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English Language Maintenance Among Indonesian Returnee Children: A Qualitative Study

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ABSTRACT

The study examines the efforts and strategies employed by Indonesian returnee parents to maintain their children's English proficiency upon their return to their home country. With the increasing importance of English for educational and career opportunities, particularly in a globalized world, the role of parents in this context is paramount. It explores the parents' beliefs, roles, and social factors influencing English language maintenance behaviors. The study included interviews, observations, and focus group discussions (FGD) with two Indonesian families who had temporarily stayed in Australia for educational purposes. The study found that parents' beliefs in the importance of English for their children's future, especially for education and job careers, shaped their behaviors and strategies for maintaining their children's English proficiency. Furthermore, the study identified varied personal strategies that the returnee families conducted to maintain their children's English skills, such as using English as a main language for daily communication, especially at home, having extensive English exposure through digital technology such as YouTube video and *Roblox* games, and maintaining relationships and communication with friends in Australia. Besides, the study concludes that societal factors are crucial in supporting or hindering the maintenance of English proficiency among Indonesian returnee children. The findings suggest that while individual strategies are essential, external support systems play a significant role in sustaining language skills in a non-English speaking environment. This study contributes to the broader understanding of language maintenance in immigrant contexts, highlighting the importance of parental involvement and societal dynamics.

Keywords: Language Maintenance; English; Returnee Children; Personal and Social Factors

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1. Introduction

The current report from the United Nations (UN) shows a significant increase in the trend of worldwide migration, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic^[1]. It includes returnees who migrate and temporarily live in foreign countries but maintain a strong connection to their home country and intend to return^[2]. Their migration is mostly to pursue better economic and educational prospects or cultural activities. Returnees significantly impact population demography in this highly interconnected world. For instance, Australia recorded approximately 703,245 individuals and their family members holding temporary stay visas for educational purposes in 2024 indicating the significant impact of transitory migration within this context. Indonesia contributes around 19.000 students who temporarily stay to study in many Australian universities^[3]. During their brief stay in a foreign country such as Australia, these Indonesian students, along with their families, especially their children, have a chance to adjust to new cultures and acquire English by directly immersing themselves in meaningful English environments.

However, when the family returns to their home countries, they encounter some challenges in maintaining their English fluency, especially after they are immersed in their native languages. Language maintenance is defined as the sustained and continuous use of language within a social community and groups^[4]. Studies show that the shift in the linguistic environment among the returnee families results in inadequate English practice and less exposure to the target language, resulting in a decrease in their English attainment^[2, 5]. This decline in English proficiency among temporary migrant families is multifaceted and influenced by various factors in the migration process. Initially, returnees often possess some level of English proficiency from their temporary stay in English-speaking countries. However, prolonged stays in their home countries require them to rely on the local language for day-to-day interactions and cultural assimilation, diminishing opportunities for practicing and maintaining English skills. Additionally, challenges associated with adapting to a new environment, such as navigating social networks, employment, and education, may divert attention from maintaining English language proficiency. Consequently, less exposure and inconsistent practice gradually erode English language proficiency among returnee families^[2]. Thus, the transition from ESL to EFL context

poses challenges for the returnee families in maintaining their English. While many studies on language maintenance have been focused on immigrant children in many developed countries^[2, 5-7], returnee children who temporarily stay in English-speaking countries are less studied. Therefore, this current study aims to examine how the Indonesian returnee family, especially the parents, formulates some strategies to maintain their children's English proficiency after moving from ESL to an EFL context like Indonesia. To achieve this aim, the study poses three research questions:

1. How do the beliefs of returnee parents influence their strategies to maintain their children's English proficiency?
2. What personalized strategies do returnee parents use to maintain their children's English proficiency?
3. How do social factors support or hinder returnee parents in maintaining their children's English proficiency?

2. Literature Review

In the realm of English as a foreign language context, such as in Indonesia, many parents who have returned from English-speaking countries anticipate that their children will be able to sustain their English proficiency^[8]. This is because parents perceive English as a valuable attribute that will augment their children's prospects for future employment^[9]. Furthermore, the parent believes that being multilingual by mastering some languages, especially English, will equip their children with better communication skills and greater self-confidence, enabling them to actively engage and succeed in a globalized society. Numerous research has amplified the benefits of bilingualism and multiculturalism on children's cognitive abilities, such as creativity, critical thinking, and problem-solving^[10-12]. Bilingual and multilingual children develop higher metalinguistic awareness and improved cognitive flexibility as a result from shifting and switching between different languages^[13-15]. Moreover, exposure to multiple languages also allows these children to learn about a variety of cultures, traditions, and world views, which engenders respect, tolerance, and appreciation for other cultures. Cultural competence improves people's understanding of other cultures and allows them to interact positively with individuals from different backgrounds^[15].

As a result, possessing these cultural abilities and understandings not only enhances personal development but also improves future career, especially in the global world^[16].

Furthermore, the transition from ESL environments, such as in Australia and the USA, to EFL environments, like Indonesia, poses difficulties for children. Research has documented that the amount and quality of exposure to a second language in a first-language environment can significantly impact the ability to maintain English proficiency^[2, 5, 17]. Kubota et al. suggest that regular exposure to a second language through different channels, such as social interactions, media consumption, and formal schooling, may help sustain proficiency in the language^[18]. For instance, Shin found that L2 exposures, practice, and cultural context have a role in sustaining English proficiency among EFL students upon their return from an ESL environment^[19]. The participants of this study retain their English abilities through social connection with family members and participation with authentic materials such as books, novels, and social media^[6]. Furthermore, in the present age of digitalization, technology provides a wide range of educational resources for acquiring new languages and maintaining language competency, specifically in English^[18]. Aldukhayel stated that technology, such as online gaming and social media, effectively exposes returnee children to a large amount of L2 language and provides them with a relevant environment to speak and utilize the language, particularly in ESL circumstances^[5].

