



# From Belief to Practice: How a Multilingual Parent's Language Ideologies Support Children English Language Learning at Home

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## Abstract

This study explores how a multilingual Indonesian single mother supports her children's English language learning within the home environment. Grounded in the Family Language Policy framework, it examines how her beliefs about English shape language practices and exposure strategies. The study was conducted over two months using a qualitative case study approach, with data collected through in-depth interviews and home observations. The participants were a single mother and her two children aged 5 and 7. The findings show that the mother holds strong beliefs about the importance of English for her children's educational success and future social mobility. These beliefs influenced her to create a language-rich environment by incorporating English into daily routines, such as through storytelling, songs, video content, and simple conversations. Despite limited resources and time constraints, the mother consistently made efforts to maintain English exposure at home. The study also found a noticeable difference in the children's English proficiency, which the mother attributed to differing levels of early exposure and support. This research highlights how a parent's positive language ideology can serve as a powerful driver in shaping informal yet meaningful language learning experiences. The results provide insights for educators and policymakers seeking to strengthen English learning support in multilingual households.

**Keywords:** *Children English Language Learning, Family Language Policy, Language Ideology, Language Practice, Multilingual*

## **Introduction**

In Indonesia, multilingualism has long been a part of people's lives. The country maintains around 600 regional languages (Sneddon, 2003), and the majority of its communities are bilingual or even multilingual, due to the necessity of learning Indonesian as the national language (Nursidi, 2019). Multilingualism within families is becoming increasingly common with the rise of cultural integration and societal diversity. Families play a crucial role in language acquisition by passing down the mother tongue while also helping children master foreign languages, such as English, which is becoming more relevant in today's global society (Lee, 2021; Zhang et al., 2018).

Recognizing the benefits of English, many parents teach their children to speak Indonesian and other foreign languages from an early age. At the International Symposium Forum on Mother Language Studies in Kendari, it was highlighted that the use of two or more languages continues to rise among Indonesian children, both at home and in school. Globalization is driving the use of English, which has become an important tool for international communication. Although English is considered a foreign language in Indonesian schools, many people wish to learn it as a second language for the social and economic benefits it offers (Hafizha et al., 2023).

Considering that more families in Indonesia are adopting multilingualism at home, the role of the family is key in shaping children's language skills. Language acquisition and language planning policies are combined in Family Language Policy (Hult and Johnson, 2015; King et al., 2008). Family language policy (FLP) is defined as language and literacy practices that are planned both explicitly and implicitly within the home and among family members (King et al., 2008). The Family Language Policy (FLP) is essential to multilingual children's linguistic upbringing. It takes into account the decisions parents make, both overt and covert, about the languages their children are exposed to (Curdt-Christiansen et al., 2018). Through FLP exploration, research aims to comprehend the connections between families' beliefs and the strategies they use to influence language outcomes. Parents frequently believe that their decisions and deeds can affect how well their kids communicate in language (Spolsky, 2009; Wilson, 2020).

A well-known FLP framework is the language policy model that Spolsky (Spolsky, 2012) developed. It is widely used to conceptualize language use planning in the home (Rose et al., 2023). Three factors need to be taken into account in order to comprehend language policy: language practices, language ideologies, and language management techniques (Spolsky, 2012). These components also serve as analytical tools in this study. Language ideology refers to the parent's underlying beliefs, values, and attitudes toward English and bilingualism, which shape how she views the role and importance of English in her children's lives. Language management describes the explicit decisions or efforts made by the parent to influence or regulate the children's exposure to and use of

English at home such as setting specific times to speak English, choosing English media, or providing learning materials. Language practices capture the actual use of English in daily family interactions, including spontaneous conversations, code-switching, and language choices made in real contexts.

According to King (2000), ideology is the main motivation behind the FLP. Curdt-Christiansen (2016) defines it as referring to beliefs and presumptions about bilingualism (King and Fogle, 2006) and the languages spoken, especially their status. Seo (2017) further states that it is composed of three interrelated constructs: language as capital, language as connection, and language as culture. Interpreting language as connection delves into the idea that maintaining and building connections with the heritage language-speaking community requires the use of the heritage language.

