

Adult Perceptions of the Influence of Children's Educational Television Programmes on Children's English Language Development: An Exploratory Qualitative Study

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ABSTRACT

This exploratory qualitative study examines adult perceptions of how children's educational television programmes may support children's English language development. It focuses on perceived contributions to vocabulary and pronunciation, characteristics of programmes considered effective for language learning, and reasons parents select educational television as a supplementary learning resource. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with four purposively selected adult participants: two parents, one preschool teacher, and one final-year child psychology student. Interview data were analysed using Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis framework. The findings indicate that participants perceived educational television as a useful source of additional English language exposure, particularly through repeated vocabulary, pronunciation models, observation, and imitation. Participants also emphasised social interaction, creative and interactive content, and clear, age-appropriate material as important characteristics of effective programmes. Parents were perceived to value educational television because it is accessible, relatively affordable, monitorable, and enjoyable for children. Because the study draws on the perceptions of four adult participants rather than direct assessments of children, the findings should be understood as a preliminary account of adult perceptions rather than evidence of children's actual language-development outcomes. The study suggests that educational television may function most appropriately as a supplementary resource when combined with parental guidance, teacher support, and opportunities for children to practise English through direct social interaction.

INTRODUCTION

Electronic media, particularly television, has long been discussed in relation to children's cognitive, educational, and language development. Educational television differs from general entertainment programming because it is intentionally designed to present learning content, often through stories, songs, repetition, characters, and demonstrations. Research suggests that children may learn from screen media, but the extent of learning depends on the characteristics of the content and the social context in which media are used (Kirkorian et al., 2008; Linebarger & Vaala, 2010).

Language development is strongly associated with exposure to language and opportunities for meaningful interaction. Studies of young children suggest that video can support vocabulary learning, particularly when viewing is accompanied by social interaction and opportunities to use language (Krcmar et al., 2007; Roseberry et al., 2009). This suggests that educational television should not be considered an isolated substitute for interpersonal communication. Rather, its potential value lies in providing additional language input that can subsequently be discussed and practised with adults and peers.

In this context, programmes such as *Sesame Street* have received substantial attention as examples of educational television designed to combine entertainment with learning. However, evidence concerning children's learning from television does not automatically establish that every educational programme produces measurable language gains. Programme design, age appropriateness, comprehensibility, repetition, interactivity, and adult mediation can all shape children's experiences.

The present study therefore takes an exploratory qualitative approach to examine how adults who have relevant experience perceive the role of educational television in children's English language development. The study does not directly assess children's language performance. Instead, it explores the perspectives of parents and education-related adults regarding perceived language benefits, programme characteristics, and parental reasons for using educational television.

1.2 Problem Statement

Previous research indicates that educational screen content can provide useful language input, but its effectiveness is influenced by factors such as programme quality, children's attention, age appropriateness, and social interaction (Al-Harbi, 2014; Linebarger & Vaala, 2010). Educational television may expose children to vocabulary and pronunciation, yet exposure alone does not necessarily demonstrate that children can transfer what they hear into everyday communication. Social interaction and opportunities to practise language remain important.

Parental mediation is another important consideration. Adults can select suitable content, discuss unfamiliar words, ask questions, and connect programme content with children's everyday experiences. Thus, the educational value of television may be shaped not only by the programme itself but also by what happens before, during, and after viewing.

A further issue concerns the evidence base of the present study. The study uses four adult participants rather than direct observations or assessments of children. Accordingly, the findings should not be interpreted as direct evidence that educational television causes improvement in children's English language ability. Instead, the study provides a preliminary exploratory account of how relevant adults perceive the possible contribution of educational television to children's English language development. This framing is important for maintaining alignment between the research design, evidence, and conclusions.

1.3 Research Objectives

- **RO1:** To explore adults' perceptions of how children's educational television programmes may support children's English language development.
- **RO2:** To identify the characteristics of educational television programmes that adults perceive as useful for children's English language development.
- **RO3:** To explore parents' reasons for selecting educational television programmes as supplementary resources for their children's English language learning.

1.4 Research Questions

- **RQ1:** How do adult participants perceive the influence of children's educational television programmes on children's English language development?
- **RQ2:** What characteristics of educational television programmes do adult participants perceive as effective for children's English language development?
- **RQ3:** Why do parents choose educational television programmes to support their children's English language learning?

1.5 Rationale and Scope of the Study

Educational television may provide children with additional exposure to English outside formal classroom settings. Previous research suggests that children can learn vocabulary from video, while social interaction can strengthen learning from screen content (Krcmar et al., 2007; Roseberry et al., 2009). The present study extends this discussion by examining the perceptions of adults who have relevant experience with children and educational contexts.