Although there have been studies on preserving the English language among returnee families in various contexts, such as in Saudi Arabia^[10], Japan^[2], and Vietnam^[7], research on this topic in the Indonesian context remains limited. To the best of the researchers' knowledge, no study has been completed on the English language maintenance of Indonesian returnee children, particularly those who previously stayed temporarily in English-speaking countries. Therefore, this study will examine the children of two Indonesian families who temporarily reside in Australia for study and return to Indonesia for good. In addition, the present study thoroughly investigates this topic by analysing the intricate interaction of individual, familial, and social elements that may either facilitate or impede the preservation of their English language proficiency among Indonesian returnee children.

Moreover, understanding the parents' beliefs and atti-

tudes to the role of English for their children will be critical to understanding their English language maintenance strategy^[10]. The role of parents is paramount to ensure the retention of children's English skills, especially in EFL contexts where English is not formally used in daily communication. The parents help their children maintain English actively with various practices such as English reinforcement at home, extensive English exposure to digital technology, and maintaining English communication with friends overseas^[2, 20]. Therefore, this study also explores the attitudes and beliefs of the parents regarding the role of English for their children. This will help understand how interrelated factors of family and society influence efforts and strategies to maintain English proficiency among returnee children.

3. Methods

This study aims to examine Indonesian returnee families' strategies to maintain their children's English proficiency when they return to their home country. It also explores personal and social factors that influence the parents' strategy to maintain their children's English proficiency. To achieve these objectives, the study used a qualitative approach in which personal interviews, observations and focus group discussions were used to collect the data^[6, 22]. This qualitative study enables the researchers to understand varied factors influencing English language maintenance within the family and social context of the participants. A qualitative study is fit to examine the English language maintenance of Indonesian returnee families who return to their home country since it delves into the complexities of individual experiences, attitudes, and perceptions regarding language proficiency after returning home^[10]. This methodology can uncover the intricate interplay among familial and social factors that impact the endeavors to sustain the English proficiency of Indonesian returnee children.

The study included two Indonesian families, namely Andy and Nita and Edy and Tania (pseudonym), who had previously lived in Australia for educational reasons. Andy and Nita stayed in Australia for four years, during which Andy pursued a doctoral degree in Business. On the other hand, Edy and Tania stayed in Australia for seven years, during which the father sought a Master's and a Doctoral Degree in Education. The families have children attending

elementary schools at various grade levels in Australia. Andy and Nita had two sons, Agil and Ali (pseudonyms), 8 and 10 years old, while Edy and Tania had two daughters, Naura and Nesha (pseudonyms), 11 and 9 years old. Interviews and focus group discussions were conducted with both parents. The researcher aimed to interview the children; however, this could not be undertaken since the parents only approve of observations. From September to December 2024, the study included two interview sessions of both parents, taking around 40–45 min each, along with two sessions of observation on the children's English communication activities, and one focus group discussion with all parents lasting around 50–60 min.

The data collected was analysed using a thematic approach due to its adaptability and the availability of an accessible analytical approach^[21]. This study incorporates a range of epistemological approaches, such as interpretivism, which are relevant to the research objective of identifying meanings and patterns in participants' perspectives and experiences related to maintaining their English proficiency. The information gathered from interviews and focus groups was carefully recorded in audio format and later transcribed. Afterward, it was scrutinized and evaluated through theme analysis. To conduct a more comprehensive study, the researchers initially utilized open coding to systematically analyze the data and discover and classify relevant topics, themes, and patterns^[22]. Then, an axial coding process was used, which involved connecting codes to create larger and smaller clusters. In detail, researchers engage in a recursive process wherein they revise codes and categories until thematic saturation is reached (namely, the point at which themes are no longer being identified). The goal of thematic analysis is to discover and summarize significant themes and patterns within the data. This allows the researchers to provide more detailed descriptions of the results.

4. Results

The data analysis showed significant results on the English language maintenance of the Indonesian returnee family, which reveals in-depth insight into their complex English language practices. The results include general thoughts and beliefs of the parents on English language maintenance, personalized strategies of the returnee parents to maintain

their children's English proficiency, and the role of social factors that influence the parents in maintaining their children's English proficiency.

4.1. The Belief of the Returnee Parents on English Language Maintenance for Their Children

The beliefs and thoughts of the returnee parents on the role of English in their children's future showed a varied perspective that was mostly formed by career and cultural considerations^[2, 6]. Through the interviews, both parents consistently mentioned that English proficiency would be a critical skill for their children to have a specialized and important career in the future. English is believed to open more access to their children for job security, not only in the local context of Indonesia but also worldwide. The vision of their future career is explained by Nita in the focus group discussion.

"With English skills, I expect that my sons, Agil and Ali, will have better jobs and careers worldwide. I learned from my experience that I had difficulty accessing a job due to my English limitation, so I will keep supporting my children to maintain the English skills they got from living and schooling in Australia"

(FGD, 28/10/2024).

Another similar point was also described by Edy during the interview:

"I expected my children to have careers worldwide. In my experience studying while working in Australia, I found that a career in Australia and other developed countries offers high-paying jobs with better job security. It is added to the quality of life in these countries; therefore, I encouraged my children to keep their English to prepare them for worldwide careers in the future"

(Interview 1, 7/10/24).

