

Innovation in Isolation  
Preschool Children Learn English during Quarantine:  
Activity-based Crash Course for Parents in EFL Contexts

**Abstract**

This paper describes a short-term case study that explains, for parents, specifically Arab ones, how to exploit time and help their preschool children learn English during the quarantine period of COVID-19 crisis, which can be applied during any other crisis periods e.g. war. This study was conducted by the researcher herself who implemented different teaching approaches and various techniques to teach English to a four-year-old child. It explicates how early learning of EFL took place in different situations at home, and in contextualized contexts. A home-education model was adopted. The child learnt EFL in a very relaxed environment, viz. home, through natural activities, e.g. playing, singing, movement, drawing, coloring, and serving food. A sessional crash course was suggested and then used to teach English to the study's single case. Bilingual and activity-based approaches were used to teach this course. Data were collected from the steps of the child's learning within the five months of the quarantine period, i.e. the observation period. Processes and outcomes of early EFL learning were analyzed considering the child's learning of English at home, the natural activities done by the child, her use of English words in different situations, and her interaction with family members. It was concluded that parents can successfully teach English to their preschool children at home through using natural activities and can consequently motivate them for schools. Moreover, the suggested course really helped The child learn English, e.g. the alphabets, ten numbers, colors, food items, and performing a few functions, and thus it offers a deeper insight into early EFL learning.

**Key Words**

Crisis, Quarantine, COVID-19, Preschool children, Sessions, Crash course, Home-education, Bilingual approach, Activity-based learning (ABL).

**1. Background & Context**

According to UNESCO (2020), more than 1.5 billion students in 188 countries were out of school due to COVID-19, on April 8, representing over 91 percent of the world's student population. Closure of schools, both public and private, widespread job and income loss, and economic insecurity have badly affected children. For many children, the COVID-19 crisis means having limited or no peers to learn with.

Children, who are badly affected by school closures, also miss the sense of stability and normalcy that schools provide and can fall further behind their peers.

Stress on families, particularly those living under quarantines, lockdowns and other restrictions on freedom of movement, may increase the incidence of violence in the home. Also, families who have lost income as a result of job cuts or precarious employment or are otherwise in a difficult situation, are likely to increase rates of children's suffering (COVID-19 and Children's Rights: 2020).

UNESCO has recommended that countries “adopt a variety of hi-tech, low-tech and no tech solutions to assure the continuity of learning”. Without exception, education policies have focused on online learning in the wake of COVID-19, although online learning has highlighted longstanding inequities. Nearly half of the world has no access to the internet. Many schools are not set up to use it or don't have the technology and equipment to run online teaching. In the United States, for example, one in five school-aged children don't have access to a computer or high-speed internet at home. In China, many rural students lack the connections or hardware to learn remotely. Children living in the most disconnected places in the world, if they are connected at all, also face the least dependable and slowest internet at the least affordable prices. Children living in countries that have imposed internet shutdowns in some regions - including Bangladesh, India, and Myanmar - have no hope of accessing online learning. Thus, this crisis has exposed vast disparities in countries' emergency preparedness, availability of learning materials and internet access for children. It increases the human rights risks to children, though some governments have tried to take all possible measures to ensure children's right to education (COVID-19 and Children's Rights : 2020).

## **2. Introduction**

The coronavirus pandemic has caused 188 countries all over the world to close their educational institutions. Children, from both public and private schools throughout different countries, aren't attending classes like usual - and their parents and other caregivers are spending their time at home and are not sure what to do with their children. And yet, more responsibility for their children's education has suddenly fallen upon them (UNESCO: 2020).

COVID-19 is disrupting parents' routine and leaving them with little children to look after and guide, as everyone tries to cope with the challenges caused by the disease. They are feeling the tensions of being in isolation at home and struggling to find their new “normal.” Some children are more than happy to spend the entire day playing video games and watching TV cartoon movies and unfortunately some parents allow their children to spend their days in this way.

The first step every parent should be taking is to talk with their children about why self-isolation is so essential. It is important to convey that the situation is serious, without invoking panic. According to Dr. Richard Horowitz, parenting coach and author of *Family Centered Parenting*, parents need to “factually explain, in age-appropriate language, what the virus is and its impact on children's health”. He advises parents: “Reassure them that [you] are doing everything to keep them safe and healthy without over-exaggerating that everything is all right”, (Coronavirus and homeschooling : 2020).

One solution that has already been implemented in some cities around the world - or suggested by experts - is home education (i.e. parent-led home-based education or homeschooling) of the child. Some homeschool organizations have already provided getting-started homeschooling resources for families. For example, the USA-based HSLDA (i.e. Home School Legal Defense Association) has released as 'Quick Start' : Guide to Homeschooling in Light of COVID-19 that links to their 'Homeschooling Quick Start' (HSLDA: 2020 )

Parents, specifically Arabs, often wonder how to enable a child to learn English at home during quarantine and accordingly they may resort to different methods to achieve this. They may devise their own lesson plans, or just figure out what children should do hour to hour or, in some cases, they might not know where to start. "Parents in charge of setting up schedules for periods of schooling at home may wonder what a typical homeschool day looks like. The truth is that it varies from family to family, and the order in which the work is done is less important than the environment and method of implementing the schedule", suggests M. Kelley in (Coronavirus and homeschooling : 2020).

### **2.1 Early Learning of English as a FL - The Arabian Context**

As a global language, with the largest number of speakers worldwide (calculated at 1.5 billion, of whom only 375 million are native speakers), English now prevails as a foreign language in schools all over the world (Garton, Copland & Burns, 2011 as cited in Murphy & Evangelou : 2016), testifying to "a global revolution in education" (Graddol, 2006:70). Moreover, together with literacy in the native language, numeracy, and information technology, English is becoming a basic skill, not just a foreign language that is part of the primary curriculum (Graddol, 2006). Preschool curricula are increasingly following this trend, and in some European countries like Spain, Cyprus and Poland, English is formally part of the preschool curriculum (Murphy & Evangelou, 2016 : 219-20). This trend is formally followed in some Arab countries such as UAE, Kuwait, Sultanate of Oman, Jordan and Egypt. It has been remarked that "it is indeed interesting to note increased numbers of countries introducing English as part of pre-school provision" (Murphy & Evangelou, 2016: 7).

