

Young Learners' Early Linguistic Stage: Phonological Processes in Islamic Kindergarten

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to identify the factors influencing pronunciation ability and to analyze the types of phonological processes performed by young learners of English. Employing a qualitative case study design, this research involved three students aged 4 to 5 years from Khalifah Kindergarten, an Islamic early childhood education institution in Tulungagung, where English instruction is integrated with Islamic values in the curriculum. Data collection methods included classroom observations, interviews, and audio recordings. Data analysis was conducted following Miles and Huberman's interactive model. The findings reveal that several factors influence young learners' ability to pronounce English vocabulary, including early exposure to the language, parental support, the use of learning media, flexible timing, motivation, and the school environment. The analysis identified various phonological processes performed by the subjects, such as decentralization, centralization, epenthesis, palatal fronting, cluster simplification, liquidization, vowel alteration and consonants addition. Notably, decentralization and centralization

emerged as the most frequently used processes, indicating that vowel sound modification is a prevalent strategy among children as they adjust their articulation skills. The theoretical implications of these findings align with Khan and Lewis' phonological processes theory and reinforce the language acquisition theory of Piaget, Vygotsky, and Krashen, demonstrating that children's phonological development is influenced by cognitive maturity and social interaction. Empirically, this research contributes to the advancement of effective learning methods and enriches the understanding of foreign language acquisition in early childhood.

Keywords: Language Acquisition, Phonology in Childhood, Pronunciation, Kindergarten Learners

INTRODUCTION

The introduction and teaching of English in Indonesia begin in early childhood education, continue through elementary school, middle school and even university level (Santoso, 2014; Sukmawati et al., 2023). Therefore, it is important to introduce English from an early age. According to Pinter, cited by Astari et al., (2020), the standards for early childhood education (ages 3-6 years) in English language learning focus on developing listening skills and vocabulary for speaking skills, using real and familiar objects. Apart from that, childhood is a golden period for the development of a child's brain and language skills. Early childhood learners are highly sensitive to language, which makes it easy for them to pick up and mimic what they hear. According to NEACY (Neacy Association for the Education of Young Children) in Etnawati (2022), early infancy is a sensitive time for children between the ages of 0 and 8.

When English is instructed in preschool settings, the outcomes naturally differ, particularly in term of speaking. The speech produced by young learners often reflects developmental characteristic, such as incomplete pronunciation or simplified sound patterns. The science that studies sound in linguistics is called phonology (Ayriza, 1997).

Phonological processes are the mechanism through which young children modify or simplify the sounds in words as they learn to talk (Vollmer, 2023). These processes are integral to language

development and help children produce speech sounds that are easier for them to say. The Khan and Lewis theory was developed to help speech-language pathologists analyze a person's spoken production, aiming to identify sound changes and determine the phonological processes that are occurring (Khan & Lewis, 2015).

This study aims to 1) identify contributing factors that influence the phonological processes of English pronunciation in young learners aged 4 to 5 years and 2) determine the types of phonological processes that young learners aged 4 to 5 years exhibit when pronouncing English vocabulary as a foreign language at Khalifah Kindergarten.

Previous studies on phonological processes have been conducted extensively across different age groups. Research focusing on early childhood (ages 3-6) revealed several common phonological processes, including reduplication, final consonant, and the stopping of affricative and fricative (Soraya, 2017); (Raja, 2020); (Umara et al., 2021); (Piper, 1984). In contrast, studies involving school-aged children (ages 7-12 years) explored phonological processes in broader linguistic contexts, showing similar tendencies with developmental variations (Diani & Azwandi, 2021); (Nirwana & Suhono, 2023). Additionally, research on adult learners has highlighted the influence of mother tongue (L1) phonology on learning a foreign language, specifically English. This interference is observed in vowel phonemes and semivowel phonemes (Andika et al., 2019); (Nur'ahdiani, 2010); (Tobing et al., 2023); (Maharani et al., 2022). Furthermore, they identified several factors that cause language interference such as age, motivation, aptitude, and language use which is specified into oral communication or speaking skill.

