
Exploring Izzi's First Language Acquisition: A Case Study of a Five-Year-Old Child

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Abstract

This study examines the first language acquisition of a five-year-old child, focusing on phonological development and the influence of environmental factors. Early language acquisition is essential for children's overall development, yet studies that explore the interplay between phonology and environmental dynamics remain underexplored. This research aims to provide insights into how these elements contribute to a child's linguistic progress. A qualitative descriptive method was employed, with data collected over three weeks through systematic observation and question-and-answer sessions, recorded via video calls. The participant, a boy named Alfahrizi Davin Syahputra Hasibuan, or Izzi, was selected due to his early-stage language development. The findings reveal that Izzi can communicate effectively and comprehend conversations within his environment. Parental involvement and a supportive home setting were identified as key factors in enhancing his phonological development, helping him practice correct pronunciation and build confidence in speech. This study highlights the importance of combining phonological analysis with environmental observations to understand how children acquire language in real-world contexts. The results provide practical implications for parents and educators, suggesting that active engagement and positive interaction can significantly influence children's linguistic abilities and overall communication skills.

Keywords: *First language acquisition; Development; Environment.*

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Citation in APA style: Br Sembiring, F. E. D. R., Rusdi Noor Rosa, & Br. Perangin-Angin, A. (2025). Exploring Izzi's First Language Acquisition: A Case Study of a Five-Year-Old Child. *JADEs Journal of Academia in English Education*, 5(2). 317-329.

Received Jun 19, 2024; Accepted Jan 16, 2025; Accepted Jan 18, 2025

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.32505/jades.v5i2.8775>



1. INTRODUCTION

Language acquisition in five-year-old children represents a critical area of study, as it explores how young learners develop the ability to understand and express thoughts, emotions, and ideas through various forms of communication, including verbal speech, written symbols, and gestures. This developmental process encompasses both the mechanisms and stages through which children internalize and produce language, offering insights into cognitive, social, and neurological dimensions of human communication (Rezeki & Sagala, 2020). Other than that, language is a complex phenomenon that plays as a key role in human communication, culture, and social interaction. It is one of the most unique human characteristics that is not found in other living things. Humans have learned about language from a newborn. Yet, the newborn must acquire language through some process. The process of babbling until speaking with a more complex language structure is a part of the process that commonly occurs when humans acquire a language. Mostly, listening is the first phase of how humans acquire language. It can be proven when a child is born; they cannot communicate with their environment immediately by using a set of words. Meanwhile, humans are gifted with or possess innate language-learning instruments known as language acquisition tools or LAD (Language Acquisition Device) (Sobecks, 2020, p.1).

The process of acquiring language begins remarkably early in human development, with infants making “cooing” and “babbling” sounds within their first year. This journey evolves throughout childhood, as they gradually master the ability to understand and produce increasingly complex expressions. By the age of five, children demonstrate notable progress in vocabulary, grammar, syntax, phonology, and pragmatics, reflecting a sophisticated interplay of cognitive, social, and environmental factors that support their linguistic growth. Early vocalizations serve as foundational milestones, paving the way for the structured use of language that continues to develop well into later stages of life (Yule, 2020, p. 202). In developing the language, the child is not literally taught the language by adults, and no one provides them any instruction on how to speak the language. Otherwise, children often construct their ability to speak the language from the environment, especially from what they hear around them. It can be said that children

imitate the language from what people around them say, and they start to adopt words from the speech that they hear (Yule, 2020, p. 206).