The appropriate age of starting FL learning has remained controversial in research studies. However, there has been a common belief that the earlier children start learning a FL, the better (Murphy & Evangelou, 2016). Evangelou and colleagues (2009) have concluded that an early start is beneficial under certain conditions, making the context of early language learning more important than the learners' age. They have reported that contextual factors, i.e. supportive environments, and cultural and social contexts, have been found to be crucial for a child's development and learning. Moreover, FL input is a key factor in children's success in learning a FL. It involves both the quality of exposure and its extent inside and outside school. Early exposure to authentic language can play a significant role in children's later levels of listening, reading and communication skills (Lefever, 2010).

In many Arab countries in the world, parents are aware that an early start to learning English will be beneficial for their children later when they progress to higher levels. There are parents who share the same language, i.e. Arabic, and have only limited English skills but would still like to raise their children bilingually and introduce them to English. These parents, in general terms, can make use of English instruction

which is offered by language schools or which is provided in nursery schools. Meanwhile, the parents who know English well enough can take matters into their own hands and teach their children English themselves by speaking English to them and by providing them with other sources of input.

## **2.2 Notes on Terminology**

The terms ‘home education’ and ‘homeschooling’ are used interchangeably in this paper. It is acknowledged that the term ‘education’ (particularly within the context of home education) refers to the process of facilitating learning or acquiring knowledge, skills, values, beliefs and habits (as in Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia). Reference to ‘parent-led home-based education’ also relates to home education.

## **3. What is Home Education?**

This study follows an unstructured home education model as it suggests using activity-based sessions to teach English to children at home, under the supervision of the parents or any other caregivers. Families, parents and schools who are disrupted by COVID-19 may confidently consider home education to meet their educational needs. Home education is suitable for the context of the COVID-19 crisis, i.e. the availability of energetic children with parents at home during quarantine and all living under lockdown and facing other restrictions on freedom of movement. This crisis can actually be seen to have imposed parent-led home-based education, and made educating children at home inevitable. Here, home education entails informal learning, i.e. an everyday form of learning through participation and creation, that is in contrast with a traditional/conventional view of learning. In the context of this new view, parents try a set of methods and techniques while doing daily activities to achieve the learning objectives they have in mind.

In Wikipedia, home education is defined as "the education of children at home or at a variety of places other than school", which is usually conducted by a parent (i.e. parent-led home-based education), a tutor, or an online teacher. It mentions that "Many homeschool families use less formal ways of educating" and that "home education" is commonly used in the United Kingdom, Europe and in many Commonwealth countries, whereas the term "homeschooling" is commonly used in USA and North America.

For most of history and in different cultures, the education of children at home by family members was a common practice. It declined at the beginning of the 19th century with the enactment of compulsory attendance laws, but began a resurgence in the 1960s and 1970s as educational reformists were dissatisfied with what they perceived to be industrialized education models (Wikipedia, 2020). Since then, home education has been growing around the world in many nations (e.g. USA, Australia, Canada, France, Hungary, Japan, Kenya, Russia, Mexico, South Korea, Thailand, Indonesia and the United Kingdom) where it is considered a legal alternative to public and private schools. An example of rapid growth in homeschooling between the 1970s and 2015 is the USA where it exploded from a population of about 13,000 students to about 2.2 million in that time (Ray, 2017). Yet, in other nations, home education remains illegal or restricted to specific conditions (as in Germany, Sweden, Greece, Albania, Andorra and in many countries of the Middle East).

Home education can be seen as a positive alternative education to develop children's potential. Home-educated children have more opportunities to explore and develop their potential based on intelligence and learning styles that are unique to each child. Educational aspects that include cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains can be developed. A home education model can provide satisfaction for parents and children because it provides tangible experiences that benefit children's life skills; thus they have had now become one of the alternative education models that are in demand by families in various countries (Purwaningsih & Fauziah, 2020).

Approaches to home education are subsumed under two basic categories: 'structured' and 'unstructured'. The former includes any method or style of home education that follows a basic curriculum with articulated goals and outcomes. This style attempts to imitate the structure of the traditional school setting while personalizing the curriculum. The latter, i.e. unstructured, is any form of home education where parents do not construct a curriculum at all. It attempts to teach through the child's daily experiences and focuses more on self-directed learning by the child, free of textbooks, teachers, and any formal assessment of success or failure (Wikipedia,2020).

Home education often implies 'informal learning', which is an everyday form of learning through participation and creation, in contrast with the traditional view of teacher-centered learning. The term is often combined with 'non-formal learning', and 'self-directed learning'. Informal learning differs from traditional learning since there may no expected objectives or outcomes. It explicates mechanisms of learning that organically occur outside the realm of traditional instructor-led programs, e.g. reading self-selected books, and participating in self-study programs.

From the learner's standpoint, the knowledge that they receive is not intentional. Anything from planting a garden to baking a cake to talking to a technician at work about installing new software can be considered informal learning. The individual is completing a task with different intentions but ends up acquiring knowledge or learning skills in the process. Children, without having to generate questions about photosynthesis, will learn through watching their tomato plants grow that this growth is due to water and sunlight, and will thereby increase their base understanding of complex scientific concepts without background studying (Wikipedia, 2020). A growing awareness that children can learn important ideas and concepts outside the traditional classroom setting have resulted in an ever-growing valuing of informal learning.

### **3.1 The Effects of Home Education Reported by Parents**

A feasibility study in England conducted by Hopwood (2006), showed that the effects of home education reported by parents interviewed included:

- Personal benefits such as: high levels of confidence and self-esteem; happier children; high standards of behavior; ability to mix with children and adults;
- Family benefits such as: a close relationship between parent and child;
- Benefits for lifelong learning, for example: a self-directed approach to learning; motivation to learn;

- Developments in line with age-related peers: some parents reported their children to be successfully following the curriculum at the level of, or in advance of, their age-related peers. Some parents who had withdrawn their children from school to home educate because of concerns over their welfare, reported mental health benefits as well as 'educational' progress such as a reduction in self-harm and improved self-confidence (Hopwood et al. ,2007 : 28).

