

The Role of Parents in Developing Phonological Awareness in 4–5-Year-Old Children: A Case Study at Cahaya Hati Kindergarten

Rohmaniah, Baiq Desy Arfini, M. Junaidi

Pendidikan Islam Anak Usia Dini, STITNU Al Mahsuni

Article Info

Article history:

Accepted: 10 September 2026

Published: 17 September 2026

Keywords:

phonological awareness;
 parental involvement;
 early literacy;
 early childhood education.

Abstract

Phonological awareness is a fundamental skill that supports early literacy development in young children. This study aimed to: (1) analyze the role of parents in developing children's phonological awareness at home; (2) identify the factors that support parents' involvement in fostering children's phonological awareness; and (3) examine the factors that hinder parents' role in developing children's phonological awareness. This study employed a qualitative approach using a case study design. The participants consisted of three parents, teachers, and Group A children at Cahaya Hati Playgroup. Data were collected through observations, in-depth interviews, and documentation. The data were analyzed using a case study analysis approach, while the trustworthiness of the findings was established through source and technique triangulation. The findings revealed that parents assumed four essential roles in promoting children's phonological awareness: as role models, mentors, organizers, and teachers. These roles were implemented through shared reading of picture storybooks, letter puzzle activities, the use of alphabet posters, and positive reinforcement during learning activities. Supporting factors included children's learning motivation, memory ability, family literacy practices, and a supportive home environment. The primary inhibiting factor was children's fluctuating moods, which affected their participation in learning activities. The findings suggest that active parental involvement in the home literacy environment plays a significant role in strengthening children's phonological awareness as a foundation for early reading development.

This is an open access article under the [Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/)

[International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/)



Corresponding Author:

Rohmaniah

Pendidikan Islam Anak Usia Dini, STITNU Al Mahsuni

Email : rohmaniahrohma123@gmail.com

1. INTRODUCTION

Early literacy skills (*early literacy*) are an important foundation for children's learning success at the next level of education. One of the most determining components in the development of early literacy is phonological awareness (*phonological awareness*), namely a child's ability to recognize, differentiate, combine, and manipulate language sounds before being able to read conventionally. Various studies have shown that this ability is a strong predictor of early reading success, language development, and academic achievement in the early years of school. Children who receive phonological awareness stimulation from preschool age tend to have better reading readiness than children who have minimal literacy experiences at home [1], [2].

The development of phonological awareness does not occur naturally without stimulation, but is shaped through consistent interactions between children and their environment. In early childhood, the family is the first learning environment, providing language experiences through shared reading, singing, playing with sounds, dialogue, introducing letters, and other language games. These activities help children understand the relationship between language sounds, words, and letter symbols, thus building a strong literacy foundation before entering elementary

school. Longitudinal research shows that literacy experiences at home and in the family, context are associated with the development of children's early literacy skills [3]. Family-based intervention research shows that when parents receive appropriate support and strategies, they are able to improve children's phoneme identification, sound blending, segmentation, and interest in reading and writing [1].

In recent years, the concept of the Home Literacy Environment (HLE) has become a major focus of early childhood literacy research. HLE encompasses not only the availability of books or learning media at home, but also the quality of literacy interactions between parents and children. A rich literacy environment provides opportunities for children to gain meaningful learning experiences through shared reading, conversation, language play, and playful exploration of sounds. Numerous studies have shown that the quality of the HLE is positively related to vocabulary development, oral language skills, phonological awareness, and children's reading readiness before entering elementary school [4].

Despite this, parental involvement in developing early literacy still shows significant variation. Some parents actively make time to accompany their children in learning, reading stories, and introducing letter sounds through play. Others face time constraints, a lack of understanding of appropriate stimulation strategies, or limited learning media at home. These conditions mean that children's phonological awareness development does not always occur optimally even though they have attended early childhood education institutions.