Research on phonological processes of pronunciation has identified four categories of English phonological processes, including assimilation, dissimilation, deletion and insertion (Mohamad et al., 2021). Another study by Sidabutar (2020) highlighted common mispronunciations of consonants and vowels, particularly focusing on errors involving voiceless dental fricative and affricative consonants. Additionally, studies on phonological

awareness (Susanto & Nanda, 2023); (Aruan, 2023); (Buana & Irawan, 2021) examined students' phonological awareness in EFL classes and its relationship to reading ability. These studies emphasized that phonological awareness is important in reading skill development and that engaging in phonological awareness tasks can enhance students' reading abilities.

Research on English phonological processes of young English learners is crucial due to the scarcity of studies focused on the specific types of phonological errors experienced by children during the early linguistic period, specifically at the ages of 4 and 5 years. Understanding how exposure to English affects their phonological development is vital. Although some previous studies have discussed general types of phonological processes and the influencing factors, none have specifically examined these processes in early childhood. As a result, there is a significant gap in knowledge regarding the patterns of children's phonological development at this stage, especially when learning English. This information is crucial for understanding how Indonesian children acquire language and for developing appropriate intervention programs for those who struggle with language learning. This study aims to bridge that gap and provide a deeper insight into phonological processes during the early stages of language development in children. However, it does not yet compare whether these processes are part of natural phonological development or emerge due to the context of learning English as a foreign language. Therefore, further investigation into this aspect is recommended for future research.

This study offers new insights into the phonological processes that children aged 4 to 5 experiences when pronouncing English vocabulary as a foreign language. While previous studies have primarily focused on the acquisition of phonology in early childhood with an emphasis on first language development, this study specifically examines phonological processes at the phoneme level in the context of English language acquisition. By applying Khan and Lewis' theory to analyze phonological findings and incorporating the developmental theories of Piaget, Krashen, and

Vygotsky, this research develops a comprehensive framework to understand the external and internal factors that influence how children pronounce English vocabulary and the types of phonological processes they undergo.

The novelty of this study lies in the integration of phonological, cognitive development, and interactional approaches to analyze pronunciation errors in early childhood, as well as its focus on the factors influencing pronunciation abilities. In addition, this study opens opportunities for additional investigation into how first language background and social interactions affect phonological acquisition, with a wider range of subjects and more diverse contexts.

Based on the background and research gap described above, this research seeks to address the following research questions: 1) What factors contribute to the ability of young learners to pronounce basic English vocabulary? and 2) What types of phonological processes are produced by young learners when articulating English as foreign language? This updated research aims to identify English phonemic sounds, with practical implications for English teachers. By analyzing the phonological processes of young children, this research can help pinpoint the English sounds that pose challenges for children to pronounce. Teachers can use these findings to emphasize and teach specific sounds in a more structured and explicit manner during learning process. The approach of this research is not only descriptive but also practical in developing English learning strategies for young children.

RESEARCH MATERIALS AND PROCEDURES

Research Design

This research used a qualitative case study design to examine the factors that influence pronunciation skills in early childhood (ages 4-5) and to identify the types of phonological processes that emerge during the pronunciation of basic English vocabulary. The qualitative approach was chosen for its ability to

provide an in-depth understanding of children's natural phonological development within their authentic learning context (Creswell & Creswell, 2018)

Research Setting and Participants

This research was conducted at Khalifah Islamic Kindergarten in Tulungagung, an early childhood education institution that offers extracurricular English programs. The research was conducted from September 2024 to March 2025. The participants in this study were three students aged 4-5 years (subject A, E, and J) who participated in English extracurricular activities using a purposive sampling technique. The limited number of participants in this study is a limitation that prevent the findings from being widely generalized, as the results show almost a similar pattern. Several criteria were used to select students for this research, including: (1) ability to pronounce English vocabulary orally, although not yet fully in accordance with standard pronunciation, and (2) demonstrating typical early childhood pronunciation characteristics that reflect natural phonological processes appropriate to their stage of linguistic development. Meanwhile, teachers and parents acted as supporting informants who provided additional perspectives on children's language development.