### **3.2 Reasons for Using this Model of Education in the Study**

Many families are opting to home education for various reasons including bullying, discontentment with the quality of education and curriculum provided in school, school phobia, parents' religious, cultural or ideological beliefs, and risk of prosecution for non-attendance. Some families who have children with special needs are also increasingly choosing home education. Others educate their children at home to individualize the curriculum and learning environment for each child, and to provide a safer environment for children because of physical violence, drugs and alcohol, psychological abuse, racism, and improper and unhealthy sexuality associated with institutional schools. The crisis of COVID-19, which results in school closures and quarantines, is leading families, children, students and schools to consider, and in some cases to require, home education to meet children's educational needs.

### **4.Review of Literature**

Home education's re-growth after about a century of decline has surprised many educators, sociologists, scientists, historians and has attracted the imagination and engagement of thousands of families. There is solid evidence that home education has made notable gains in absolute numbers and percentages of the school-age population in diverse nations (Rothermel, 2015).

The majority of the current studies into homeschooling are focusing on evaluating the effectiveness and relevancy of home education as an alternative to traditional schooling, especially on children's healthy emotional social psychological development (Jamaludin, 2015). The focus, here, will be on the positive effects of home education on children's development.

Some studies tried to find an answer to this question; does the home educated child experience healthy social, emotional, and psychological development?

In the USA, numerous studies, such as Medlin (2006), Ray (2005), White, Moore, & Squires (2009) and White et al. (2007), employing various psychological constructs and measures, show that home-educated children develop at least as well as, and *often better than*, those who attend institutional schools. No research to date contravenes this conclusion.

Regarding the aspect of self-concept in the psychological development of children, various studies have revealed that the self-concept of homeschooled students is significantly higher than that of public school students. For example, in an earlier study, Taylor (1986) investigated the self-concept in homeschooled children and found that it was significantly higher ( $p < .100$ ) than that of conventionally schooled children on all of the scales he used.

Another early study (Shyers, 1992) of home-educated children's self-concepts examined passivity and aggression. The research was conducted with 70 homeschooled and 70 traditionally schooled eight-to-ten-year-old children in Florida and found significantly fewer problem behaviors amongst the home-educated children than the traditionally schooled children. The latter exhibited problem behaviors above the normal range for a national population of the same age and displayed more anxiety than their home-educated peers. Shyers also found that the home-educated children, whether thinking passive or aggressive thoughts, were more able to control their emotions and act in a socially acceptable way than the schoolchildren who "had a tendency to act on their feelings, not their understandings" (Rothermel, 2012).

Medlin's study (2006) investigated homeschooled children's social skills. He found that the homeschooled children in his study described themselves as more cooperative, assertive, empathetic, and self-controlled than did the public school children in his study. "There appears to be a convergence of evidence from three different perspectives—parental report, objective observers, and self-report—that homeschooled children's social skills are exceptional", (Medlin, 2006).

Mazama and Landy's study (2012) has explored the issue of racism that occurred in public school and how homeschooling is viewed as an alternative to restore children's self-confidence and healthy learning environment (Jamaludin, 2015).

Rothermel's study (2012), that used the Revised Rutter Scale (RRS) and the Goodman Strengths & Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) scales to investigate whether home-educated children experience psychological problems over and above what is considered normal, discovered that they were judged to be psychosocially healthy by the RRS.

In England, a feasibility study (2006) conducted on the prevalence of home education in England showed that the beneficial effects of elective home education reported by parents included high levels of confidence and self-esteem, a close relationship between parent and child, self-directed learning, and the development of skills in line with, or in advance of, age-related peers.

In New Zealand, the New Zealand Government Education Review Office (ERO, 2001) found that homeschooled children were "comfortable with the experience, were progressing educationally, and that their socialization was not at risk". Their report found that for 90% of homeschooled children their education was at least as good as a school education (Rothermel, 2012).

## **5.The Study**

### **5.1 Purpose of the Study**

Without a doubt, families and parents are discovering how challenging it is to educate their children, especially preschool children, at home and make them learn anything, not necessarily English, during the coronavirus shutdown or during any other crisis. It is an incredibly daunting task. They may ask themselves: *what we have to do with our children during quarantine?* They want to make this time as stress-free as possible for their children and to benefit their children in this temporary crisis situation.

The present paper aims to enable parents to help their children learn English indirectly during the quarantine or any other crisis periods. It gives an answer to this question, ‘How can preschool children, aged between 4-6 years, indirectly learn English during quarantine in FL contexts in general, and in the Arab world, in particular?’ To answer this question, a short sessional activity-based course, i.e. a crash course, has been suggested to help parents in teaching English to their preschool children at home.

## **5.2 Significance of the Study**

This study suggests a sessional activity-based course, i.e. a crash course, for preschool children to help them learn English at home, in FL contexts in general, and for Arab parents, in particular. It guides parents who are disrupted by the COVID-19 crisis and who are spending a challenging time at home with energetic children aged between 4–6 years. The suggested crash course contains sessions on basic English language topics that parents can also use to teach their children if they are forced to spend weeks at home for any other crisis periods in the future.

## **5.3 Getting Children To Learn English is a Difficult Task**

Children, especially those of preschool age, love to play all the time. They do not like to stay static or to receive instructions that don’t involve moving around here and there. So expecting them to learn when they are contained in a restricted area (i.e. home) is not an easy task. Parents should keep these tips in mind:

1. Teaching children is a little difficult as they can't learn in the common conventional way i.e. you cannot make them sit at one place to learn the language. This would be too boring for them and they may develop a fear of the language, which we don't want. Hence, they should be taught in unique, interactive and fun ways. Therefore, parents shouldn't fix a particular time and stick to it. Short sessions of about ten-fifteen minutes are enough for the child as s/he has a short attention span. Also, short, regular sessions are better than long, irregular ones. Making the sessions fun helps in keeping the child engaged.
2. It doesn't matter if the parents' English is not perfect, also, they shouldn't worry if they don't speak English. They can give their child the instructions in their own language, and at the end of the activity they can also tell them about it in their own language. The most important thing is that while they are doing the activity, they are using English.
3. The most important thing is that parents should be enthusiastic and give their children lots of encouragement and praise. Children will pick up on the mom's or dad's enthusiasm for the language. Parents shouldn't worry if their children don't start to learn English immediately. They surely need a certain amount of time to say the words and to repeat them subconsciously in different situations. Parents should be patient, and children will begin to learn English in their own time.