The data showed that pragmatic motivation, such as having a better job and higher income in the future, shaped the parents' decision to preserve their children's English proficiency after returning home to Indonesia. The parents try to

shape their children to have a global mindset that is more connected and competitive. In the process, English has become one tool that they believe could transform their children into global citizens. Furthermore, parents also believe that building a career in Indonesia is more challenging as the work environment is not supportive, and where social and political connection still plays a critical role. As Andy described:

"It was my experience that it is difficult to build a career in Indonesia since there are so many political interventions and nepotism. Therefore, with high English proficiency, I wish my children will have more chances to build their future careers in many developed countries such as Japan, the USA, Australia, and Canada"

(Interview 1, 7/10/24).

The data shown above indicates that Indonesian returnee parents believe that their children need to acquire English, which has evolved into a global and international language, to access a broader range of employment prospects. The parents believe that English proficiency would provide their children with better future careers. English proficiency will improve their children's chances of getting employed, especially in higher-end jobs, leading to socio-economic mobility through a global career. The parents want their children to be cosmopolitan people with a wider vision to reach a global career and market. Besides access to better employment and job careers, access to education is consistently cited by Indonesian returnee parents as another factor that shapes their effort to maintain their children's English proficiency. Through focus group discussions with these two families, education opportunities were revealed as another motivation that encouraged the parents to consistently supervise their children's English maintenance. High English proficiency is believed to give children more access to a better education, especially in many developed countries. For example, Edy and Talia narrated:

"In the future, I want my children to continue their studies in reputable universities worldwide, such as Oxford and Harvard universities. I realized that English is one prerequisite for their education journey. Therefore, I ensure that they maintain their English proficiency

and find strategies to improve their English"
(FGD, 28/10/24).

A similar belief was expressed by Andy:

"I already experienced studying in one of the best universities in Australia, so I want my children to experience the same thing or even in better universities. My first son, Agil kept saying that he wanted to return to his school in Australia, and kept saying to him to maintain and improve his English skills, so one day he can return to Australia and study there" (Interview 2, 14/2/24).

(Interview 2, 14/10/24).

Learning from their experience, the parents realized that English proficiency is a prerequisite for studying in high-ranking universities abroad. Since English has become the language of knowledge and a medium of instruction in many world-ranking universities, English skills are necessary for their children. In addition, both parents have experience studying at the best universities through scholarships from the Indonesian government or international funding. They realized that English would be the key requirement when their children want to apply for the scholarship. Therefore, maintaining English skills is important to help the children engage with the course material and learning activities and give them access to some scholarship funding. As Nita explained:

"Studying abroad, especially in Australia, is very expensive, and I am not sure whether it will be affordable for my children in the future. However, since my husband studied there through a scholarship, I encouraged my children to follow their father's path"

(Interview 1, 7/10/2024).

Thus, the desire to secure better employment prospects and access to quality education motivates the returnee parents to prioritize and maintain their children's English language skills. The returnee parents aim to ensure that their children's English skills grant them more access to the best schools and universities for their future education. Both parents share the same thought and belief that by maintaining and improving their English skills, the children will have more opportunities to experience a good education in the best schools and

universities worldwide.

4.2. Personalized Strategies to Maintain English Proficiency

English as a Home Language

One strategy the parents employ in this study is to provide a context for using English during conversations at home^[6]. The parents believe that maintaining a regular practice of using English in personal conversations at home establishes a significant environment for their children to utilize English. Andy emphasized the need to create an English-speaking atmosphere at home to expose his children to the English language, which can be challenging in EFL contexts (Interview 2, 14/10/24). The data also indicated that parents enforce rigorous regulations for their children to use English at home exclusively, as seen in **Figure 1** of family rule number four and **Figure 2**. This is because they believe interactions outside the house do not offer a conducive environment for their children to maintain their English proficiency. Edy and Talia further explained:

"We applied no English no service at home to encourage our children to keep communicating in English. Even when our family came, I kept asking my children to communicate with us in English while using Indonesian with our relatives"

(Interview 1, 7/10/2024).

Implementing a rigorous policy of exclusively using English at home creates an authentic environment for children to practice English and exposes them to the cultural nuances of English-speaking countries^[15]. For example, when the parents communicate with their children, such as when calling for dinner or having casual conversations in front of the TV, these parents consistently use English. The researcher found that the parents keep using English with their children at every opportunity, including directing the children to watch English programs and read English comics. The parent is concerned that the external environment lacks sufficient English exposure to ensure their children's English proficiency. For instance, when the children attend schools or engage in activities in the area, they will primarily be exposed to Indonesian and a few other local languages, with few opportunities to utilize English. Edy remarked that the

opportunity to converse in English at the school and in the local community is extremely limited, making communication with the parents the sole alternative for the children (Interview 2, 14/10/24). Rahman argued that locating genuine situations for utilizing English in meaningful discourse would pose a challenge within the realm of EFL^[9]. Consequently, he proposed that EFL learners should actively pursue or even generate their meaningful contexts.

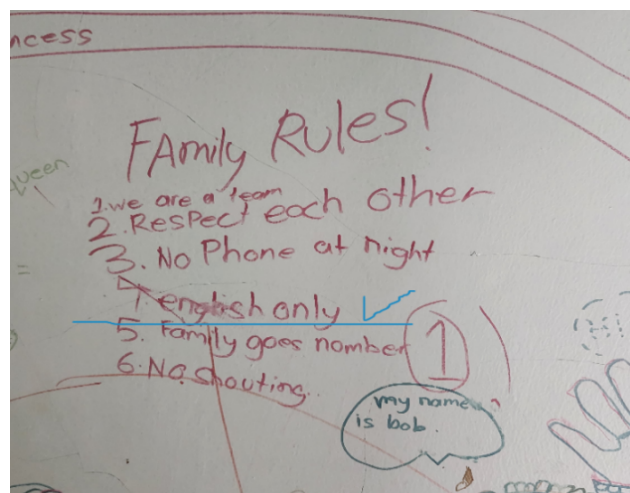


Figure 1. Family rules to use English at home.