Research Materials

The research materials consisted of English vocabulary frequently taught in kindergarten through classroom learning activities, specifically focusing on the names of fruits and animals, totaling 20 words. The primary data for this study included audio recordings of children's pronunciation during learning activities, while secondary data consisted of observation notes gathered during classroom learning activities, and interview transcripts obtained from parents and teachers. These interviews offered additional insight into the factors influencing the children's pronunciation development.

Data Collection Procedures

The data were collected through three primary methods: (1) classroom observation of English pronunciation activities, (2) semi-structured interviews with teachers and parents, and (3) audio recordings of children's speech during vocabulary practice. The instruments used were an observation checklist, an interview guide and recording devices using the PRAAT application.

Data Analysis Procedures

The analysis of data were conducted using the interactive model of data analysis procedures proposed by (Miles et al., 2016), covering data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing. The study drew upon various theories of language development in early childhood in the introduction of a foreign language (English), such as the behaviorism theory, social interaction theory, cognitive theory. Additionally, the researcher applied the phonological process theory of Khan and Lewis (2015) to analyze the types of phonological processes observed.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

This section presents the results derived from classroom, observations, interviews, and analysis of children's pronunciation data.

The Contributing Factors that Influence the Phonological Development

Based on observations and interviews, it was found that children's production abilities are influenced not only by internal factors but also by external factors.

Introduction of English to early childhood (early exposure)

The introduction of the English language occurs at an early age, facilitated by various stimuli given by parents. This process typically begins between the ages of one and two years, starting with fundamental activities such as listening.

"At age two, I taught her English combinations using pronunciation alone." (Interview transcription parent SA, SE, SJ)

English stimulation at home: parental strategies.

Parents utilize a variety of method to provide English language stimulation to their children, employing both digital media and interactive engagement. The following is derived from interview results:

"I started inviting him to watch Numberblocks on YouTube. He also often opened his older brother's dictionary, looking it up in the table of contents. There were also flashcards that he often played with." (Interview transcription parent SA, SE, SJ)

Children learning media

In the context of children's media for English language acquisition, several resources have been identified, including YouTube, flashcards, films, books, smart hafiz, and dictionaries. The following is a quote from a parent explaining the use of learning media.

"For example, he enjoys reading books the most. He also learns using YouTube, dictionaries, flashcards, riddles, films, and videos. He also usually asks Google if he can't answer a question." (Interview transcription parent SA, SE, SJ)

Time flexibility in English exposure

The next factor identified was the flexibility of English exposure. English stimulation is tailored to the child's readiness and provided under easily accessible. One parent expressed this perspective by saying:

"As for when he learns, it really depends on his mood. I teach him when he asks, even if it's only for five minutes. But the most frequent and most intense time is definitely before bedtime." (Interview transcription parent SA, SE, SJ)

Motivation

Motivation emerged as an important internal factor in this study. The children demonstrated a strong curiosity about the English language, driven by various factors that enhanced their enthusiasm for learning. This observation aligns with the results of interviews conducted with their parents.

"Everything he does well, he's always praised. There are special occasions. If it's a really special occasion, like when he participates in a competition, even if he loses, I still give him appreciation." (Interview transcription parent SA, SE, SJ)

School environment

The educational environment plays an important role in the development of children's English language skills. Teachers at Khalifah Kindergarten use a variety of teaching strategies, such as repetition, group recitation, and even quizzes. The following is an interview with a teacher from Khalifah Kindergarten.

"The method or strategy used is repetition, and in one semester there should be six themes, but instead of just four, there is more repetition. There are quizzes too." (Interview teacher transcription)

Type of Phonological Process by Young Learners Aged 4 to 5 Years

The results of tests conducted on subjects E, A and J indicate the presence of various phonological processes that differ amongst the individuals. This diversity shows that, despite the subjects being within almost the same age range, they have different phonological acquisition patterns influenced by their respective articulatory abilities and linguistic experiences.