The study involved four adult participants: two parents, one preschool teacher, and one final-year child

psychology student. Semi-structured interviews were used to obtain their views and experiences. The scope is therefore limited to adult perceptions of educational television, language exposure, parental involvement, and perceived English language development. It does not include direct language testing, observation of children, or experimental comparison of programmes. The study is consequently positioned as preliminary and exploratory.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Rather than treating children's television as a collection of country-specific developments, the literature is more useful when synthesised around three connected issues: the educational potential of screen content, the conditions that shape language learning from media, and the role of adults in mediating children's viewing experiences.

Educational television can provide structured exposure to language through repeated words, conversations, songs, stories, and visual demonstrations. Research on children's learning from media suggests that educational content can support cognitive and language-related learning when it is appropriately designed (Kirkorian et al., 2008). Studies of language-promoting media also show that programme features and developmentally appropriate presentation can influence how children attend to language content (Linebarger & Vaala, 2010).

However, the literature also indicates that the medium alone does not determine learning. Krcmar et al. (2007) examined whether toddlers could learn vocabulary from television and highlighted the importance of the conditions surrounding exposure. Similarly, Roseberry et al. (2009) found that young children learned more effectively from video when meaningful social interaction was incorporated. These findings shift the focus from whether television is simply "good" or "bad" for children toward the question of what kinds of content and contexts make screen-based language exposure more useful.

Adult mediation is particularly relevant. Parents and teachers can help children interpret unfamiliar vocabulary, repeat expressions, relate programme content to everyday situations, and practise language after viewing. Al-Harbi (2014) similarly argues that educational television is better understood as a supportive educational tool and emphasises the importance of parent-child interaction. The implication is that educational television may provide language input, while social interaction provides opportunities for children to process and use that input.

The literature also identifies potential limitations of television exposure. Excessive or poorly selected viewing may reduce opportunities for direct interaction and may expose children to content that is unsuitable for their developmental level. Kirkorian et al. (2008) emphasise that children's learning from media is affected by both the content and the context of use. Consequently, programme quality, age appropriateness, clarity, interactivity, and adult guidance are central considerations.

This synthesis identifies a specific gap relevant to the present study. Much of the literature examines children directly, programme content, or associations between media exposure and developmental outcomes. Less attention is given in small exploratory settings to how parents and education-related adults interpret the perceived language-learning value of educational television. The present study addresses this gap by documenting adult perceptions of language benefits, programme characteristics, and parental reasons for using educational television, while explicitly avoiding the claim that these perceptions constitute direct evidence of children's measured language development.

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Data Collection

A qualitative approach was used to explore participants' views and experiences. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, with each interview lasting approximately 10–30 minutes. The interview format allowed participants to discuss perceived effects of educational television, characteristics of effective programmes, and reasons for selecting educational television for children.

3.2 Research Design

The study adopted an exploratory qualitative research design. This design was appropriate because the purpose was to obtain detailed descriptions of adult perceptions rather than to measure children's language outcomes. The unit of analysis was the participants' accounts concerning children's educational television programmes and their perceived relationship with English language development.

3.3 Sampling Techniques

Purposive sampling was used to select participants with relevant knowledge or experience. Four adult participants were included: two parents (Parent 1 and Parent 2), one preschool teacher (Teacher 1), and one final-year child psychology student (Student 1). The small sample was intentional for an exploratory qualitative account, but it limits the transferability of the findings and does not support generalisation to children or the wider population.

3.4 Data Analysis

The interview data were analysed using thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke (2006). The researchers first familiarised themselves with the interview material through repeated reading. Initial codes were then generated from meaningful segments of the data. Related codes were examined and grouped into candidate themes. The candidate themes were reviewed against the interview material, refined for internal coherence and distinction from one another, and subsequently defined and named. The final themes were then organised in relation to the research questions and reported systematically across adult perspectives. This procedure provided a rigorous approach for identifying recurring patterns in participants' accounts while retaining the exploratory character of the study.

3.5 Ethical Considerations and Informed Consent

All participants were informed about the purpose and procedures of the study, their voluntary participation, their right to withdraw, and the intended use of the interview data. Informed consent was obtained before the interviews were conducted. Participants' identities were kept confidential and neutral codes (Parent 1, Parent 2, Teacher 1, Student 1) were used throughout reporting to preserve anonymity.

FINDINGS

The findings are presented as an exploratory account of the four adult participants' perceptions. They should not be interpreted as direct measurements of children's English language development. Six core themes were identified across the interview accounts, grouped under the three research objectives.

4.1 Influence of Educational Television Programmes on Children's English Language Development

4.1.1 Vocabulary and Pronunciation Development

Participants perceived repeated exposure to English words, conversations, and pronunciation models as a potential benefit of educational television. They described programmes as providing children with opportunities to hear vocabulary and spoken English beyond the classroom. The perceived benefit was therefore associated with repeated listening and auditory exposure rather than with television viewing alone. Parent 1 and Teacher 1 specifically emphasized that hearing correct phonetics and clear enunciation from animated characters provided children with models for correct word pronunciation that reinforced school instruction.