An individual's culture must be expressed, preserved, and promoted, and this is the main emphasis of language as culture. Linguistic capital refers to the possible advantages that legacy language development could have for the economy, professions, and academia (Rose et al., 2023). According to research on language ideologies, parents' self-perception and desired social group image can have an impact on these ideologies, as well as how macro-political decisions affect parental views on bilingualism and minority language social standing (Baker & Wright, 2021). The motivation underlying language management and practice is language ideology. Family language ideology is the term used to characterize the importance that members of the same family place on language use (Zhan, 2023).

One of the important factors in determining how children learn English is parent language ideology. Parents' beliefs and attitudes toward bilingualism and the value they place on English significantly impact the resources and opportunities children have for language development (Curdt-Christiansen, 2009). Parents with a positive belief of English as crucial for success in the future might actively promote English learning by offering home literacy environments like English-language books, digital media, and other materials that promote language exposure (Dong and Chow, 2022). Children will probably be exposed to English on a regular basis in this setting, creating a comfortable and natural setting for language learning.

In addition, language ideology influences family language practices that shape daily interactions in English. When parents believe that English is useful, they may include it into daily activities and conversations, giving children a language-rich environment (Curdt-Christiansen and Huang, 2020). This may include code switching between languages, utilizing English for particular tasks, or establishing English-infused routines like bedtime stories or English-language interactive media sessions are a few examples (Sczepurek et al., 2022). These practices reinforce the child's use of the language and are consistent with the belief that bilingualism has cultural, educational, and financial advantages (Jawad, 2021).

Furthermore, language ideology influences children's attitudes toward learning English as well as the frequency and modes of language use. Children may be more inclined to study and use English if they see that their parents appreciate it, internalizing the idea that it's a useful language. According to research, children's linguistic identity and long-term motivation can be influenced by the social and cultural importance that is placed on language within the family (King & Fogle, 2006). As a result, family language ideology serves as a basis and a framework for children's English language acquisition, impacting their motivation and attitudes toward bilingualism as well as their access to language resources and the situations in which they use the language.

Earlier researches have shown that parent's language ideologies have a big influence on how the language practice and learning within the family. For example, Altman et al. (2021) highlighted that parents' positive attitudes towards home language maintenance are crucial for influencing their children's language abilities. In similar terms, Hu et al. (2014) found that families that value a language more often integrate it into everyday activities, giving kids a rich linguistic environment that promotes language learning. Research by Wan & Gao (2021) also demonstrated that parental ideologies significantly influence not only language management but also shape children's attitudes toward learning languages, which in turn contributes to their motivation and engagement. The study indicated that parents' ideological beliefs regarding the status and value of different languages play a crucial role in how they manage language learning within the family. For instance, parents who view English as essential for global opportunities may instill a sense of motivation in their children to learn it, while those who emphasize the importance of Chinese may foster a connection to cultural identity.

Although these studies offer valuable insights into the impact of family language ideology, most FLP research has primarily focused on two-parent households, where language decisions and practices are often the result of joint parental negotiation and shared responsibilities (King et al., 2008; Curdt-Christiansen, 2009; Mirvahedi & Hosseini, 2023; Liang et al., 2024). In contrast, single-parent families present unique sociolinguistic dynamics, as the language planning and decision-making fall on one individual. This can influence not only the consistency of language exposure but also the availability of linguistic resources, emotional support, and time dedicated to language learning. However, empirical studies that examine how single parents navigate these challenges in supporting their children's English acquisition are still limited. This gap is significant, considering the growing number of single-parent households globally and in Indonesia. Understanding how a single parent's ideologies on English influence how she supports her children's language development thus provides a new and necessary perspective in FLP studies.

Therefore, this study addresses the following research question: How does a single mother's language ideology influence her children's English language learning within the home environment?