Figure 2. Family rule to use English at home.

Furthermore, contextualizing English in domestic activities and communications instils a sense of cultural identity and belonging. To some extent, parents play a significant role in shaping their children's identity as multilingual individuals with diverse cultural backgrounds^[13]. Their goal is for their children to identify as Indonesians while also considering themselves Australians or global citizens. Talia clarified that "due to our use of English as the primary language at home, my children occasionally describe her as

being of mixed Indonesian and Australian” (Interview 2, 14/10/24). The parents’ decision to exclusively use English for in-home communication is justified by their desire to shape their children’s identity as global citizens.

The parent’s decision to use English at home directly results from their past experiences living in Australia. Andy and Talia explained that while they were in Australia, they used the same method to preserve their children’s proficiency in Indonesian. They elaborated that during their time in Australia, they enforced the exclusive use of Indonesian at home for their children. This decision was based on their belief that their children were already exposed to English at their schools and surroundings. This technique has successfully fostered bilingualism in Indonesian and English among their children. Consequently, by drawing lessons from those experiences, parents implement this technique to uphold their children’s English competence.

Nevertheless, implementing solely English policy within one’s household presents specific difficulties. The children frequently exhibit a reluctance to speak English, mainly when some friends or relatives visit their house. Talia described:

“Since we have returned to Indonesia, my children have begun using Indonesian at home. This change occurred due to their increased exposure to Indonesian at school and in the neighbourhood. They also started to question the necessity of using English in Indonesia. As a result, I have to put some pressure and formulate some rules on them to continue using English.”

(Interview 2, 14/10/2024).

Talia elaborated that she kept informing their children about the need to preserve their English language proficiency, particularly if they plan to go back to Australia or explore other countries for educational or professional purposes (Interview 2, 14/10/24).

Negative judgment from friends and families on using English in public spaces is another challenge the returnee faces in maintaining their English proficiency^[25]. The children and parents may encounter difficulties when speaking English in the presence of their families and friends. There is sometimes a prevalence of negative attitudes towards using English in Indonesia, even within families. As an illustration,

Nita clarified that she experienced some complaints from her acquaintances and families regarding her choice to speak English with her children. During the engagement with the community, some expressions such as “this is Indonesia, not Australia,” “just English,” “don’t show off,” and “are you talking about me?” were occurred (Interview 2, 14/10/24). However, this also motivates numerous families to practice English with their children and implement the same approach within their own households. Talia elucidated that one of his friends implemented this strategy with her family and reported a substantial improvement in her children’s English proficiency (Interview 2, 14/10/24). The data indicated that maintaining English proficiency among returnee children necessitates unwavering commitment from both the parents and the children, particularly within the household setting and in the presence of Indonesian speakers especially in the public spaces.

English Language Exposure through Technology

Another significant strategy to maintain the returnee children’s English proficiency was exposure to technology^[5]. The parents believed that technology offers intensive language experiences that are advantageous for preserving their children’s English proficiency. Although the children have returned to Indonesia, where English is not the primary mode of communication, technology allows them to overcome this geographical constraint. It exposes them to diverse and significant channels of English communication.

For example, Talia explained:

“I used many technological tools to give my children more access to English, from watching English movies on Netflix without Indonesian subtitles to playing Roblox games. I believed these technological tools provided my children more English exposures and allowed them to access more authentic and meaningful language usage”.

(Interview 2, 14/10/2024).

Authentic and meaningful English language exposure through technology enables children to experience real-world scenarios and use their English in a real context^[24]. Andy and Nita described that technology facilitates real-time interaction with other English speakers worldwide. The technology

provides unlimited access to daily English communication that enables continuous English skill development. As they described:

"I notice that my children actively communicate with other English speakers worldwide, especially native speakers, through social media platforms and online games. My children also enjoyed playing games while actively communicating with other players. I do not need to remind them to use English as it happens naturally".

(Interview 2, 14/10/2024).

For parents, technology has transformed into a game changer that provides abundant access to English exposure and allows their children to maintain and develop their English skills through authentic English settings^[27]. The technology creates a setting of English language learning where the children can communicate meaningfully with other English speakers from various linguistic contexts. The setting will be hardly found in the context of Indonesia, where English only serves as a foreign language and is not used for daily communication. As shown in the **Figure 3** showing how *Roblox* game facilitates authentic communication for the returnee children.

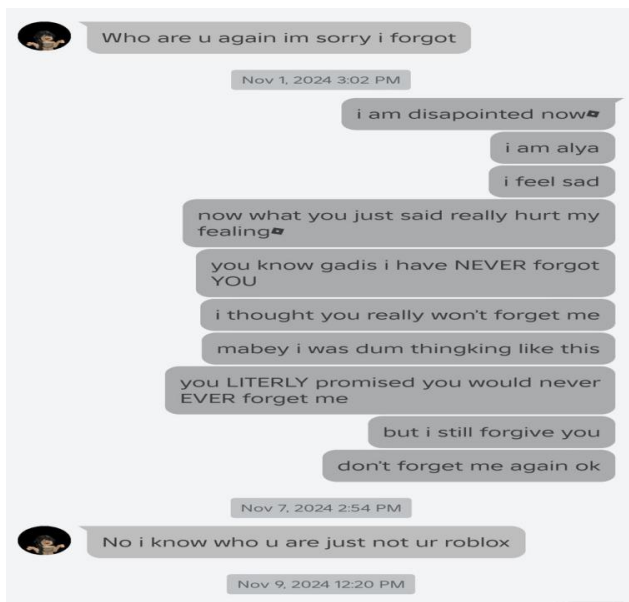


Figure 3. How the natural communication occurs through the Roblox game.