4. Remember that every child learns at a different pace, so do not worry if your child is taking a long time to say the English words. So do not rush. The pace of learning, however, will depend on whether and to what extent the child's inclination to learn is encountered and engaged in supporting environments.
5. Not all children will be up for learning English in the way parents would want them to. Therefore, it is best to integrate the language into the activities they already enjoy.
6. Don't force children to learn, learning should not be forced. Instead, parents need to find an activity their children are interested in and incorporate learning into that activity.
7. Children's retention of English words may be difficult at first. So repetition is essential – children often need to hear words and phrases many times before they feel ready to produce them themselves (Blackmore, 2020).
8. Learning a language can be a physical exercise too. A child can learn English while playing, jumping, riding a bicycle, and making houses with clay. Children's learning speeds up when they get occupied in doing things themselves.
9. Children grasp things quickly once they are in an interesting environment that fully supports their learning process, so they can start grasping the nuances of the language from everywhere. These could be from conversations amongst family members or on the phone, from watching media that has simple English spoken in it, and so on.
10. Fathers and mothers CAN home educate children effectively and successfully.
11. Parents should keep in mind that there is no one-size-fits-all home-education method that will work for all different types of children.

## **6. Research Methodology**

This study is a case study. It follows a research method that involves an up-close, in-depth, and detailed examination of the case of a four-year child who was home-educated, for the first time, by her mother during quarantine. Teaching this child has helped in preparing the suggested sessional activity-based crash course to teach some basic English language topics. Any parents can use the ideas of the suggested course whenever they are forced to spend weeks at home for COVID-19 or any other crisis periods. Here, the child's learning of some English and the progress of her learning may help parents in exploiting challenging times during crises.

## 6.1 Participants

This study centers around a four-year-old child who learnt some English at home while doing daily natural activities, e.g. playing, moving around, singing, and dancing during the quarantine. This four-year child is the single case whose learning of English through doing natural activities was the researcher's focus.

## 6.2 Procedures & Instruments

*Observation* was the main research tool. The researcher monitored the child's learning of English, session by session, observing her doing different activities, her reactions, repetition of the target words, participation and creation. Also, the researcher *took notes* during each session. Those notes helped her to overcome the difficulties she encountered while helping her child learn English at home. Accordingly, the researcher avoided the occurrence of whatever hindered her learning (e.g. her being interrupted by noise caused by others, her being fixated on her favorite cartoon films on TV, and her elder sister responding to the mom's questions addressed specifically to her).

## 7. Description of the Suggested Course

A sessional activity-based course that covers the different situations at home: i.e. in the bedroom, in the kitchen, in the bathroom, in the dining room, in the hall, in the garden, on the phone, at the food table etc., served the purpose of this study. The suggested crash course comprises a set of sessions that cover the daily activities taking place at home. In each session, the child learns some words (e.g. names of objects, numbers, alphabets, colors, some action verbs etc.). For example, she learns English while eating food with family members, while watching TV, while talking on the phone, while playing with toys and while having a bath, etc., which helps in making the child's brain active. In other words, she learns English subconsciously without having to follow structured practice or very strict direct instructions. Here, a child can both do daily activities and learn English indirectly in a stress-free atmosphere under the guidance of her parents or siblings. Parents should plan a schedule that will help everyone to spend the day joyfully while enabling children to learn English through occupying them with fun activities. It is better to have short, frequent sessions than long, infrequent ones. Ten-fifteen minutes is enough for a session, for very young children. Parents can gradually make sessions longer as the child gets accustomed to the learning sessions and her concentration span increases. They should keep the activities short and varied in order to hold the child's attention.

The advantage of teaching English at home is that parents can use situations of everyday life and use real objects from around the house to practice the language naturally and in context. For example:

- Practicing vocabulary for toys and colors when the mother helps the child to tidy her bedroom (“Put your teddy bear on the bed!”, “Where’s your blue car?”, “It’s under the chair”, “Bring your small doll, it’s over there” etc.).
- Teaching food vocabulary when the mother cooks lunch with the child in the kitchen.

- Revising food vocabulary when the mother serves the food to eat on the table (“I’m cooking fish”, “Give me the juice over there”, “We’re eating eggs and bread” etc.).

### 7.1 How to Teach Children the Suggested Course

The suggested course can be taught through using a *bilingual approach* in which parents can use, for example, Arabic language to teach the child the English language. They can switch from Arabic to English and vice versa. Also, they can use an *activity-based approach*, i.e. learning by doing. This approach of activity-based learning is the best teaching approach, especially for children. This methodology has gained such profound importance that even toy companies employ it by producing activity-based and educational toys. This is performed to stimulate the minds of children and help to keep them positively occupied.

### 7.2 What is Activity-based Learning (ABL)?

Activity-based Learning (ABL) was first pioneered by *David Horsburgh*, a British-born educationist. Since its inception, it has been implemented widely. ABL is the process of *learning by doing*, as opposed to asking children to simply listen and take notes. In ABL, children learn at their own pace through various supervised activities. It is a more engaging and interactive way of teaching children, as it encourages children to participate in involving learning experiences. It is a child-centered approach that allows for monitoring factors such as speech, coordination, social skills and motor skills, amongst other key factors. Furthermore, it is a fun approach to learning as it boosts the development of children’s brains by providing constant stimuli to prompt them to provide responses. It is achieved broadly in three ways, namely exploration, experimentation and expression. A key feature of ABL is that it uses child-friendly educational aids to allow a child to study according to his or her aptitude and skill. ABL has innumerable benefits, especially in early childhood development, such as the following:

1. *Helping children memorize information* – It enhances memory. Anything we do, we remember for a longer period than anything we read or listen to. This process of gathering knowledge through personal experience (i.e. experimentation) helps children memorize and understand learning material.
2. *Encouraging children to be independent and inquisitive* – Asking children to work on their own or in small groups encourages them to be independently inquisitive, think critically and learn from their own experience.
3. *Supporting social development* – ABL helps children develop teamwork and social skills when they work in a group.
4. *Emphasizing the relevance of educational material* – ABL helps children to understand the ‘real-life’ relevance of learning material by encouraging them to explore and solve realistic problems and scenarios (i.e. exploration).
5. *Encouraging children to express themselves in different ways* – ABL provides children with the opportunity to express what they have learnt through the act of doing as well as through the act of verbal presentation (i.e. expression).
6. *Continuous engagement* – ABL faces no threat of inattention. Since the children are actively involved at every step, they can’t stray away.