By concentrating on a single-parent household and investigating how the parents' ideologies about English influence the language usage and exposure techniques she employs to help her children acquire the language at home, this study fills this knowledge gap. By looking into this particular situation, the study aims to show how language ideology influences everyday choices and practices, which in turn influences the multilingual development of the children.

This study offers a meaningful contribution to the field of Family Language Policy (FLP) by extending the application of Spolsky's model language ideology, language management, and language practices into the context of a single-parent household, a domain that has received limited scholarly attention. Theoretically, it enriches FLP research by revealing how language planning occurs when only one parent is responsible for making decisions, offering insight into how ideologies and practices may differ from dual-parent dynamics. Practically, the study provides valuable implications for educators, language policy makers, and parents by highlighting how English learning can be effectively supported at home, even with limited resources and parental support. Understanding the unique strategies and challenges faced by single parents can inform more inclusive educational interventions and family-based language learning programs.

## **Method**

This study employed a qualitative case study design to examine how a multilingual parent's language ideologies influence her children's English language learning within the home environment. A case study approach was chosen because it allows for an in-depth exploration of complex social phenomena in their natural settings (Yin, 2017). The study took place in a multilingual household located in Central Java, Indonesia. The participant, a single mother fluent in Javanese, Indonesian, and English, was selected through purposive sampling due to her unique multilingual background and her role in actively supporting her children's language development.

Her household provided a rich context for understanding the dynamic interactions between language beliefs, practices, and management strategies in a multilingual environment. The participant has two children, aged five and seven. The older child is fluent in English, while the younger child has limited exposure, offering a contrasting perspective that enriches the analysis. Data were collected through two primary methods: semi-structured interviews and home observations. A total of two in-depth interviews were conducted, each lasting approximately 60 minutes.

The interviews took place over a two-week period in March 2025. The interview guide included open-ended questions. Observations were conducted over four sessions, each lasting 30–45 minutes, focusing on language practices during routines like storytelling, media use, and daily conversations. The observational period spanned three weeks.

Ethical considerations were carefully addressed. Informed consent was obtained from the participant prior to data collection, and she was assured of confidentiality and her right to withdraw at any time. Ethical approval for the study was granted by the university's research ethics committee. Researcher positionality was also acknowledged. As a graduate student in English education and a bilingual speaker with experience teaching English to children, the researcher recognized her own potential biases, particularly in interpreting the parent's language choices and intentions. To mitigate this, reflexive journaling was used throughout the research process to maintain awareness of personal assumptions.

Data analysis followed the interactive model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014), consisting of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. Interview transcripts and observation notes were coded thematically, guided by the Family Language Policy (FLP) framework's components: language ideology, language management, and language practices. Themes were organized using visual matrices to trace patterns and relationships, such as the link between the mother's belief in English as a tool for global mobility and her integration of English in bedtime routines and play activities. To enhance reliability and validity, triangulation was applied by cross-verifying data from interviews and observations.

Member checking was conducted by sharing preliminary interpretations with the participant to confirm accuracy and ensure her perspectives were faithfully represented. Data saturation was achieved when no new themes or significant insights emerged during the final interview and observation sessions. This rigorous methodological approach provided a comprehensive understanding of how a multilingual parent's language ideologies are enacted in everyday practices, shaping her children's English language learning in the home.

## **Results**

This section presents how the parent's beliefs and language practices shape the children's bilingual development. Drawing on interview data and observations, two refined themes emerged: English as a Tool for Global Readiness and Digital Adaptation and Strategic Language Practices and Home-Based Exposure Dynamics. These themes are supported by direct quotes, contextual information, observed behaviors, and reflections on the children's responses and involvement in language use.