Various previous studies generally focus on the relationship between Home Literacy Environment early reading skills, or the effectiveness of phonological training programs provided to children. However, relatively little research has explored the concrete role of parents in everyday life when stimulating phonological awareness in children aged 4–5 years, particularly in the context of early childhood education in Indonesia. Most studies also focus more on measuring children's learning outcomes than on describing the support process carried out by parents within the family environment [1].

Based on these conditions, this study offers novelty by analyzing the role of parents through four main dimensions: modeling, mentoring, organizing, and teaching. These four dimensions are used to explain how parents provide role models in literacy activities, accompany their children's learning process, organize the learning environment at home, and directly teach letter sounds and phonological games. This approach provides a more comprehensive picture of phonological awareness development practices than studies that only measure the intensity of shared reading activities.

Preliminary observations at Cahaya Hati Kindergarten indicate that teachers have implemented various literacy activities in the classroom, but the development of children's phonological awareness still shows considerable variation. Several children were observed to readily recognize the initial sounds of familiar words, clap out syllables correctly, and join sound-matching games without hesitation, while others needed the activity repeated more than once, struggled to separate a word into its syllables, or remained passive when asked to identify a sound independently. Informal conversations with the classroom teacher indicated that this variation is closely related to differences in the literacy support children receive outside school hours: children who completed these tasks with relative ease were generally reported by the teacher to have parents who regularly read with them or played sound-related games at home, whereas children who struggled were reported to have comparatively little literacy interaction outside school. These preliminary observations indicate that stimulation provided at school needs to be strengthened through active parental involvement at home so that the process of early literacy development continues sustainably, and they form the empirical basis for selecting parental involvement as the focus of this study.

Based on the description, this study aims to analyze the form of parental role in developing phonological awareness of children aged 4-5 years at KB Cahaya Hati, identify factors that support and hinder its implementation, and explain the implications of the research results for the development of early literacy programs in early childhood education.

2. METHOD

This research uses a qualitative approach with a case study design. This design was chosen because it allows researchers to gain a deep understanding of phenomena occurring in real-life contexts, particularly regarding the role of parents in developing phonological awareness in 4–5-year-old children. The case study approach is appropriate when researchers want to explore a case comprehensively through various data sources to be able to describe the phenomenon as a whole.

The research was conducted in a family with a 4–5-year-old child with normal language development. The parents served as primary informants, while the class teacher served as supporting informants for data triangulation.

The primary informants were the child's parents, who are the main caregivers responsible for the child's daily learning support at home; both parents took part in data collection, with the mother as the main respondent given her more consistent daily involvement in literacy-related activities, and the father contributing additional information during joint interview sessions. The child, aged 4–5 years, was purposively selected on the basis of typical language development and no diagnosed developmental delay, so that the study could focus specifically on variation in parental stimulation practices rather than on developmental intervention needs. The supporting informant, the child's classroom teacher, has direct daily contact with the child in a formal learning setting and was included to provide a triangulating perspective on the child's phonological awareness as observed at school, complementing the home-based data obtained from the parents.

Data were collected through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. Observations were conducted on children's learning support activities at home. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore parental involvement in developing children's phonological awareness. Documentation was used to supplement the data, including photographs of learning activities, learning media, and child development notes.

Data analysis used the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, which includes data condensation, data presentation, and drawing and verifying conclusions. Data validity was achieved through source triangulation, technical triangulation, and member checking to ensure the credibility of the research results.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the results of observations and interviews, parents act as models (*modelling*) in developing children's phonological awareness through various literacy activities at home. Parents regularly read storybooks, introduce new vocabulary by breaking words into syllables, and encourage children to imitate the pronunciation of letter sounds. These activities provide direct examples of how to pronounce language sounds, allowing children to gain phonological experience naturally through everyday interactions.

These findings align with the results of a recent systematic review showing that home literacy activities combined with active verbal interactions between parents and children are important predictors of oral language and early literacy development. Shared reading activities (shared reading) will have a greater impact if accompanied by dialogue, asking questions, emphasizing the sounds of letters, and practicing recognizing the relationship between letters and their sounds [5].

