3	3	2,7
2022	2,6	2,69	2,73	2,82	3	2,7
2021	2	2,1	2,5	2,6	3	2,4
2020	2,08	2	2,16	2	3	2,2
2019	2	2	1	1,5	3	1,9

Demonstrating the learner's developing spoken English proficiency, as indicated by the average total score, the table reveals a generally increasing trend. The scores progress from 1.9 in 2019 to 2.2 in 2020, 2.4 in 2021, 2.7 in both 2022 and 2023, 2.75 in 2024, and finally reach 2.8 in 2025 (the current year), signifying improved spoken English abilities over time. Notably, this improvement's pace is inconsistent across all age periods. This suggests that various external and developmental factors may influence the rate of language acquisition at different stages. Factors such as cognitive maturity, exposure intensity, parental support, and content type on YouTube likely played roles in shaping the learner's progress.

From the interview data, it is known that this young *Dayakese* was exposed to English early. This exposure came through YouTube and direct interaction. Her mother was the primary interaction partner. This early and frequent exposure is important. Parental engagement also played a role. They viewed content together and interacted in English. This seems to have helped her learn basic English vocabulary. She also understands colors, shapes, and numbers. She can even use English appropriately in some situations. This is especially true with her mother. YouTube provides accessible and engaging language input. The mother's consistent use reinforces this learning. It fosters her language comprehension. This even leads to code-switching in different social settings.

Discussion

This study reveals that developing English spoken expressions in a young *Dayakese* child through YouTube exposure aligns with several second language acquisition (SLA) theories and prior research findings. The natural acquisition of vocabulary, expressions, and pronunciation through informal digital exposure supports Krashen's Acquisition-Learning Hypothesis, which distinguishes between unconscious language acquisition and conscious language learning (Krashen, 1982). The child's early exposure to English content via YouTube facilitated acquisition rather than learning, particularly as her speech developed through repetition and contextual understanding, not formal instruction.

This condition aligns with Sundqvist and Sylvé's (2016) research, which showed that digital media exposure contributes significantly to L2 vocabulary acquisition in young learners. The observed language development follows the Natural Order Hypothesis (Krashen, 1982), where basic expressions like "mama" or "I play ball" emerged before more complex grammatical structures. This sequence suggests that the child's language acquisition is occurring in a natural, subconscious manner, influenced by consistent and meaningful exposure. The role of comprehensible input, as emphasized by Krashen, appears crucial in facilitating this gradual linguistic progression.

The progression from the one-word to the fluency stage, as shown in the observation tables, mirrors the stages proposed in Brown's (2000) model of language acquisition and Clark's (2009) findings on early childhood language development. Code-switching between English, *Dayakese*, and Indonesian during the early multi-word stage reflects findings by Baker (2011), who noted that bilingual children often mix languages as part of their interlanguage development. This multilingual interaction not only indicates cognitive flexibility but also highlights the child's ability to navigate between linguistic systems based on context and communicative intent.

YouTube's role in this process cannot be underestimated. Kuppens (2010) found that children exposed to subtitled English media acquire vocabulary more effectively than those who are not, supporting the idea that YouTube content—especially songs, interactive storytelling, and educational cartoons—provided the young Dayakese learner with meaningful, repetitive input. This aligns with Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, particularly the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) concept, where learning is facilitated through social interaction. The child's interaction with her mother while watching YouTube provided comprehensible input (Long, 1996), scaffolding her initial use of language in meaningful contexts.

Using songs and repetitive dialogue in YouTube content likely lowered the child's Affective Filter, making her more open to absorbing English (Krashen, 1985). This supports findings by Medvedeva and Potapova (2017), who emphasized that children's emotional engagement with media content significantly improves their receptive and productive skills. Such emotional involvement fosters a relaxed and enjoyable learning environment, which is essential for sustaining motivation and long-term language acquisition in young learners. In addition, the findings show that while YouTube facilitated early acquisition, formal schooling played an important role in refining grammar and expanding vocabulary.

This dual-source input—digital and structured—echoes Gee's (2003) argument that learning is enhanced when informal (situated) and formal (academic) learning environments intersect. The child's ability to self-correct and produce complex structures during the fluency stage demonstrates metalinguistic awareness, as Ellis (2008) discussed. However, challenges emerged when the child interacted more frequently with peers who used Dayakese or Indonesian, sometimes leading to pronunciation and grammar interference. This is consistent with De Angelis (2007), who found that multilingual learners often exhibit transfer from dominant or more frequently used languages.

Moreover, while YouTube provided exposure to discourse patterns and pronunciation models, it lacked interactive feedback, a limitation noted by Reinders & White (2010) in their study of autonomous digital learning. Therefore, active engagement by parents and teachers remains essential for maximizing YouTube's potential. Selecting age-appropriate, educational content aligned with language learning objectives, as recommended by Wang & Vásquez (2012), helps ensure that input remains relevant and beneficial. Without guided support, there is also a risk of children passively consuming content without fully processing or practicing the language they encounter.

In conclusion, the findings of this study support the growing body of research on the effectiveness of digital media, particularly YouTube, in shaping early second language acquisition. For learners in remote or multilingual contexts like the Dayakese, integrating informal media, active caregiver involvement, and formal instruction creates a balanced and effective environment for language development. This child's progress from simple words to fluent English communication validates several SLA theories and emphasizes the importance of contextually rich and engaging language input.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the English spoken expression development of a young Dayakese individual learning through YouTube. The findings reveal significant progress in her speaking abilities, suggesting YouTube's effectiveness as a learning resource by providing diverse English content. Her acquisition process mirrored natural language learning principles, emphasizing authentic input. Parental support also played a vital role in her development. While this case highlights the potential of YouTube and naturalistic learning, individual language acquisition can vary. This research contributes to understanding technology-mediated language learning in unique contexts.

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