### **English as a Tool for Global Readiness and Digital Adaptation**

The parent expressed a consistent belief in the value of English as a vital asset for her children's future. In an interview conducted at her home during a late afternoon session (Week 2), she emphasized:

*"I think English is important after Indonesian... when we go abroad or for work, English will be the language used."*

This belief reveals her instrumental view of English as a language of opportunity, particularly for career and international mobility. She further contextualized this belief within the realities of the digital era:

*"It is easier to face challenges in this digital era."*

This was stated while discussing her decision to allow her children to access English YouTube content during unsupervised time, which she viewed as a way to build digital literacy and language exposure simultaneously.

Her ideology influenced early language exposure strategies. She began introducing English to her first child, Saylendra, at six months:

*"I played English children's songs every day. By the time he was almost two, he could already count from one to ten, even though I never taught him."*

This statement was validated during an observation (Week 1), where Saylendra, now 9, spontaneously recited numbers and named animals in English while watching a cartoon.

Despite her focus on English, she emphasized balance:

*"Because we are Indonesians and live in Indonesia, Indonesia is the most important."*

This was expressed while helping Sean, her second child, complete schoolwork in Bahasa Indonesia. Her ideological stance is thus both aspirational and pragmatic, ensuring the children are culturally grounded.

### **Strategic Language Practices and Home-Based Exposure Dynamics**

Reflecting her belief in early and consistent exposure to English, the parent incorporates the language into her children's routines. She shared:

*"I also try to set aside regular time at home to talk or watch movies or cartoons in English."*

As the family was frequently seen watching English language cartoons together, during which the children occasionally repeated phrases or asked about unfamiliar words. These activities, such as watching English language media or engaging in casual conversations, provides consistent exposure to the language in a natural and enjoyable way. By embedding English into daily routines, the parent creates an informal learning environment that encourages the children to engage with the language in low pressure contexts. This approach supports both language and comprehension and a positive attitude toward learning English.

Moreover, the parent also adopted a flexible approach to language use, often mixing English and Indonesian to suit the context. She described:

*"At home, it is mixed, sometimes Indonesian, sometimes English."*

*For example, during casual interactions, she alternated between languages:*

*"Sean (second child) do you want a snack or camilan?"*

This adaptive use of code-switching ensured that her children could simultaneously practice English and maintain their proficiency in Indonesian. It also allowed for greater comprehension, particularly for the younger child, who required more support to understand conversations.

The choice of language often depended on situational demands. The parent explained:

*"For example, during relaxed times, we can speak in English, but for daily matters, I ensure we use Indonesian so he (second child) understands better."*

The situation described during household chores or task-oriented conversations, the parent predominantly used Indonesian, while relaxed settings like bedtime stories featured English phrases or sentences. These interactions allowed the children to develop bilingual abilities while ensuring they felt comfortable and supported in their linguistic development. English was used for enrichment during leisure activities, while Indonesian was prioritized for clarity and essential communication.

To further illustrate the variation and balance of language use across daily activities, Table 1 summarizes estimated time allocations and language preferences based on observation and parental report.



Table 1. Estimated Weekly Language Practice

Activity Context	Dominant Language(s)	Estimated Weekly Time	Notes
Watching Cartoons	English	~3 hours	Family often watches together
Storytelling at Bedtime	English	~1.5 hours	More common with first child
Homework Assistance	Indonesian	~5 hours	Supports comprehension
Mealtime Conversations	Indonesian + occasional English	~7 hours	Code-switching based on topic
Casual Conversations	Mixed (code-switching)	~8 hours	Situational and flexible

The parent also made efforts to ensure ongoing use of English despite external challenges. She stated:

“I still make sure there is a portion of English at home so the children get used to it.”

Although resource limitations and time constraints sometimes reduced the intensity of English exposure, her consistent commitment maintained the children’s familiarity with the language. The parent was noted to encourage her children to actively use English in conversations. For instance, while discussing a movie, she asked the older child questions like, “*What is the character doing?*” and prompted the child to answer in English. For the younger child, she provided simpler prompts and translations, ensuring both children engaged at their respective levels.

As shown in Figure 1, the parent’s language ideology directly influenced the choice of daily practices, which in turn shaped the children’s language development.