In mastering language, children experience accelerated language acquisition during the golden period, also referred to as the critical age. According to Clark (2016), the language development stage in this crucial period begins at the age of 0–6 years and starts with the stages of vocalization, including crying, cooing, and babbling. This phase is considered a golden age because it significantly influences how children grow mentally, physically, and intellectually (p. 43). The rapid progression during this period is attributed to heightened cognitive and neural plasticity, which enables children to absorb linguistic input more effectively, making this stage critical for laying the foundation of their linguistic and developmental trajectory. Children at an early age often obtain their mother tongue, or what is commonly called their first language, from adults near them. Moreover, the first language that is acquired can be their native language. Even though human has a native language it does not mean that a newborn immediately has any grammatical rules in the brain. It has to go through some stages to acquire the language completely. There are six phases in first language acquisition written from research; they are:

Cooing Stage (0-6 months)

The cooing stage, also called the pre-talking stage, is characterized by the production of non-word sounds such as crying, laughing, and cooing. These sounds express a newborn's needs and emotions and often resemble vowels, particularly the back vowels [u] and [o], as in "oh" and "uh." Consonant sounds like [p], [b], or [m] are challenging at this stage (Bolinger, 2002, p. 283).

Babbling Stage (6-8 months)

During this stage, children begin combining vowels and consonants, producing repetitive sounds like "da-da-da," "ba-ba-ba," and "ga-ga-ga." Babbling plays a crucial role in practicing the phonemes of their native language (Yule, 2020, p. 204).

Holophrastic Stage (9-18 months)

The term "holophrastic" combines "holo" (complete) and "phrase" (sentence). At this stage, children use single words to represent entire sentences or ideas. For instance, saying "milk" might imply "I want

milk.” These single words are often simple, concrete nouns or verbs (Fromkin, 1983, p. 328).

Two-Word Stage (18-24 months)

In this stage, children form basic sentences using two distinct words, such as “baby chair” or “mommy eat.” These combinations convey meaningful relationships like possession, requests, or statements, depending on context (Yule, 2020, p. 205).

Telegraphic Stage (24-30 months)

Children’s utterances expand into multiple-word phrases, though they often omit grammatical elements. For example, “Mommy give cookie” stands in for “Mommy gives me a cookie.” Sentences at this stage are longer and more complex but remain simplified (Yule, 2020, p. 206).

Later Multiword Stage (30+ months)

Children at this stage experience rapid vocabulary growth, adding new words daily. Their speech becomes fully communicative, with no babbling. They can understand nearly everything spoken to them or around them (Bolinger in Bertharia, 2015, p. 55).

Acquiring the first language is a complex process that has been extensively studied and theorized by linguists, psychologists, and cognitive scientists. The language development in every child experience differently to one another. During the acquisition of the first language, the mechanism of maturity occurs. There are two critical processes that arise when a child is learning their first language. The processes are the competency process and the performance process. Competency process refers to the underlying knowledge of a language system that is possessed by the speaker. Otherwise, the performance process refers to how the speaker applies their competence to produce and comprehend speech in real-time (Sumarlam et al., 2016).

In this study, behaviorism is a theory that is close to the observation. According to Rohimajaya and Hamerb (2020), the behaviorism theory is often called *tabula rasa* (Latin for “blank slate”). It represents a newborn’s brain, the same as the blank paper that will be enriched with knowledge about lingual phenomena through experiences. The hypothesis was a popular concept that was discovered by the English Philosopher John Locke (119). Another philosopher also believed that newborns acquire language from other humans around them through processes like imitation, rewards, and practice. The newborn’s environment or adults

that are role models to the newborn provide rewards and stimuli (Otto, 2015). Furthermore, one of the elements that contribute to a child's language development is their environment.

The researcher of this study is delighted to examine and explore language acquisition in a five-year-old child who has not yet acquired language skills. For this study, the researcher selected Izzi, a five-year-old boy who has surpassed the typical critical period for language acquisition. By observing Izzi in his daily life, the researcher aims to identify and analyze the primary factors influencing his delayed language development, particularly those related to environmental and social dynamics, including familial interactions and caregiver roles.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Acquiring language is a complicated process that often occurs nowadays. Some factors also influence children's acquisition of language. Often, the factors that contribute to a child's life hinder or speed up their language development. In this study, the researcher elevates the phenomenon that happens in a five-year-old child who still finds some difficulty in acquiring language. The researcher discovers several relevant studies after conducting some investigation, which is crucial to expanding the study.