Recent meta-analysis research also shows that code-based literacy activities (code-based literacy activities), such as introducing letter sounds, combining sounds into syllables, and identifying the initial sounds of words, have a stronger influence on the development of phonological awareness than passive reading activities without interaction [6].

This study found that parents have not consistently provided stimulation for recognizing rhymes and initial sounds in words. Most of this stimulation is obtained by children at school through activities such as grouping words with similar initial sounds, rhyming games, and practicing combining and separating syllables. This situation indicates that parental and school

involvement is still complementary, requiring continuous stimulation between the home and school environments.

The next role that parents play is mentoring, namely providing guidance, direction, motivation, and emotional support while children are learning. Based on observations and interviews, parents build warm relationships with their children before starting learning activities, so that children feel comfortable, confident, and more receptive to the stimulation provided. This positive relationship is realized through responsive communication, full attention, and active involvement throughout the learning process.

In addition to building emotional closeness, parents consistently provide positive reinforcement (positive reinforcement) in the form of praise, hugs, thumbs-up, or simple rewards when a child successfully recognizes letter sounds, pronounces syllables, or shows progress compared to before. Rewards in the form of objects are only given when a child successfully achieves a mutually agreed-upon learning target, so they serve more as a motivator than as the primary goal of learning.

This finding is supported by recent research showing that parental involvement through providing emotional support, positive expectations, and home learning support activities contributes to child development. Emergent literacy includes phonological awareness, vocabulary mastery, and early reading skills. Parents with positive attitudes toward literacy learning tend to engage in more teaching activities at home, provide learning resources, and engage in shared reading activities, thus significantly impacting the development of children's literacy skills [7]. Sociopedagogical studies also show that parental involvement in literacy is multidimensional and related to the literacy competence of preschool-aged children [8].

During the mentoring process, parents also utilize various learning media such as letter cards, picture story books, educational games, and sound-based games. These activities not only help children recognize the relationship between letters and sounds but also provide opportunities for children to practice identifying the beginning sounds of words, combining syllables, and expanding vocabulary through fun interactions. Recent research shows that the quality of parental involvement during home learning activities has a stronger relationship to literacy development than the frequency of activities alone. Responsive, dialogic, and child-centered interactions have been shown to improve phonological skills and reading readiness in preschool-aged children [9].

The results of this study indicate that mentoring serves not only as a companion during a child's learning but also as a form of scaffolding, providing gradual assistance according to the child's needs until they are able to perform tasks independently. This approach allows children to have a more meaningful learning experience because stimulation is provided according to their individual developmental level and abilities.

The next role that parents play is organizing, namely providing and managing a learning environment that supports the development of children's phonological awareness. Based on observations and interviews, parents not only help children when they have difficulty recognizing letter sounds, but also create a literacy environment at home (home literacy environment) rich in learning resources. This environment is realized through the provision of accessible bookshelves, picture books, letter cards, alphabet puzzles, educational games, and various media that can stimulate the ability to recognize language sounds.

When a child has difficulty distinguishing certain letter sounds, parents provide gradual assistance by associating the letter sounds with the names of familiar objects in everyday life. This strategy helps the child connect letter symbols with language sounds more concretely, facilitating the process of forming phonological representations.

This finding is in line with the results of a recent meta-analysis which showed that the quality of the home learning environment has a significant relationship with children's language and literacy development. A home environment that provides books, shared reading activities, adult literacy practices, and easily accessible learning resources positively contributes to the development of children's early language and literacy skills. Interestingly, the study showed that the presence of books at home and the literacy habits of family members had a greater influence

than formal teaching activities at home [10]. Other findings indicate that the quality of the home literacy environment is also related to children's vocabulary development and language skills [11].

In addition to providing printed media, parents in this study also utilized educational games and digital media to stimulate phonological awareness. Children were allowed to play with letter puzzles, alphabet games, educational videos, and learning apps that introduced the relationship between letters and sounds. The use of digital media was carried out in a targeted manner with parental guidance so that children continued to receive verbal interaction throughout the activities.