Moreover, technology plays an essential role in pro-

viding cultural literacy and experiences for the children that facilitate their English language maintenance^[10]. As Andy explained "through technology, my children not only the linguistic aspect of the language but also the cultural dimension (Interview 2, 14/10/24)". Digital platforms offer various authentic cultural content, such as in movies and music. The cultural nuances in these movies and songs not only develop the linguistic aspects of the language, such as their vocabulary development, but also give them a knowledge of the culture of the native English speakers. A better understanding of the cultural aspect of the language enables the children to actively engage and create a better relationship with English from various contexts, such as from European and Asian countries. The children felt more competent and confident communicating and engaging in various activities from various digital platforms with their other English speakers. The parents described:

"My children often taught me various English pronunciations and they can clearly explain the English variations across countries. They can even switch from a British to American and Indian English accent. When I asked them where do you learn it? They just answer that they learn from their engagement with their friends on social media or via chat services in their mobile games"

(FGD, 28/10/2024).

Therefore, realising the important role of this technology platform, the parents also create strategies to expose their children to English through digital platforms. The parents, for example, explained that they apply strict rules for their children to use mobile phones and access the Internet. However, when they realize the benefits of this exposure, they arrange some hours during the day to let their children play some of their favourite online games or watch their favourite movie series on Netflix. Nita explained further

"I just let my children watch the movies in English on Netflix. For example, my second child watched Peppa Pig and YouTube videos. I make sure that she watches the English version of the videos so that they will be more exposed to English conversation"

(Interview 2, 14/10/2024).

Maintaining Friendship with Australian Friends and Peers

Maintaining relationships with Australian friends and peers emerges as one strategy Indonesian returnee families apply to maintain their children's English proficiency^[10, 18]. The parents described that allowing the children to interact with their friends in Australia regularly enabled them to access daily genuine communication that they believe to be effective in maintaining their children's English proficiency (FGD, 28/10/24). Friendship with many native English speakers, especially from Australia, offers the children meaningful conversations where they can use their English in a natural communication setting and receive language feedback to maintain and improve their English communication skills. For example, Andy explained that:

"My children can spend hours talking with their friends in Australia, especially during the weekends. I am happy with that because I noticed that my children can practice their English and learn from their friends from Australia"

(Interview 1, 7/10/2024).

Edy and Talia expressed a similar opinion as they said:

"Maintaining the children's relationship with their friends in Australia is very important for their English skills. The English language exposure with their friends in Australia ensures that our children are updated with all language variations in the Australian context. For example, when our children talked to their friends in Australia, it is difficult to understand what they said since they use much Australian slang and speak very fast".

(FGD, 28/10/2024).

Besides, friendship offers children a safer learning environment that facilitates their confidence in communication. In other words, the parents believe that this channel of language exposure is safer for the children than other digital platforms. The parents already know their children's friends and even their parents. Therefore, the parents do not need to worry that the children might have intense communication with strangers that could bring some harm to their children.

For example, Nita explained, *"I felt calmer if my children chat with their friends in Australia compared to when they chatted with strangers in their mobile games"* (Interview 2, 14/10/24). Edy also revealed similar comments that he observed whom his children talked or chatted with on many digital platforms but was not strict when he knew that his children talked with his school friends in Australia, as illustrated in **Figure 4** (Interview 1, 7/10/24). The findings indicated that the strategy is preferred due to the combination of rich and diverse linguistic inputs from intense communication with friends in Australia and the aspect of security. According to the returnee's parents, the extensive exposure of their children to different digital communication media is important for the children to retain their English skills. However, they also kept ensuring that these media of communication do not pose threats to their children such as cyberbullying, predators, or inappropriate content.

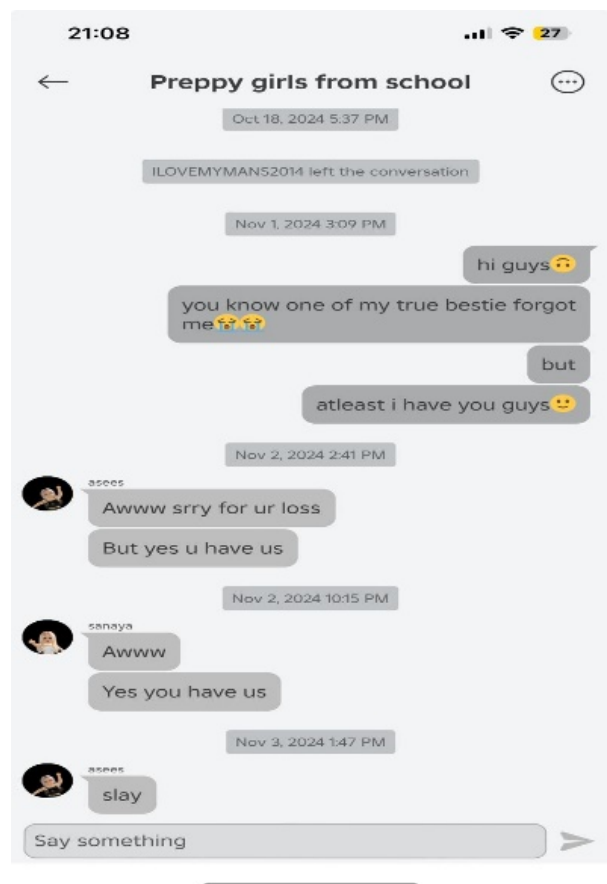


Figure 4. Authentic communication with school friends.