The article by Anum et al. (2024) investigates the phonological and morphological language acquisition of children aged 0–2 years in Indonesian-speaking families, particularly in bilingual environments where the community uses Javanese. The study highlights the stages of early language development, from babbling to producing single words and simple phrases, and examines the role of biological and social factors in shaping language acquisition. This research employs descriptive qualitative methods, collecting data through observation and transcription of children's spoken words, providing a detailed account of early phonological and morphological development.

This article is highly relevant as a previous study for our research because it explores the foundational stages of language development that are crucial for understanding the advanced stages observed in a five-year-old. By examining how early phonological and morphological structures are acquired, it offers a baseline for comparing the progression of language acquisition in older children. Additionally, the study's focus on

linguistic input from caregivers and the surrounding environment provides valuable insights into factors that could influence the linguistic competence of my case study subject. From this article, the researchers can utilize its findings on early language patterns and environmental influences to contextualize the development of language abilities in our research subject. It also offers methodological insights, particularly in data collection and analysis techniques, which can guide the design of the researchers' case study.

In Warni et al. (2023) research, the researchers' state that based on the observation that environmental, social, gender, and parenting factors can affect language development in children. It proves how the children in the study significantly show the differences between acquiring the language in phonology, morphology, and syntax. The comparison between the two children reveals that the environment influences both language development the most. The first child was born into a middle-class family living in urban areas and raised by parents with high education. Inversely, the second child, who lives in the village area, comes from the low middle class and is raised by parents with low levels of education. The second child shows the language that she acquired is still lacking in some ways. According to the research, the environment makes a significant contribution to children developing their ability to acquire language.

Grandgeorge et al. (2009) state that the level of education of parents, socioeconomic, and environment have a major impact on children in developing language. The result shows that at an early age, children raised by high-level parents develop the language earlier than children raised by parents with low-level education. The level of parents' education can be stated as one of the influences on the child since parents are the first teachers of their children. Another impact in building language development is from the parental influence that is depicted in the environment that they share. This research is detailed in observing the influence of some factors that currently exist on their child's abilities. The analysis of this research strengthens this study's discussion of the environmental factor that often influences children in developing language.

3. METHODS

In conducting the study, the method used by the researcher is the qualitative method. This study uses a descriptive approach because of the observation of the object. The data used in this study relies on in-depth observation and analysis of a five-year-old child. The qualitative method is an appropriate methodology for further investigating the environmental factor in a child's language acquisition. In his book, Creswell states that qualitative research begins with the assumptions of addressing social problems in society (2013, p. 44). The researcher elevates the common topic in social life, making the method an accurate way of analyzing the data. There are specific requirements in completing qualitative research to get precise or valid data, such as recording the data (question and answer techniques), analyzing the information with multiple analysis steps, and adding approaches to strengthen the results (Creswell, 2014, p. 183).

Furthermore, the object of this study was a child named Alfahrizi Davin Syahputra Hasibuan, who was familiar with Izzi. A five-year-old child who is healthy mentally, physically, and socially. He is the third child of an Indonesian parent who lived in Binjai. His family usually used the Indonesian language in daily life. The parent's ethnicity is Mandailing. At his age, he loves to run inside and outside the house and play with people in his environment. He is also a passionate boy who often asks his parents, siblings, and the environment about many things or observes things around him.

In the data collection, the researcher collects the data in several stages. First, the data from the conversation between the child and the researcher is recorded through a video call. Secondly, the data that has already been transcribed is classified based on the error acquisition of vowels, consonants, and word structure.