7. *Ability Variability* – This feature is hugely leveraged by ABL. Not all children can grasp things at the same time or pace or to the same degree. Each child is unique, even in their ability to learn. ABL promotes learning at the pace of each child, thus eliminating the stress of time or pace at which they learn.
8. *Motivation* – Unquestionably, each child feels a sense of accomplishment in performing each activity. This enhances their confidence to believe in their abilities.
9. *Building in curiosity* – Little children still comprise of a playful mind. Indulging them in ABL kindles their curiosity which in turn makes them active and not passive.

### **7.3 Contents of the Suggested Crash Course**

*The duration of the course:* Five months (this study was carried out between 17<sup>th</sup> March and 18<sup>th</sup> August 2020).

*The intended learners:* Preschool children whose age is between 4–6 years old.

*Aim of the course:* Introducing preschool children to English in EFL contexts.

#### **7.3.1 Objectives of the course:**

1. To enable parents to teach English to their preschool children whenever they are forced to spend long periods at home.
2. To enable preschool children to:
  - a. learn English at different situations at home and in contextualized contexts;
  - b. write and recite the English alphabets (both upper and lower case letters);
  - c. write and recite the first ten numbers in English (1-10);
  - d. name some items e.g. colors, toys, food items, a few parts of the body;
  - e. perform a few functions, e.g. expressing dis/likes, talking about oneself, describing things using specific adjectives, helping mother, and serving food for other family members.

### **7.4 Content-items of the Suggested Crash Course**

Parents should consider the child's interests and personality when deciding which topics to teach, and let their child help them choose. Also, the content items should be organized in accordance with the children's cognition and psychomotor abilities. The suggested sessional activity-based course may include these topics:

Table no. 1: Outline of the contents of the suggested crash course

No.	Themes	Situations at home	No. of items to teach	No. of expected sessions	Activities done by the child	Tutors	Time of each session	No. of actual Sessions
1	Numbers	In the hall, In the bedroom, In the kitchen, In the dining room.	10  (1-10)	Five  (teaching two numbers in each session)	Counting real countable objects e.g. toys, fruits, pens, etc.	Parents	15 minutes	5
<b>Remarks</b>		<p>1. Numbers should be repeated constantly by the child, making the child count everything in hand e.g. toys, pencils, colors, fruits...etc.</p> <p>2. Playing the numbers songs helps the child to recite them,</p>						
2	Alphabet	In the hall, In the bedroom, In the kitchen, In the dining room.	52 letters (A a- Z z) (26 upper case letters + 26 lower case ones) + 26 words as examples for each letter.	26	<p>1. Writing the letters.</p> <p>2. Drawing and painting forms that initiated with the letters.</p> <p>3. Singing the alphabet song.</p>	Parents	20 minutes	26
<b>Remarks</b>		<p>1. Here, pauses/breaks are needed after every two sessions (i.e. after every 4 letters) to review, refresh the child's mind and motivate the child to learn more,</p> <p>2. The content of learning alphabet shouldn't be dense and then boring.</p> <p>3. Repetition of the alphabet is needed here.</p> <p>4. Flash cards in which different letters written are useful to enable the kid discriminate the different shapes of the letters.</p>						
3	Family members	Different situations at home.	6 mother (mom) father (dad) sister, brother.	2	1. Calling the child's real dad "father" and real mom "mother" real sister and brother. If the child doesn't have any of the members, L1 is	Parents	15 minutes	2

					used to explain them			
<b>Remarks</b>		1.Repetition of the family members' names. 2. Keep calling 'dad' with father and 'mom' with mother, etc.						
4	Colors	Different situations at home	10 white-black-red- brown-green-yellow-blue- orange-pink- purple	10	1. Playing the game (find out with your little eyes) specified colors  2. Using the intended color to paint some shapes	Parents	15 minutes	10
<b>Remarks</b>		1.A child needs to do more activities, e.g. coloring many shapes with specific colors such as purple and brown to fix the long names of these colors in mind. 2. Pauses/breaks are really needed after every two colors. 3. Repetition of the names of colors is needed here.						
5	Talking about oneself	In the hall	<b>3</b> 1. What's your name? 2. How old are you? 3. How are you?	<b>3</b>	1. Answering the questions  2. Singing the questions  3. Tracing the dots of the child's name. 4. helping the child to write her name by herself.	Parents	15 minutes	6
<b>Remarks</b>		1.Repetition of the questions and answers is necessary.						

6	The body	Different situations at home	9 face: eyes, ears, nose, mouth, hair, head, hands, legs	9	1. Drawing faces and parts of the body .  2. Naming the intended parts of the body using a doll.  3. Coloring specific parts of the body as required	Parents	20 minutes	9
<b>Remarks</b>		1. The parts of the body should be reviewed daily e.g. while the child is having a bath. 2. Pauses/breaks are needed after a single name of the parts of the body. 3. Repetition of the names of colors is needed here.						
7	Food	In the kitchen,  In the dining room.	10 fruits (apple, orange, banana) juice, water, milk, egg, bread, fish	10	1. Naming real food items  2. Asking the child to bring some food items e.g. ask her to bring water or apple or juice from the fridge.	Parents	15 minutes	10
<b>Remarks</b>		1.It is useful to remind the child about the names of the food (daily), in the kitchen, in the dining room. 2.Repetition of the names of food items is important.						
8	Expressing dis/likes	In the kitchen  In the dining room	3 1. Do you like eggs /milk /apples? 2. Yes, I like milk. 3. No, I don't like eggs.	6	1. Singing the song of "I like apples, I don't like oranges..."  2. Dancing while singing  3. Jumping  4. Denoting the	Parents	15 minutes	6