Type of phonological process by young learners/subject A

The data presented consists of the results of subject A's pronunciation of English vocabulary that had been previously taught at Khalifah Kindergarten.

Table 1. Subject A Pronunciation

Vocabulary	Native Speaker (US) Pronunciation	Subject A Pronunciation	Type Phonologi cal Process	Description process
Starfruit	/ˈstɑːr.fruːt/	[sətɑːr.fruːt]	<i>Epenthesis</i>	Adding schwa vowel /ə/
Tomato	/təˈmeɪ.tou/	[təˈmeɪ.tou]	<i>Decentralization</i>	Replacing vowel /ə/ to vowel /ɔ/
Peach	/piːtʃ/	[piːtʃ]	-	-
Banana	/bəˈnænə/	[bənænə]	-	-
Pineapple	/ˈpaɪ.næpəl/	[pamæ:pəl]	-	-

Vocabulary	Native Speaker (US) Pronunciation	Subject A Pronunciation	Type Phonological Process	Description process
Watermelon	/ˈwɑː.t̬ə.mel.ən/	[ˈwɑː.t̬ə.mel.ən]	<i>Decentralization</i>	Replacing vowel /ə/ to vowel /ɔ/
Strawberry	/ˈstrɔ.beri/	[ˈsətɑː.beri:]	<i>Epenthesis</i>	Adding schwa vowel /ə/
Apple	/ˈæp.əl/	[eɪpəl]	<i>Diphthongization</i>	change of a single vowel into a diphthong
Papaya	/pəˈpaɪə/	[papaɪə]	<i>Centralization</i>	shifting the vowel sound to the center position
Lemon	/ˈlem.ən/	[ˈlem.ən]	-	-

Type of phonological process by young learners/subject E aged 4 years old

The next step is research on subject E's pronunciation of English vocabulary related to fruit names. The vocabulary consists of 10 words. Several phonological processes occur during the pronunciation process:

Table 2. Subject E Pronunciation

Vocabulary	Native Speaker (US) Pronunciation	Subject E Pronunciation	Type of Phonological Process	Description process
Starfruit	/ˈstɑːr.fru:t/	[ˈstrɑːr.fru:t]	<i>Addition of consonant and syllable</i>	<i>Adding consonant /r/</i>
Tomato	/təˈmeɪ.tou/	[təˈmeɪ.tou]	<i>Decentralization</i>	<i>Replacing vowel /ə/ to vowel /ɔ/</i>
Peach	/piːtʃ/	[piːts]	<i>Palatal fronting</i>	<i>changes the consonant /tʃ/ to /t/</i>
Banana	/bəˈnænə/	[bəˈnænə]	-	-
Pineapple	/ˈpaɪ.næpəl/	[næpəl]	<i>Cluster simplification</i>	<i>Deleting /paɪ/</i>
Watermelon	/ˈwɑː.t̬ə.mel.ən/	[ˈwɑː.t̬ə.lmelən]	<i>Decentralization</i>	<i>Replacing vowel /ə/ to vowel /ɔ/</i>
Strawberry	/ˈstrɔ.beri/	[strɔ.beli]	<i>Liquidization</i>	<i>Changing to liquid consonant /r/ to /l/</i>
Apple	/ˈæp.əl/	[ˈæp.əl]	-	-
Papaya	/pəˈpaɪə/	[paˈpaɪə]	<i>Centralization</i>	<i>shifting the vowel sound to</i>

Vocabulary	Native Speaker (US) Pronunciation	Subject E Pronunciation	Type of Phonological Process	Description process
Lemon	/'lem.ən/	['lem. ɔn/]	Decentralization	the center position Replacing vowel /ə/ to vowel /ɔ/

Type of phonological process by young learner/subject j 5 years old

The researcher also observed the pronunciation of subject J in relation to 10 fruit vocabulary words. The study identified several phonological processes in subject J that simplify articulation.