4.1.2 Learning Through Observation and Imitation

Participants also perceived children as learning through observation and imitation of programme characters, conversations, actions, and repeated expressions. This perception is compatible with Bandura's (1977) social

learning theory, which emphasises learning through observation and modelling. Student 1 and Parent 2 noted that children frequently copy phrases, catchy dialogue, or gestures demonstrated on screen during play, using television media as a social template for verbal expression.

4.1.3 Educational Television as a Supporting Teaching Tool

Participants perceived educational television as a supplementary rather than replacement teaching resource. Programmes could provide examples of vocabulary, pronunciation, stories, and communication that parents or teachers could discuss with children. Teacher 1 noted that television acts as an effective visual hook that can introduce new topics before formal lessons, reinforcing the literature's emphasis on the social context of media use (Al-Harbi, 2014; Roseberry et al., 2009).

4.2 Characteristics of Effective Educational Television Programmes

4.2.1 Social Interaction

Participants identified social interaction as an important feature surrounding effective educational television use. Programmes that invite children to respond, participate, repeat, or communicate were perceived as more useful than programmes requiring passive viewing. Both Parent 1 and Student 1 highlighted that media content prompting direct verbal responses (e.g., asking the child to repeat a word or locate an object on screen) successfully bridged passive screen consumption and active learning.

4.2.2 Creative and Interactive Content

Participants highlighted songs, stories, music, characters, repetition, and interactive activities as features that can sustain children's attention and make language learning more enjoyable. Parent 2 emphasized that rhythmic songs and recurring narrative structures made English words memorable, allowing children to retain terminology more effortlessly through melody and narrative context.

4.2.3 Understandable, Informative, and Age-Appropriate Content

Participants perceived clear, simple, informative, and age-appropriate language as important characteristics of effective educational programmes. Content that is too complex, fast-paced, or laden with idiomatic expressions was observed to make it difficult for children to comprehend the language presented. Teacher 1 underscored that appropriate pacing and simple syntax are vital for young non-native speakers to digest sentence structures.

4.3 Reasons Parents Choose Educational Television Programmes

4.3.1 Accessibility and Affordability

Parents perceived educational television as a convenient supplementary resource because programmes can be accessed easily through existing broadcasting and digital streaming media services without requiring substantial additional learning materials or expensive tutoring.

4.3.2 Ease of Parental Monitoring

Participants indicated that parents can easily monitor what children watch and provide explanations when unfamiliar words or ideas occur. Co-viewing can also create natural opportunities for discussion, clarification, and language practice within the household setting.

4.3.3 Fun and Enjoyable Learning

Educational television was also perceived as attractive because bright visual elements, storytelling, upbeat music, and engaging characters make learning feel less like formal study and more like entertainment, keeping children motivated and engaged.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

This exploratory qualitative study indicates that the four adult participants perceived educational television programmes as potentially useful supplementary resources for children's English language learning. The perceived benefits centred on vocabulary and pronunciation exposure, observation and imitation, and the use of television as a supporting teaching resource. Participants also identified social interaction, creative and interactive content, and clear, informative, age-appropriate material as characteristics that may enhance the usefulness of educational programmes.

The findings should, however, be interpreted within the limits of the study design. The sample comprised only four adults, and the study did not directly observe children or assess their English language outcomes. Consequently, the study cannot establish that educational television caused improvements in children's language development. Its contribution is instead preliminary: it documents how parents and education-related adults perceive the possible role of educational television in children's English language learning.

The findings also reinforce the importance of adult mediation. Educational television is better positioned as a supplementary source of language exposure than as a substitute for teachers, parents, peers, or direct communication. Its potential value depends on programme quality and on opportunities for children to discuss, practise, and apply language beyond the screen.

Recommendations

1. **Parental Selection and Co-Viewing:** Parents should select programmes that are appropriate for children's age, language level, and developmental needs, monitoring viewing where possible. Co-viewing and active discussion can help children connect programme vocabulary and expressions with everyday communication.
2. **Pedagogical Integration:** Teachers may use suitable educational television programmes as supplementary materials for English language activities. Programme clips can be followed by vocabulary exercises, pronunciation practice, questions, storytelling, or other classroom interaction so that viewing is connected to active language use.
3. **Targeted Content Production:** Programme producers should prioritize clear, simple, interactive, creative, and age-appropriate content. Repetition, songs, stories, characters, and opportunities for children to respond support engagement. For local Malaysian audiences, cultural and linguistic familiarity should also be considered to bridge international accents with children's everyday experiences.
4. **Future Research Directions:** Future research should utilize larger, more varied samples and incorporate direct observation or formal assessment of children's language development. Longitudinal studies, classroom-based empirical research, and comparative evaluations of different educational programmes would provide stronger evidence regarding which specific media features drive language outcomes.

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