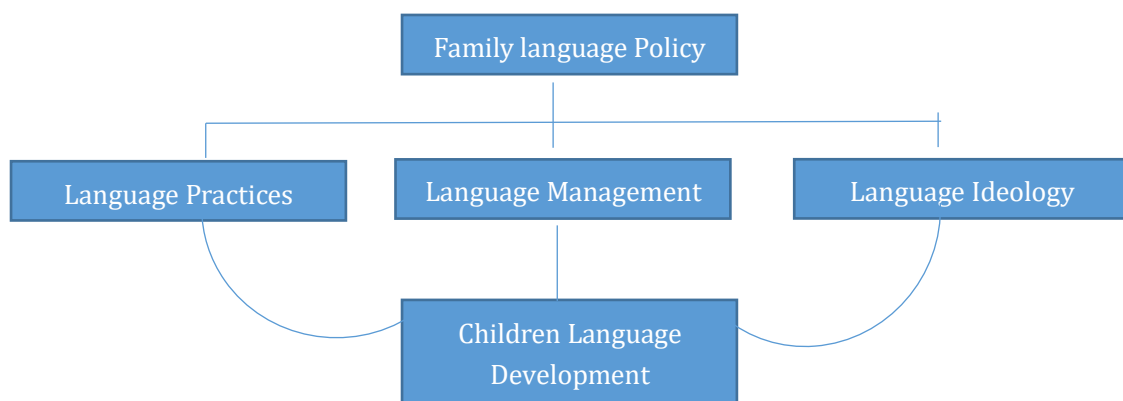


Figure 1. Family Language Management Flow Model Based on Spolsky’s FLP Framework

The interplay between language ideology and practices demonstrates their profound influence on the children's multilingual development. The parent's belief in English as a vital skill motivated deliberate strategy, such as early exposure, routine integration, and adaptive language use, fostering a bilingual environment. While the outcomes varied between the two children due to differing levels of exposure, the parent's ideological commitment and practical efforts provided a strong foundation for their multilingual abilities.

The older child's active engagement and confidence in using English suggested a positive attitude shaped by consistent exposure, while the younger child, though less fluent, showed signs of curiosity and growing interest during language-rich interactions. These responses highlight how parental strategies not only support linguistic development but also foster motivation and emotional readiness for bilingual learning.

## **Discussion**

The results of this study highlight how important parental language ideology is in influencing children's multilingual development and, eventually, their actual language usage. In line with Spolsky's (2012) Family Language Policy framework, this study sheds insight on the complex ways that language attitudes and everyday behaviors interact to promote bilingualism by analyzing a single-parent household.

### ***Parental Language Ideology as a Motivator for Language Practices***

The parent's strong belief in English as a tool for future success influenced her consistent efforts to integrate English into her children's lives. This aligns with research by Curdt-Christiansen (2016), which emphasizes the pivotal role of language ideologies in motivating parental actions. The parent's early introduction of English through songs and routines mirrors findings by Hu et al. (2014), who found that families valuing a language often incorporate it into everyday practices to provide a linguistically rich environment.

However, the variation in the children's outcomes, particularly the younger child's slower development demonstrates a potential limitation of ideology-led practice: belief alone is insufficient without consistent, sustained, and age-sensitive support. This reflects Cychosz et al. (2021), who noted that inconsistent exposure can lead to disparities in language development among siblings. Thus, the study adds nuance to the FLP framework by showing how ideological commitment can be moderated by practical constraints, such as time, economic conditions, and child-specific needs.

### ***Language Practices and the Role of Social Cultural Contexts***

The study shows how the children's bilingual development was aided by useful techniques like context-driven language use, code-switching, and regular exposure. These results are consistent with Schwartz (2010), who emphasized

how adaptive activities contribute to the development of a naturally bilingual environment. For instance, code-switching offered a flexible method of language use that guaranteed comprehension while preserving regular exposure to English. Nevertheless, these initiatives, the children's development was impacted by outside variables including education and financial limitations, which shaped the focus and intensity of language practice. According to Spolsky (2012), the parent's capacity to modify her strategies in response to these limitations demonstrates how family language policies are dynamic and continuously shifting.