Table 3. Subject J Pronunciation

Vocabulary	Native Speaker (US) Pronunciation	Subject J Pronunciation	Phonological Process	Description Process
Starfruit	/'stɑ:r.fru:t/	['sətɑ:r.fu:t]	Epenthesis	Adding schwa vowel /ə/
Tomato	/tə'meɪ.tou/	[tə'meɪ.tou]	Decentralization	Replacing vowel /ə/ to vowel /ɔ/
Peach	/pi:tʃ/	[pi:s]	Palatal fronting	changes the consonant /tʃ/ to /t/
Banana	/bə'nænə/	[bə'nænə]	-	-
Pineapple	/'paɪ.næpəl/	[pou]	-	-
Watermelon	/'wɑ:.tə.mel.ən/	['wɑ:.tə.melɔn]	Decentralization	Replacing vowel /ə/ to vowel /ɔ/
Strawberry	/'strɔ,bəri/	[stɔ,beyi]	Deletion of medial consonant.	Deleting middle consonant /t/ and /y/
Apple	/'æp.əl/	[æpou]	Vowel alteration	Changing a front or back vowel as a central vowel.
Papaya	/pə'paɪə/	[p a'paɪə]	Centralization	shifting the vowel sound to the center position
Lemon	/'lem.ən/	['lemɔn]	Decentralization	Replacing vowel /ə/ to vowel /ɔ/

Frequency and percentage of phonological processes in young learners aged 4-5 years.

To provide a clearer picture of the phonological phenomena observed in children aged 4 to 5 years at Khalifah Islamic Kindergarten, the researcher has summarized the identified phonological processes along with their frequency and percentage. The distribution is presented in the following table.

Table 4. Frequency and Percentage of Phonological Processes for Young Learner Aged 4-5 Years Old

Type of Phonological Processes	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)	Example of Occurrence
<i>Decentralization</i>	3	18.75%	Tomato, watermelon, Lemon
<i>Centralization</i>	3	18.75%	Papaya
<i>Epenthesis</i>	2	12.5%	Starfruit
<i>Palatal fronting</i>	2	12.5%	Peach
<i>Addition of consonant and syllable</i>	1	6.25%	Starfruit
<i>Diphthongization</i>	1	6.25%	Apple
<i>Cluster simplification</i>	1	6.25%	Pineapple
<i>Liquidization</i>	1	6.25%	Strawberry
<i>Deletion of Medial Consonant</i>	1	6.25%	Strawberry
<i>Vowel Alteration</i>	1	6.25%	Apple
Total	16	100%	

DISCUSSION

There are some contributing factors that influence the phonological development of English pronunciation in young learners aged 4 to 5 years. The first factor is the introduction of English during early childhood. Research findings indicate that the introduction of English was delivered through various stimuli that align with the child's interests around the ages of 1 to 2 years. These findings are in line with the *Critical Period Hypothesis theory* proposed by Eric Lenneberg, as referenced by (Liu, 2023) which states that the ages 2 to 12 years represent a critical period for second language acquisition. During this developmental stage, a child's neurological and cognitive capabilities is in an optimal condition in obtaining language input naturally. Consequently,

providing English language stimulation during early childhood can yield a more significant impact than exposure received after passing this critical period. Furthermore, the strategies employed are in accordance with *the stages of language acquisition development* explained by Kurniasih (2022) which states that the listening process in early childhood starts progresses from sounds recognition to phonemes differentiation, culminating in the ability to understand and produce sounds with certain words.

The second factor is English stimulation at home, specifically through parental strategies. Based on the results of interviews conducted with three informants from parents of subjects A, E, and J, it can be concluded that these parents provide English stimulus to children by varying according to the individual character and interests of each child. This strategy shows that children naturally receive language input through multisensory experiences and meaningful interactions in their daily lives.