Finally, the friendship bond with acquaintances enhances the cultural interaction between the children and their

Australian peers^[10]. The parents believe that when their children actively engage in cultural exchange with their Australian friends, it improves their cultural literacy^[15]. The children engage in diverse online digital activities with their Australian friends and peers, such as playing games together or creating digital art. These social activities allow the children to engage in meaningful conversations in English with their native speaker friends. Additionally, they understand fundamental principles of life, such as rules, customs, and social development within the Australian setting. This type of communication and social interaction has an essential impact on maintaining the returnee children's English skills, especially in attaining a native level of English proficiency.

4.3. The Role of Social Factors in the Maintenance of English Proficiency

Social factors have a crucial role in facilitating or impeding the preservation of the English language within returnee children. The findings revealed that parents play a vital role in assisting their children to preserve their English proficiency upon returning to their native countries. Given the children's frequent exposure to the Indonesian language in their surroundings, the parents actively encourage them to maintain their proficiency in English, particularly during interactions at home. The parents keep encouraging their children to use English in various situations including asking their children to keep their diaries written in English as seen in the **Figure 5** below.

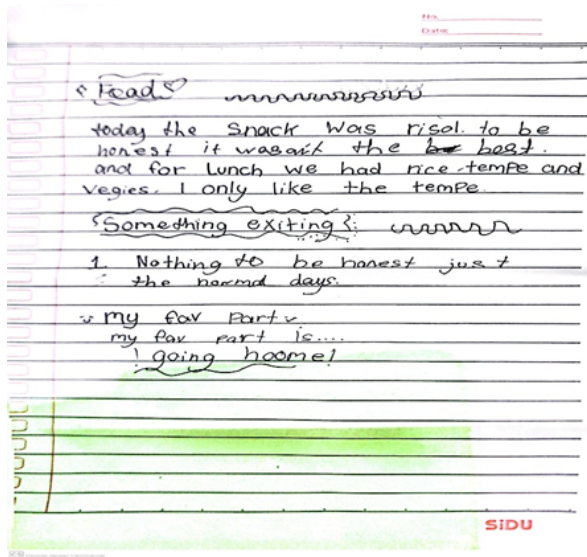


Figure 5. The diary writing in English.

Additionally, Nita stated

"After a few months in Indonesia, I noticed that my children shifted the language for communication from English to Indonesian. Even when I asked them in English, they replied that they were in Indonesia. It makes me afraid that they already lost their English. Therefore, from that moment, my husband and I decided to apply the English language rule in which my children must use English at home, especially when they talk to me and my husband"

(Interview 1, 7/10/2024).

Similarly, Talia expressed,

"When I returned to Indonesia, I suddenly became an English teacher for my children. I encourage them to use English as much as possible, especially at home, and support them whenever needed."

(Interview 2, 14/10/2024).

This demonstrates that parents have a crucial role in preserving the English language proficiency of their children. They serve as the primary language resource for children and establish a thoroughly engaging atmosphere within the home that offers significant linguistic stimuli, such as through everyday communication and engagement. When English is used as the primary language of communication at home, it provides consistent English exposure that effectively maintains and develops their children's English skills. Furthermore, parents play a crucial role in facilitating their children's access to a wide range of English language channels, thereby connecting them with larger communities. Enabling their children to use different digital platforms like smartphone apps, Netflix movies, and YouTube videos guarantees they receive sufficient English language exposure to sustain their English skills as seen in the **Figure 6** below.

Moreover, friends, particularly in Australia, are a crucial social aspect that significantly influences the preservation of the English language among children. The children's frequent and in-depth connection with friends, mainly native speakers in Australia, prevents them from communicating in isolation^[18]. During the focus group discussion, the parents highlighted the influence of their children's friends in imparting linguistic and cultural knowledge that may not be

acquired through contact or interactions with their parents and digital platforms. Andy and Nita said, “our children’s pronunciations and idiom vocabularies are much better than ours. They mostly learned from their friends in Australia” (Interview 1, 7/10/24). Similarly, Talia expressed that maintaining my children’s friendships gives them an authentic audience for English communication and a natural context to use English. She narrated:

“Friends are essential to keep many children using English in Indonesia. They communicate regularly through chatting or video calls, which gives my children invaluable opportunities to use their English in real-life situations. My child can talk for hours with her friends, discussing many topics. For example, a few days ago, he made a video call with her friends and showed them how to cook Indonesian cuisine, such as gado-gado. They spent much time discussing about food”

(FGD, 28/10/2024).

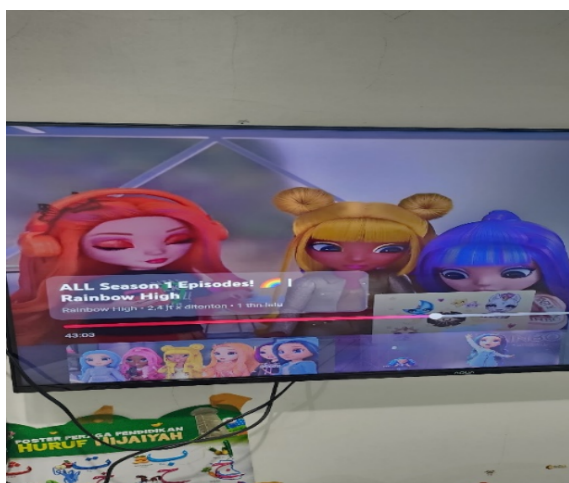


Figure 6. English Language Exposure Through Movies and Youtube Channel.