Maintaining a balance between English and Indonesian demonstrated the parents' understanding of the social and cultural importance of both languages. While English was seen as an investment for the future, Indonesian was valued for its quick comprehension and social integration. This is in line with Seo's (2017) assertion that broader socio-political and cultural factors frequently influence language ideology. But after starting school, the older child started using Indonesian, which shows how social circumstances affect language usage. According to Baker and Wright (2021), language development is a dynamic process that is impacted by the interaction of external settings and domestic behaviors.

This study contributes to the development of Family Language Policy theory by emphasizing the fluid and evolving nature of parental ideologies and strategies in single-parent, multilingual households. It demonstrates that even strong ideological commitment to a language such as English must be complemented by adaptable, consistent practices that respond to family dynamics and resource availability. The differing outcomes between siblings highlight the need for individualized language support within shared ideological frameworks. This underscores the importance of treating FLP not as a fixed plan but as a dynamic, context-sensitive process.

Practically, the study offers insights for both families and stakeholders. Single parents aiming to support bilingual development can benefit from embedding target languages in daily routines through accessible and low-pressure methods, such as storytelling, media, and code-switching. For educators and policymakers, the findings call for greater recognition of the linguistic resources present in households and the need for language-supportive environments in schools. Providing culturally relevant and parent-accessible learning materials could strengthen the bridge between home and school language practices.

Like all case studies, this research is limited in its scope and generalizability. The focus on one single-parent household within a specific cultural and linguistic setting limits the extent to which the findings can be applied broadly. The researcher's positionality as someone with training in language education may also influence interpretations, despite efforts to ensure validity through triangulation and member checking. Additionally, while children's responses were considered through observation, their voices were not directly elicited through interviews, which may have enriched the understanding of their agency and experiences.

Future research could address these gaps by incorporating multiple family case studies across different cultural contexts, or by adopting a longitudinal approach to examine how language ideologies and practices evolve as children grow. Including children as active participants in such studies would also deepen our understanding of how they interpret and negotiate family language policies. Quantitative tools, such as language diaries or usage tracking apps, could be used alongside qualitative methods to capture a fuller picture of bilingual development at home.

While the parent in this study demonstrated a thoughtful and proactive stance in nurturing bilingualism, there are also possible unintended consequences to consider. The unequal intensity of English exposure between the children may risk fostering imbalance, where one child advances more quickly than the other, potentially affecting confidence or sibling dynamics. Additionally, prioritizing English as a language of opportunity might unintentionally reinforce linguistic hierarchies, potentially devaluing local languages over time. These reflections suggest that even well-intentioned family language strategies must be approached with critical awareness, flexibility, and responsiveness to the evolving needs of all family members.

## **Conclusion**

This study shows how parental language ideologies and practices have a significant impact on how multilingual children develop in single-parent households. The parent's conscious attempts to incorporate English into daily life were motivated by her strong belief that it is an essential ability for both modern challenges and global opportunities. A bilingual environment that promoted natural language acquisition was established through early media exposure, regular integration, and adaptive code-switching.

The results demonstrate how language ideologies and practices interact to promote multilingualism. The parent balanced the use of English with Indonesian to facilitate social and cultural integration, even if English was preferred for future goals. This effective approach emphasizes how crucial it is to match practical strategies with ideological values in order to successfully negotiate the challenges of a bilingual at home.

Despite challenges like limited resources and differences in exposure between siblings, the parent's persistent efforts gave the children a strong linguistic foundation. The transformative potential of belief-driven and context-sensitive practices in fostering bilingualism is highlighted in this study, which advances our understanding of how Family Language Policies can be adjusted to accommodate various family structures. These observations have significant consequences for educators and families working in multilingual environments.

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