After collecting the data, the researcher proceeded with a systematic data analysis guided by phonology theory. The analysis process involved several stages:

a) Transcription Validation

The transcriptions were carefully reviewed for accuracy by replaying the recorded video calls multiple times. This step ensured that all phonetic details, including vowel and consonant articulations, were correctly documented.

b) Phonological Categorization

Each segment of the transcription was analyzed to identify specific phonological patterns and errors. This involved categorizing the child’s speech sounds into standard and non-standard forms based on established phonological frameworks.

c) Error Analysis

Errors in vowel production, consonant articulation, and word structure were meticulously documented. For instance, instances of substitution, omission, and addition in speech were noted, and patterns of these errors were analyzed to understand their frequency and possible causes.

d) Environmental Context Correlation

The identified phonological patterns were then correlated with environmental factors. This step involved examining how the child’s linguistic environment, including interactions with family members and exposure to specific language inputs, influenced his language acquisition process.

e) Cross-Validation

To strengthen the reliability of the findings, the researcher applied multiple phonological theories to interpret the data. This multi-theoretical approach ensured that the analysis captured diverse linguistic perspectives and reduced potential biases.

f) Synthesis of Findings

The final step involved synthesizing the analyzed data to form coherent conclusions about the child’s language acquisition process. This synthesis emphasized the interplay between phonological development and environmental influences. By employing these rigorous and detailed steps in data analysis, the researcher ensured a comprehensive understanding of the phonological aspects of the child’s language acquisition while maintaining the validity and reliability of the findings.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this research, the researcher analyzed and observed the first language acquisition in a five-year-old child who still lacks language skills. It highlights the frequent inaccuracies in Izzi’s language use, particularly in his utterances. The observation was conducted for around 3 weeks, starting from 19th April 2024 – 1st May 2024. The child is Izzi,

who was born in 2019. His father (Mr. Edi) is a salesman, and his mother (Mrs. Dewi) is a receptionist. He has one brother and one sister. His parents primarily use the Indonesian language in their daily lives. Over several weeks, the researcher observed Izzi through question-and-answer sessions to understand his phonological acquisition. Based on these observations, the researcher documented instances of mispronounced utterances, as summarized in Table 1.

Table 1 presents a selection of utterances recorded during conversations between the researcher and Izzi. These conversations employed structured question-and-answer techniques, addressing topics such as daily activities and familiar objects. Through these interactions, Izzi demonstrated an ability to respond to questions, indicating a foundational level of language comprehension and communicative intent. However, a notable challenge was observed: Izzi struggled to maintain focus on a single topic, often shifting topics spontaneously. This behavior reflects both cognitive and linguistic development stages, where attention span and language organization are still maturing.

Upon closer analysis, it was evident that Izzi's difficulty in pronunciation stemmed from the acquisition of phonology. This aligns with Dardjowidjojo's (2000) explanation that the process of learning human language sounds, or phonology, involves gradual stages. Children undergo a series of developmental steps to acquire accurate sound production, influenced by both biological and environmental factors. For instance, Izzi's mispronunciations suggest incomplete mastery of certain phonemes, which may result from either articulatory challenges or the influence of his linguistic environment, where Indonesian serves as the dominant language. This indicates that the acquisition process is not merely about learning isolated sounds but also about integrating these sounds into meaningful communication.

Furthermore, the inconsistencies in Izzi's responses and his topic-shifting behavior suggest a broader interplay between phonological and cognitive development. While his phonological challenges are evident in mispronunciations, his ability to engage in conversation indicates progress in language comprehension and social interaction. This supports Dardjowidjojo's (2000) view that sound acquisition is inherently dynamic and reflects the evolving nature of linguistic competence in children.

In summary, Izzi's phonological acquisition provides valuable insight into the complexity of language development. His challenges highlight the intricate process children navigate as they reconcile their biological capacities with environmental influences, reinforcing the significance of both observation and structured interaction in understanding language acquisition. The sound that comes out first in child utterances is vowels and consonants. It can be seen in the utterances below:

Table 1. The Child Utterances in Video Recorded

No	Izzi's Utterances	Mature Speaker Utterances	English
1	CENDILI	SENDIRI	ALONE
2	CEPULUH	SEPULUH	TEN
3	KELETA	KERETA	TRAIN
4	SAYUL	SAYUR	VEGETABLE
5	LEBALAN	LEBARAN	EID
6	LAPEL	LAPER	HUNGRY
7	SELING	SERING	OFTEN
8	NUNUN	NURUL	NURUL
9	GELATIS	GRATIS	FREE
10	BAYAL	BAYAR	PAY
11	TIDUL	TIDUR	SLEEP
12	TELAS	TERAS	TERRACE
13	PEWEMPUAN	PEREMPUAN	WOMAN
14	SELATUS	SERATUS	ONE HUNDRED
15	BAKAL	BAKAR	BURN
16	CELITALAH	CERITALAH	TELL ME