					food/toys she likes/dislikes			
<b>Remarks</b>		1. Repetition of the questions about what the child likes/dislikes. 2. Encourage the child to use 'I like and I don't like with different things she dis/likes.						
9	Toys	Different situations at home	6 a ball, a doll, a car, a teddy bear, a plane, a cycle	6	1. Naming the toys using real toys  2. Searching for specific toys in a pile of toys  3. Drawing the intended toys	Parents	15 minutes	6
<b>Remarks</b>		1. Repetition of the names of toys is important. 2. Asking the child about the names of the toys daily is useful.						
10	Describing things (using adjectives)	Different situations at home	6 small-big short-tall happy-sad	6	1. Comparing between different shapes or toys. 2. Drawing different shapes to describe them. 3. Describing things in pictures	Parents	15 minutes	6
<b>Remarks</b>		1. Comparing between objects is very useful to fix the adjectives in the child's mind. 2. Repetition of the names of toys is important.						
11	School materials	In the bedroom  In the hall	6 a pencil, a rubber, a bag, a pen,	6	1. Naming real school-tools  2. Asking the child to bring specific	Parents	15 minutes	6

			a book, a lunch box		items of her tools.			
<b>Remarks</b>		1. Asking the child to use school-materials in each session. 2. Repetition is important.						
12	Some action verbs	At different situations	13 count, eat, drink, sleep, dance, draw, write, play, jump, give, cook, sit. stand	13	1. Acting the verbs 2. Using them every day in the daily routine	Parents	15 minutes	13
<b>Remarks</b>		1. Parents should use the verbs daily and in the contexts, so they encourage her to use them.						
13	Names of animals;	At different situations	6 dog, cat, bird, monkey, donkey, fish	6	1. Saying the names according to the pictures of the animals 2. Coloring the animals in a coloring book 3. Drawing simple pictures for the animals using lines 4. Imitating the animals' voices	Parents	15 minutes	6
<b>Remarks</b>		1. Repetition of the animals' names is important.						

Table no. 2. The different skills to develop and the different teaching techniques used

No.	Topics	Child's Motor Skills to develop	Child's Cognitive Skills to develop	Feasible Teaching Techniques to use
1	Numbers (1-10)	1. Tracing the numbers 2. Coloring the blank pictures of the numbers 3. Writing the numbers 4. Singing the numbers	1. Attention 2. Identifying the numbers 3. Discriminating the different numbers 4. Matching numbers to objects 5. Reciting the numbers	1. Using flash cards for the numbers 2. Using real objects to count 3. Using blank pictures to color according to

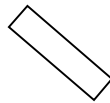
			6. Counting	numbers
2	Alphabet: Caps & small (A a-Z z)	1. Tracing the letters 2. Coloring the blank pictures of the letters 3. Writing the numbers 4. Singing the numbers	1. Attention 2. Identifying lower and upper case letters 2. Matching uppercase letters to lowercase 3. Recognizing the sounds 4. Reciting the letters.	1. Using flash cards for each letter 2. Showing real objects of which names start with the intended letters 3. Using blank pictures/shapes of the letters to make the child coloring them
3	Family members (6)	1. Calling out the real members at home with the learnt English names	1. Attention 2. Recognizing the different family members 3. Using the correct name with the correct member.	1. Showing pictures of the different family members
4	Colors (10)	1. Coloring shapes with intended colors. 2. Searching for things with specific colors at home	1. Attention 2. Recognizing the different colors. 3. Using the correct color pen with the correct name of the color.	1. Using the color pens to teach colors. 2. Using the book of the blank pictures & getting the child to color them with the correct colors.
5	Talking about oneself (3)	1. Answering questions about the child (name, age) 2. Tracing the child's name 3. Writing the child's name	1. Attention 2. Understanding what each question is about 3. Recognizing the different questions	1. Repeating asking the question to the child.
6	The body (9)	1. Drawing the different parts of the body 2. Repeating the names of the parts of the body 3. Tracing the names	1. Attention 2. Recognizing the different parts of the body when she is asked. 3. Identifying the correct body's parts in her body or at a doll 4. Matching the correct body part with its correct name.	1. Denoting the real parts of the body 2. Drawing the body to show the parts on it 3. It is feasible to use a doll asking the child to name its parts
7	Food (10)	1. Naming real food 2. Drawing specific food as it is required 3. Bringing specific food from kitchen as it	1. Attention 2. recognizing the different food items. 3. Discriminating between the fruits, drinks and food items.	1. Using real food items. 2. Using pictures to elicit the names of the food from the child

		is required	4. Matching the correct food item with the its correct name.	
8	Expressing dis/likes (3)	1. Answering questions starting with "Do you like..?"	1.Attention 2.Understanding the question of "do you like..?" 3.Discriminating between the negative answer 'No' and the positive answer 'Yes'.	1. Using pictures of bad things/good things the child dis/likes 2. Repeating I like with happy emoji and I don't like with sad emoji.
9	Toys (5)	1. Naming the real toys 2. Coloring the blank pictures of the different names 3. Searching for specific hidden toys	1.Attention 2. Recognizing the different toys 3. Matching the correct toy with the its correct name	1. Showing real toys the child has 2. Frequent repetition of the names of the toys
10	Describing things using adjectives (6)	1. Saying the different adjectives 2. Drawing different things that stand for the different adjectives e.g. a big and small ball 3. Describing different objects using adjectives	1.Attention 2. Identifying the different adjectives with different shapes/objects 3.Comparing with the adjectives using different shapes/emoji. 4. Matching the different adjectives with the correct emoji.	1.Using suitable pictures/emojis to present the different adjectives 2. Repetition of the different adjectives
11	School Materials (6)	1. Naming the different school tools 2. Drawing the different school tools 3. Coloring the blank pictures of the different school tools	1.Attention 2. Identifying the different school tools 3. Matching the correct item of the tools with the correct name.	1.Showing real school tools 2. Repetition of the names of the school materials
12	Some action verbs (11)	1. Saying the verbs 2. Acting the verbs	1. Attention 2. Understanding each verb 3. Recognizing the different verbs 4. Matching the correct verbs with the correct actions	1. Acting the verbs 2. Using pictures that explain the verbs
13	Some names of animals (6)	1. Naming the different intended animals 2. Drawing them 3. Coloring the animals' pictures	1. Attention 2. Recognizing the different animals 3. Matching the different pictures of the animals with the	1. Showing the animals' pictures 2. Using the book with the blank pictures of the animals to make the child

			correct names	color them
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Photograph 1: some parts of the body while playing and using her doll.