The findings are in line with the Krashen's *comprehensible input* theory of (2014), which states that second language acquisition occurs when learners receive input that is easy to understand and slightly above their current abilities. In addition, the use of visual and audio media that supports the provision of stimuli is in line with *Mayer's multimedia learning* theory, as cited by Prihatmoko (2023). This theory suggests that learning will be more effective when it incorporates a combination of visual and auditory media, thereby improving understanding and memory. Moreover, the strategy that focuses on children's interests and experiences correlates with the *constructivist theories* proposed by Piaget and Vygotsky, which assert that children construct their own knowledge through social interactions and direct experiences (Nelwati & Rahman, 2022). This is in accordance with the case of subject J, who acquires English not only through media, but also through social interactions.

The third factor pertains to learning media utilized by children. Based on interview results, it is evident that the use of learning media aids in the process of acquiring a second language, with each child has different interests. These findings align with the

comprehensible input theory proposed by Krashen (2014), which posits that children acquire language effectively when exposed to meaningful and easily understandable input. In addition, the use of multimedia in language stimulation process can facilitate children's understanding and increase vocabulary retention (Prihatmoko, 2023). Previous studies, including those by Ahmad and Arkiang, (2021), Laksmi et al. (2021), and Wideasri et al. (2022), affirm that the use of media can improve language skills in early childhood. Therefore, when parents provide appropriate facilities for learning media, it can significantly contribute to a child's natural and meaningful acquisition of English.

The fourth factor involves time flexibility regarding English exposure. Parents provide stimuli during moments when their children are in a good mood, even if the duration is as short as 5 minutes. This approach gives children opportunity to determine their own time and can create a pleasant, comfortable, and conducive learning atmosphere without any pressure. These findings correlate with Krashen's *Affective Filter Hypothesis*, which states that children can absorb language or knowledge stimuli when in a comfortable environment without pressure (Krashen, 2014). Additionally, Vygotsky's theory concerning the *Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)* supports the notion that children learn more effectively when supported and guided by parents. Research conducted by Prayoga et al. (2025) and Rusdiana (2025) further indicates that flexibility in learning time can increase comfort and improve learning outcomes. Therefore, the incorporation of flexibility in learning is essential for supporting children's success in English acquisition.

The fifth factor is motivation. Interview data indicate that the three subjects received additional motivation when learning English through rewards, either in the form of praise or gifts. Each subjects received different forms of motivations. This strategy is in line with Skinner (1982) which emphasizes the importance of reinforcement in shaping behavior. Giving praise and gifts acts as a positive reinforcement that encourages children to repeat good learning behaviors.

The sixth factor is the school environment. According to the interviews conducted, the learning strategies applied by teachers emphasize repetition of material, the use of interesting learning media and direct practice. In addition, teachers also simplify the themes and learning materials to optimize understanding. This approach is in line with the behaviorist theory, which highlights the importance of reinforcement and repetition of stimuli in forming children's habits (Skinner, 1982).

Additionally, an analysis of the type of phonological processes in young learners aged 4 to 5 years at Khalifah kindergarten was conducted by examining their pronunciation of English vocabulary as a foreign language. Findings regarding subject A's pronunciation of English vocabulary identified several types of phonological processes including *epenthesis*, *decentralization*, *diphthongization*, and *centralization*. These types are included in the core phonological processes category according to Khan and Lewis (2015). The findings indicate that children tend to simplify complex articulation movements to adapt to their developing motor skills and auditory perception. These findings align with Vollmer (2023) who stated that phonological processes represent natural adaptations facilitating easier speech production. However, this finding contrasts with Raja's (2020) conclusion, which noted a dominance of final consonant deletion along with a higher frequency of *epenthesis*. This indicates that a progression towards more accurate pronunciation due to more intensive exposure and guidance.