The findings indicated that the presence of friends in Australia provided an additional social network for the children, facilitating the opportunity to practice the English language. Upon their return to Indonesia from Australia, the children can uphold their social networks in Australia, predominantly through friendship. Natural and genuine discussions and active group involvement help sustain English language proficiency among children and, to some degree,

enhance their English skills. However, certain social conditions impede the preservation of the English language within the Indonesian returnee children^[2]. For instance, findings indicated that the socioeconomic status and availability of resources can impact the returnee children’s capacity to sustain their competence in the English language. An interview with Andy and Nita showed that since they lived in a big city with abundant learning facilities, including high-tech technology and a fast internet connection, they have more support to provide the English language experience to their children, facilitating the English language maintenance. Meanwhile, Talia and her family lived in rural areas and had difficulty providing good access to English language exposure. She narrated:

“Before returning to Indonesia, I decided to enrol my children in international schools^[10], but I did not have those schools in our area. Therefore, I just enrolled my children in mainstream schools or state schools. I could not rely much on the school to help my children maintain their English since they mostly use Indonesian and only provide English lessons as extracurricular or additional subjects.”

(Interview 1, 7/10/2024).

Negative sentiments also occur in society when the returnee families use English in the Indonesian EFL context. Nita said, “it was frustrating to use English in society since the people think we are showing off” (Interview 2, 14/10/24). Some negative expressions of the people, when the returnee family uses English in their communication, were reported, such as “don’t show off; you are in Indonesia now, so speak Indonesian, local bule, or behaviours such as keep copying the English expression with a sinister expression, or laughing when the children used English.

Since English is considered a foreign language in Indonesia, people generally discourage the use of English outside of formal educational contexts. Despite the widespread belief among Indonesian people that English proficiency is crucial for children to secure a brighter future and career opportunities^[26], its usage in public settings can lead to negative stigma and social pressure^[9]. Throughout the interviews, the parents repeatedly expressed their support for the children’s English language practice in private settings, such as at home or in a personal conversation with friends from

Australia, because using English in public locations poses more significant difficulties. For example, Edy narrated:

"I found that the children are quite hesitant to use English in public spaces. When I talked to my children in English, they kept complaining that they were shy and a little scared to use English in public. My children told me that sometimes people mocked and laughed at them, so they prefer using Indonesian"

(Interview 2, 14/10/2024).

Thus, social factors should be considered when maintaining English for Indonesian returnee children. While some social factors, such as parental support and friendship relationships, provide the children with an authentic context to use English in meaningful ways, some social factors, such as access to resources and social disapproval and criticism of using English outside the educational context, could pose barriers to English language maintenance among Indonesian returnee families^[2].

5. Discussion

This qualitative study sheds light on two Indonesian returnee families on how they maintain their children's English proficiency, including the parents' beliefs and thoughts, personalized strategies, and the role of social factors. These findings amplify previous studies on how returnee families preserve their children's English proficiency to face the global challenge^[5, 8, 10]. The data showed that personalised strategies to maintain English link to the beliefs and thoughts of the parents who receive English as an instrument of their children's success, especially in opening more access to high-paid jobs and better education opportunities^[26]. This belief manifests in the parents' actions and behavior, especially in English communication with their children. English language reinforcement and practice at home indicates how strongly this belief in the importance of English influences their strategy to maintain their children's English skill proficiency. This confirms the findings of the study from Alshammri that revealed the parents' ideology and belief in the importance of English for their children's future determine the level of their effort to encourage their children to preserve their English skills.

However, the finding shows that the returnee's parents do not make these English language rules and maintenance strategies in isolation. While the general discourse of society on the importance of English that is bombarded through educational institutions and media encourages this English language maintenance behaviour^[14, 26, 27], the status of English as a foreign language in Indonesia does not give children more opportunities to practice and use their English in meaningful ways^[9]. It is exacerbated by the negative sentiment from society that hindered the use of English at the public place^[23, 28]. This phenomenon encourages the parents to find and create an environment that enables the children to use their English meaningfully as a strategy to preserve their English proficiency. The contexts of informal settings beyond the classroom, such as English language use through digital technology such as social media and mobile games^[29, 30] and English communication with native-speaker friends from Australia^[10] become feasible and suit the context of English as a foreign language in Indonesia.

Moreover, the decision to switch the home language from Indonesian to English proves to be efficient in creating an authentic context for the children to use the language meaningfully in daily communication. Tran et al. reveal that switching from home to other languages requires strong motivation and persistence^[7]. To some extent, the preference for using Indonesian among the children due to the environment and regular Indonesian exposure^[9] forces the returnee parents to strictly apply their only-English policy at home^[5, 8]. For the returnee family, living in multiple linguistic worlds results in emotional costs that make language transmission from Indonesia to English or vice versa more challenging^[2]. For example, most people in Indonesia still have negative sentiments about using English in public spaces^[9], which puts more psychological pressure on the returnee children to use English in their daily communication^[23].