Photograph 2: the basis colours using coloured sheets.



## 8.Results and Discussion

The most important result of this study is that this study's case, i.e. she, really learnt the English alphabets, the first ten numbers and many English words (nearly 90 words) that she repeated spontaneously and used in contexts, i.e. words for colors, toys, some parts of the body, some animals, and some food items. Another important result is that she was very motivated towards her English learning experience (once the challenges mentioned in 'Procedures & Instruments' above were ironed out). This was evidenced in a number of ways:

1. The child's eagerness to play with her sister in English - this was the greatest observable evidence: she played with her sister naming her toys in English, e.g. ball, doll, car...etc.
2. The child's enthusiasm and engagement during English sessions: she was happy listening to her mom speaking in English and she used gestures and English words when she could. There was no sign of boredom or lack of interest during the English sessions either, as the mother didn't give her a chance to feel bored.
3. The ease with which she used English words that she remembered in context, particularly the words for colors, toys, and food: Mother asked her regularly how to say words she had forgotten. Sometimes, she used gestures to show what she had forgotten. She usually sang the alphabet song whenever she played with her sister.
4. Other family members (i.e. parents and elder sister) rehearsed examples of her use of English at home (e.g. she said *TF* to mean TV and *eesh* to mean the letter H).

5. Parents and her elder sister also highlighted that she was enthusiastic to be at school in the coming days, as she used to ask them when school will start.

Thus, this study has described the process of introducing a four-year-old child to English as a foreign language through a short sessional activity-based course, i.e. a crash course, and through social interaction with the family members at home, doing different activities: singing, modeling, drawing, coloring, helping in cooking, serving food, expressing dis/likes...etc. It seems that the process was successful .

It is uncontroversial that there are many parents all over the world who know English well and could use it easily in the way described in the study to enable their children to experience English for the first time. However, the parents do not need to be proficient in English, as much less than proficient English will suffice to follow the language of basic English described in the study's sessional course and to be able to explain it to children.

Preschool children are keen and enthusiastic, active and interested in exploration as they learn best through discovery and experimentation. However, early age alone does not automatically guarantee successful FL learning, and should be accompanied with more important factors, such as the quality of teaching and the amount of time allocated to learning/teaching (Griva & Sivropoulou, 2009). Also, young children are motivated to learn in a playful and relaxed environment so language learning can best be linked with natural activities at home such as playing, running, jumping, searching for hidden things, etc.

## **9. Conclusions**

The suggested crash course based on natural activities over five months, taking up 30 hours and covering 100 sessions, gives the opportunity to introduce about 90 English words and 26 alphabet letters (both lower and upper case), 10 numbers and a few functions (e.g., talking about oneself, describing things, answering some questions, helping mother in cooking and serving food, expressing dis/likes etc.), related to the preschool age. Such a course includes a learner-centered syllabus (where the focus is on the children's needs and interests instead of being on the teaching task), enabling preschoolers to make English words their own, providing them with an encouraging start and motivating them to continue their studies.

Taking into consideration the approaches and strategies developed with children and relying on my personal experience of teaching Joudy at home during quarantine, I came to some conclusions;

Effective teaching of EFL to preschool children needs to take into account the following:

1. It should be conducted with varied activities, natural to the child, taking place at home, e.g. coloring, matching, drawing, dancing, singing, modeling, watching and helping mom while cooking, all, in fact, being means of communication.
2. Clearly, using the bilingual approach, i.e. using mother tongue (Arabic) to explain English, helped to increase the child's attention and awareness, language abilities, miming, improvisation, and interpersonal relationships.

3. Singing and music, with its emotional nature, motivates the child, makes exposure to English desirable, interesting and makes learning easy and effective.
4. Individual vocabulary is quickly learned in a relaxed learning environment, but it does not always matter whether the child uses it naturally and appropriately at this age and this level, as children are not usually very experienced in the acquisition and activation of new vocabulary in their native language.
5. The child needs to move naturally while using the language, to feel relaxed and to have fun. S/he says/repeats the words while moving the body (i.e. kinetics or body language) as s/he doesn't like to be bound and static while learning English and this may affect his/her attention and understanding, so parents should be tolerant and calm.
6. Getting a child to learn the English alphabet, both lower and upper case letters, can be the most exhausting and daunting task for parents, as it takes a long time, e.g. about two months, and children may accordingly get bored. So, parents should make it fun by using (if possible) online songs for letters, dancing, drawing the letters with funny faces, and exploiting the child's fertile imagination in narrating very short stories about each letter.
7. The suggested crash course might help the child to learn the English alphabet and the first ten numbers, and to name different items and objects orally. Here, skills of recognition and comprehension should be the focus rather than reading and writing skills, as it is supposed that the child is introduced to English language for the first time.
8. After all the sessions described in the suggested course, we would certainly not expect the child to introduce herself saying: "Hello, my name is Joudy, I am four years old", from the linguistic point of view, as it is a new experience for the child.
9. Parents can exploit pictures, flashcards, real objects and colored sheets to present and provide English vocabulary, as it is shown in table no. (2). Emphasis should be placed on the presentation and practice of discrete items of language and a few specific language functions.
10. Parents might need to pay great efforts in teaching English to their preschool child while s/he is totally bound to a restricted area, viz. home, but, learning of EFL would ultimately occur, and the main aim would get achieved.

Thus, the implementation of the suggested crash course across several EFL contexts, at the preschool stage, is considered necessary in order to obtain a more complete picture about the effectiveness of teaching a FL to preschool children by parents at home.

### **11.Recommendations**

It is recommended that parents, in EFL learning contexts, use this sessional activity-based crash course described in this study to introduce their preschool children to English language in different situations at home. The course can also be recommended to Arab parents who have at least some grasp of English, as they can easily follow the bilingual approach to teach it effectively. Furthermore, it is recommended that parents start teaching their children English at an early age as there is a common belief that the earlier children start learning a foreign language, the better.