The video-recorded conversation with the child reveals that, despite being 5 years old, the child consistently exhibits phoneme mispronunciations, indicating ongoing challenges in mastering accurate pronunciation. In this study, the child is still in the process of perfectly pronouncing the phonemes and mastering the language at his age. There

are 16 words above that show the error phonemes, which clearly reveals the lack of phonology acquisition.

The data in Table 1 reveals that Izzi demonstrates proficiency in producing vowels such as [a], [i], [u], [e], [o] and certain consonants like [p], [b], [t], [d], [k], [g], [l], [c]. His ability to produce these phonemes and attach meaning to them indicates significant progress in phonological development. Notably, his mastery of vowels appears to be complete, reflecting a foundational milestone in his language acquisition. Meanwhile, in consonants, it is hard for him to say phonemes [r] perfectly in the middle of a word and at the end of the word, and the phoneme [s] is a little bit difficult for him to pronounce at the beginning of the word.

The error pronunciation of the phonemes [r] in the middle of the word. For example like, "sendiri" become "cendili", "sepuluh" become "cepuluh", "kereta" become "keleta", "lebaran" become "lebalan", "sering" become "seling", "nurul" become "nunun", "gratis" become "gelatis", "teras" become "telas", "perempuan" become "pewempuan", "seratus" become "selatus", "ceritalah" become "celitalah". The phoneme [r] in the end of the word can be seen on the utterances "sayur" become "sayul", "laper" become "lapel", "bayar" become "bayal", "tidur" become "tidul", and "bakar" become "bakal". Then, for the phoneme [s] like "sendiri" become "cendili", "sepuluh" become "cepuluh", the phoneme [s] difficult to pronounce it. He cannot pronounce the sound [s] at the beginning of the word, but he can pronounce the sound [s] in some utterances.

According to his age, at five years old, it is supposed to be already clear in acquiring the language. In her article, Hidayani (2021) states that besides the stage of language acquisition based on age, the concrete experience that influences the child in daily life can be generally influenced by how the child acquires their first language. From the data above, the phonological abilities of the child in pronouncing the words have some errors because he often simplifies or replaces the difficult sounds with the easier ones, like "bayar" becomes "bayal."

In addition, the child's language development is also contributed by the environment that the child experiences because most of the words are directly tied to experiences that occur in daily life. Meanwhile, as shown by Izzi's parent, both of them are workers who have limited time to interact with their children. The child is not provided with a caregiver

since the parents' economy is still not inadequate. It makes the child's ability to pronounce the words slower than that of another child his age. The researcher also found that the environment or neighbor did not correct the error in his utterances when they interacted with him. The ignorance of this problem creates a delay in child language acquisition.

5. CONCLUSION

Acquiring a language is a complex process experienced by children. In this case, the language acquisition of a child named Izzi is influenced by the experience in his environment. The lack of phonological abilities is a problem that must be faced at his age. From the results of this study, the researcher found that there are some consonants that are difficult for the child to pronounce. The child often uses simplification to pronounce the utterances. The consonants that often error are the phonemes [r] and [s]. The researcher found that Izzi was able to communicate well with his interlocutors. Phonologically, he is already able to pronounce all vowels and most consonants. Meanwhile, the phonemes that were uttered were still not as perfect and complete as most children his age.

In this study, the researcher concludes that the parents' role is the most important to support the child's language ability. The interaction between the child and parents is the concrete way to know the child's ability to develop the language. It can be said that a child's parents and the environment around him influence when the child uses language in daily routines. The parents should start to build an interaction with their child to sharpen the child's ability in language development so that the child does not have difficulty in using language.

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