Furthermore, the effort to maintain English among Indonesian returnee children relates to the role of English as the cultural capital. From the lens of threshold theory, the parents in this current study consistently create settings enabling the children to maintain high levels of English proficiency to achieve critical benefits of being multilingual citizens, especially in the context of Indonesia. The application of the language policy of mandatory use of English in their everyday communication at home shows the intention and

effort to prevent the English language loss reflected from the lower threshold of English proficiency^[31]. Alshammri acknowledges that the parents' aspiration to see their children as multilingual children who can become global citizens influences their efforts and strategies to maintain their children's English proficiency. Being multilingual children is believed by the parent to give more advantages regarding intellectuality, critical thinking, and cultural understanding^[12, 16]. Being multilingual children with high levels of English proficiency provides more advantages for the returnee family, especially their children in their future academic and professional careers. Chamorro & Janke state that multilingualism is believed to boost the problem-solving skills and creativity needed in the global workforce besides facilitating effective communication through linguistic and cultural skills^[13, 14]. While Indonesians are multilingual in nature^[26], such as having high proficiency in Indonesian and some local languages, adding English proficiency will provide greater opportunities for education and career on a global scale, engaging them with international networking and a multifaceted landscape of opportunities. Maintaining children's friendships with Australian native speakers is described not only as a medium of regular English language exposure for their children but also as channels of cultural sharing that enable the children to be effective communicators^[5, 12, 16]. By engaging directly with English native speakers in Australia through friendship, the returnee children obtain different cultural perspectives, values, and norms that facilitate their appreciation and understanding of global diversity. This valuable experience cultivates cultural empathy, respect, and tolerance, which are important for the children's global interaction^[15].

Technology also emerges as one channel that provides returnee families abundant exposure to English, contributing to their English language maintenance^[10]. Alshammri argues that digital technology enables returnee children, especially children, to stay connected with the English community, such as their schoolmates and friends^[10]. This connection and interaction with the English community enable them to use authentic language and learn about native cultures while living in their home countries. Aldukhayel highlights that digital platforms such as social media and mobile games solve geographical barriers for children, especially when they return to their home country^[5]. Therefore, the returnee

parents in this study mitigate the risk of losing English proficiency among their children by utilizing technology and communication tools. In other words, digital platforms provide various authentic materials and channels for active and interactive communication, allowing the returnee children to connect with other global English speakers^[16].

Personal factors such as belief, motivation, English language attitude, and prior learning experiences in Australian schools shape the returnee attitudes to their English language maintenance^[8, 18]. These personal factors play with some social factors, such as access to English communities through maintaining their friendship with Australian friends and access to global English speakers through technology and digital platforms that enable the returnee children to preserve their English proficiency when they return to their home country^[5, 18]. This study emphasizes that the interplay of these personal, familial, and social factors alleviates challenges in the Indonesian and English transition, significantly impacting the success of returnee children in maintaining their English proficiency.

6. Conclusions

The study has examined the experiences of Indonesian families in preserving their children's English fluency upon their return from English-speaking countries such as Australia. The study reveals that maintaining English skills for the returnee children in a foreign language context like Indonesia requires deliberate and adaptive family language planning. The study suggests that English exposure, especially in meaningful settings like casual family communication, shapes the language maintenance among the returnee children. Certain strategies identified, such as utilizing English for in-home communication, maximizing English exposure through technology, and maintaining relationships with Australian friends, are greatly influenced by the belief in the status of English in Indonesian contexts, particularly its potential economic and educational benefits for the children. The study demonstrates that parents have a substantial impact on increasing the amount of English exposure and creating authentic settings for their children to use English. The study also implies some negative judgment from society in using English in Indonesian public spaces, which has encouraged parents to maximize their personal space at home.

This personal space, such as using English in daily communication at home, becomes the solution for the children to practice and use their English meaningfully to preserve their English proficiency.

However, the study has limitations, especially regarding the nature of the participants. This study was based on a small sample, focusing only on two returnee families from a similar socio-economic background in a certain period. Therefore, it is recommended that future studies involve a larger sample size from various groups and settings to improve the generalizability of the study. The future studies should also be conducted in a longitudinal study design to comprehensively examine language maintenance in the long-term period.

Author Contributions

Conceptualization, S. and A.R.; methodology, S. and H.; software, H.; validation, S., A. and H.; formal analysis, M.D. and S.; investigation, S. and M.D.; resources, S.; data curation, H.; writing—original draft preparation, M.D. and S.; writing—review and editing, A.R. and S.; visualization, H.; supervision, A.R.; project administration, A.R.; funding acquisition, S. All authors have reviewed the manuscript critically for important intellectual content, approved the final version to be published, and agree to be accountable for all aspects of the work to ensure the integrity and accuracy of the research.

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Institutional Review Board Statement

This study was reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board of the Research and Community Service Institute (*Lembaga Penelitian dan Pengabdian kepada Masyarakat*) at Institut Agama Islam Negeri Sorong, in accordance with the institution's ethical standards for research involving human participants. Ethical approval was granted in August 2024 under Protocol Code: B-052/In.41/L-1/PP.00.9/08/2024 prior to the data collection period conducted between September and December 2024.

Informed Consent Statement

Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study. All participating parents provided verbal and written consent prior to the interviews, observations, and focus group discussions. Since children were not interviewed directly, consent was only obtained for their passive involvement through parental observations. Written informed consent has been obtained from the participants to publish this paper, including identifiable quotes.

Data Availability Statement

The data supporting the findings of this study are not publicly available due to privacy and ethical restrictions, as the research involved personal and family experiences of participants. However, anonymized excerpts from the interviews, focus group discussions, and observational notes may be available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request and with appropriate ethical clearance.

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Conflicts of Interest

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