As the suggested crash course follows a bilingual approach, it could be adjusted and bilingually translated into different languages, e.g. English-German, English-Mandarin, English-Urdu, to enable diverse types of parents with limited English to teach their children when they are confined in their homes. It could be re-designed and printed in the form of a small booklet.

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## APPENDIX

### *Selected Extracts of some Talking, between The child and her mom, in different Situations at Home*

Session I: serial 1

The situation: In the kitchen

Activity: Counting objects

Words to learn: To count - numbers (1-5)

Participants: The child and her sister:

*Mom collected ten objects available in the kitchen, e.g. some spoons, knives and forks.*

She said "let's count them" she repeats " let's count them" هيا نعد هذه الأشياء

Mom counted the objects thrice (1-2-3-4-5)

Now, mom asked The child to count with her, the child counted with her mom (1-2-3-4-5)

Mom & The child, together, repeated the numbers many times.

The child & her sister, together, counted the objects and repeated the numbers many times.

Mom brought five plates and asked The child to count them, she did count them.

### **Session I, serial 2**

The situation: In the kitchen

Activity: Having breakfast in the morning

Words to learn: egg, bread, milk.

Participants: The family members

The mother said

" we have eggs, bread, milk for the breakfast, today" يوجد لدينا بيض , خبز وحليب للفتور اليوم

We have eggs, bread and tea for me and dad.

The mother repeated the words; eggs, milk, bread. The sister & dad helped the mother in repeating these three words while having breakfast. The child repeated afterwards.

The mother encouraged the child to repeat the words with them.

The mother asked the child to serve every member his/her food.

Mother said: give your dad bread, The child did give him.

Give your sister eggs, she did give her eggs.

Drink your own milk, she drank her milk. اشربي الحليب

### **Session I, serial 3**

The situation: In the kitchen

Activity: Cooking fish with mom

Words to learn: cook, fish, salt, oil

Participants: Mom, sister and The child

The mother said

" Let's cook fish for lunch". هيا نطبخ سمك للغداء

The mother showed some fish.

Mother said "this is fish" هذا سمك

She asked the child " Do you like fish?" هل يعجبك السمك؟

The child nodded her head 'yes'

Mother said " I cook this fish, clean it under water', then I put salt , then I put it in the oil'

Mother encouraged The child to cook another fish.

The child cooked it herself with the mom's help.

The mother repeated 'we cooked fish', The child repeated these words.

### **Session I, serial 4**

The situation: In the kitchen

Activity: Washing some fruits

Words to learn: apple, orange, banana, fruits

Participants: Mom, sister and The child

Mom showed the fruits (an apple, an orange and a banana) تفاحة، برتقالة و موزة

She took an apple and said "this is an **apple**", The child repeated "this is an apple"

The sister took an apple and said "this is an apple" هذه تفاحة

Mom took an orange and said this is an **orange**, the sister and The child repeated after their mom. برتقالة هذه

The same thing the mother did with the banana and

The child repeated "this is a **banana**" هذه موزة

Mom said twice "let's wash these **fruits**", هيا نغسل هذه الفواكه

Mom asked The child to help her and wash the fruits. The child did wash them and kept repeating "apple, orange, banana, fruits" while washing them.

### Session II: serial 1

The situation: In the hall

Activity: Describing things

Words to learn: big, small

Participants: Mom, sister and The child

Mom brought two toys (e.g. dolls) both small and big ones.

She showed them, then said "this doll is big, while this doll is small." هذه كبيره بينما هذه صغيره

She repeated the same sentences then repeated "big" and "small". كبيره و صغيره

She asked The child to repeat after her "this is big, and this is small; big & small."

She repeated small and big. The child did understand the difference.

Mom brought another two toys (small & big balls) and asked The child "which ball is small, and which is big?". أيا منهم الصغيرة وأيا الكبيرة؟

The child could compare between the toys.

Mom asked The child to compare many things: toys, furniture, clothes...etc.

The child's sister helped her to compare the different objects.

### Session II: serial 2

The situation: In the hall

Activity: Describing things

Words to learn: tall, short

Participants: Mom, sister and The child

Mom asked her elder daughter, namely Moony, to stand next to The child. She did.

Mom said "Moony is tall and The child is short". موني طويله بينما جودي قصيره

Mom repeated the two words "tall and short" طويل و قصير

Mom asked The child to repeat the words. The child did repeat with her sister.

Mom stood beside her husband and said "Dad is tall and mom is short". Daughters laughed.

The child kept repeating "tall" and "short".

### Session II: serial 3

The situation: In the hall

Activity: Describing things

Words to learn: sad, happy

Participants: Mom, sister and The child

Mom drew two faces: one is happy and the other is sad, crying.

Mom showed the first face and said "this one is happy, happy." هذا الوجه مبتهج

She asked The child to repeat the word "happy" many times, she did.

Mom showed the second face and said "this one is sad." هذا الوجه حزين

She asked The child to repeat the word "sad" many times, she did.

Mom drew two big circles and encouraged The child to make one into a happy face and the other into a sad face. ارسمي وجه مبتهج والآخر حزين

The child did draw the two faces, repeating "happy" and "sad".

#### Session II: serial 4

The situation: In the hall

Activity: Coloring some drawings

Words to learn: white & black

Participants: Mom, sister and The child

Mom brought two sheets of blank white paper.

Mom used a pen with a black color and she colored one sheet black and left the other blank, i.e. white.

Mom showed the two sheets and said "this is black while this is white" هذه بيضاء وهذه سوداء

Mom compared the two sheets, she said "black and white". أبيض وأسود

Mom repeated "black" and "white". She asked The child to repeat after her while denoting the two colors. The child did repeat the two words.

Mom asked The child to find out the black pen among the different colors and asked her to color some shapes with it and leave others white. أستخدمي اللون الأسود ولوني الأشكال

The child did color the shapes.

#### Session III ; serial 1

The situation : In the bedroom

Activity: Naming some toys while playing.

Words to learn: a doll, a teddy bear.

Participants: Mother, sister and The child

Mom entered The child's bed room while she was playing with her doll.

Mom said "this is a doll." هذه تمية

Mom asked The child to repeat "a doll", she repeated it many times.

Mom brought her teddy bear and said "this is a teddy bear" هذا دب

Mom asked The child to reapeat " a teddy bear", she repeated it many times.