Furthermore, the findings from subject E's pronunciations of English vocabulary shows several phonological processes such as *addition of consonants*, *decentralization*, *palatal fronting*, *cluster simplification*, *liquidization*, and *decentralization*. These phonological processes reflect the child's efforts to simplify English sounds. Notable examples include the addition of consonants in the vocabulary "starfruit" and the substitution of the vowel /ə/ to the vowel /ɔ/ in "tomato, watermelon and lemon", suggesting an adjustment to the vowel of the mother tongue. *Palatal fronting and cluster simplification* processes show the child's efforts to simplify

complex sounds, while *liquidization* occurs in words like "strawberry", where the consonant /r/ is replaced with /l/. These findings support Khan and Lewis's (2015) theory that dual phonological processes are part of natural phonological development, and align with Piaget's and Vygotsky's theory, which emphasizes that children's speaking abilities develop through cognitive maturity and social interaction (Nelwati & Rahman, 2022); (Etnawati, 2022). From the perspective of second language acquisition, these findings are in line with the input hypothesis theory by Krashen (2014), which posits that pronunciation errors are natural adaptation to the linguistic input obtained.

The last finding is young learner of subject J. Based on the findings and analysis above, subject J showed several phonological processes such as *epenthesis*, *decentralization*, *palatal fronting*, *deletion of medial consonants*, *vowel alteration*, and *centralization*. For instance, the addition of the vowel /ə/ in "starfruit" to simplify consonant clusters, while the replacement of the vowel /ə/ to /ɔ/ in "tomato, watermelon, and lemon" indicates an adjustment to the sound pattern of the learners' mother tongue. The *palatal fronting* in "peach" and the deletion of some mid consonants in "strawberry" reflect a simplification of the sound structure. Additionally, *vowel alteration* in "apple" and *centralization* in "papaya" indicate an adjustment of articulation to a more neutral vowel position. These processes are classified as core phonological processes identified in the theory of Khan and Lewis (2015), which are considered a natural part of language development. This finding supports the theories of Piaget and Vygotsky, which emphasize that language development occurs through imitation and interaction (Etnawati, 2022; Nelwati & Rahman, 2022).

From the frequency analysis of the phonological processes produced by the participants, several dominant patterns emerged. The results show that the most dominant phonological processes are *decentralization and centralization* with a percentage of 18.75%, followed by *epenthesis and palatal fronting* at 12.5%. These phonological processes illustrate the tendency of children aged 4-5 years to adapt vowel sounds and simplify complex phoneme

structures in English. This finding strengthens the theory of Khan and Lewis (2015) regarding core phonological processes that commonly occur during children's language development. Furthermore, it supports Piaget's notion that sound adjustments are an integral aspect of natural cognitive development (Nelwati & Rahman, 2022).

CONCLUSION

This study explores the factors that influence the development of English in young learners aged 4 to 5 years, as well as the types of phonological processes they produced when pronouncing English as a foreign language. The researcher identified several key factors that influence the English language development in this aged group, including early exposure to English, English stimulation at home: parental strategies, children's learning media, time flexibility in English exposure, motivation and school environment. The role of parents is also very influential in children's English development, especially in providing positive reinforcement, feedback strategies, and the use of scaffolding techniques. These findings align with various theories of learning and language development in children.

The phonological processes observed in the pronunciation of English by children aged 4 to 5 years show individual variations. However, it has a similar general pattern. Common phonological processes found include vowel lowering, vowel raising, centralization, decentralization, cluster simplification, deletion of medial consonant, deletion of final consonant, addition of consonant and syllable, and palatal fronting. These processes represent typical forms of simplification that occur in early childhood particularly in the context of foreign language acquisition. Each individual demonstrates different variations of these phonological processes, suggesting that phonological acquisition is individual and influenced by developmental readiness and environment support. The findings of this study confirms that phonological processes are not indicative of linguistics failure but

rather reflect a natural progression within the stages of language development in children.

This research found factors that may impact the children's pronunciation development. However, due to the qualitative methodology employed and the limited number of sample size, causative relationship cannot be definitively established. Furthermore, the study has not yet provided a comparative analysis to determine whether the phonological processes observed are part of children's natural phonological development or emerge as a result of learning English as a foreign language. Therefore, the differences between natural developmental processes and the influence of the EFL context cannot be analyzed in depth. Future research using a more robust design, a larger number of participants, and comparative analysis is essential to examine the causal relationships and differences in the influence of the EFL context on phonological development.

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