Recent research shows that digital media can benefit literacy development when used interactively and with parental guidance. Digital media combined with dialogue, questions, and collaborative play has been shown to increase children's engagement in the learning process and enrich early literacy experiences. Conversely, passive use of digital media without interaction tends to provide less benefit to language development and phonological awareness [12].

The findings of this study also indicate that providing a literacy-rich learning environment is not only related to the number of learning media a family has, but also to how parents organize the use of these media in their daily activities. Parents actively select age-appropriate books, games, and digital media, then integrate them into play and learning activities, so that children gain meaningful learning experiences. Thus, the role of organizers is not only to provide learning facilities but also to manage the environment, encouraging children to actively interact with various literacy resources. A better-quality home literacy environment is also associated with higher language and pre-reading achievements in preschool-aged children [13].

The final role found in this study is teaching, namely the direct involvement of parents in teaching phonological skills to children through structured activities. Based on the results of observations and interviews, parents actively introduce the relationship between letters and sounds (grapheme–phoneme correspondence) using various media, such as alphabet posters, picture story books, letter puzzles, alphabet cards, songs, and educational games. Learning is carried out in stages, starting with introducing letter names, letter sounds, combining sounds into syllables, and finally reading simple words according to the child's ability. Longitudinal findings also indicate that letter-sound interactions in the home literacy environment are related to subsequent literacy skill development [14].

In the phoneme recognition stage, parents point to a letter on an alphabet poster, pronounce its sound, and ask the child to imitate it. When the child has difficulty, parents assist by connecting the letter to the name of a familiar object. This strategy helps children establish connections between letter symbols, sounds, and meanings, making the learning process easier.

This finding is in line with developments in the Science of Reading, which places phonemic and phonics teaching explicitly (explicit and systematic phonics instruction) as the main foundation in the development of early literacy. The latest literature review shows that learning carried out systematically, starting from the introduction of the relationship between letters and sounds, practicing combining sounds (blending), separate the sound (segmenting), and reading words gradually has a significant impact on the development of children's early reading skills and phonological awareness [15].

In addition to print media, parents utilize letter puzzles and alphabet games as learning tools through play. During these activities, children are not only asked to recognize letter shapes but also to associate letters with their sounds and name words that share the same beginning sound. A play-based approach (play-based learning) like this has been proven to increase children's involvement in the learning process while strengthening phonological abilities because children gain active, meaningful learning experiences that are in accordance with the characteristics of early childhood development [12].

Research also shows that parents integrate alphabet songs into daily learning activities. Songs are used as a medium to introduce letter sequences, practice pronunciation, and help children remember the relationship between letters and sounds through repetitive rhythms. Singing activities increase children's enthusiasm for learning and provide opportunities for them to naturally repeat language sounds. Repetition of sounds through songs, sound games, and shared

reading activities helps strengthen children's phonological representations, facilitating the process of mastering reading skills at later stages [12].

Furthermore, parents use digital media to a limited extent as a supplement to learning. Educational videos and phonics apps are used to reinforce material learned through direct interaction. However, the use of digital media is always accompanied by parental guidance to facilitate two-way communication, feedback, and discussion of the letter sounds being learned. A recent systematic review showed that the use of tablets or phonics apps can benefit the development of phonological awareness when combined with teacher or parent guidance, while independent use without interaction does not always result in consistent improvement [16].

Based on these findings, the role of teaching is not only to transfer knowledge about letters and sounds, but also as a form of instructional scaffolding that helps children gradually develop phonological skills. Parents adjust the learning difficulty level to the child's development, provide examples, repeated practice, and positive feedback so that children have a systematic, enjoyable learning experience that aligns with the principles of evidence-based early literacy learning (evidence-based early literacy instruction).

Taken together, these findings should be read with some caution before being treated as evidence that parents in general fulfil all four roles, modelling, mentoring, organizing, and teaching, in a consistently effective and well-balanced manner. The results in this study came from a single family with reasonably good access to learning media and a mother closely engaged with the child's schooling; the pattern of comprehensive parental support described here is therefore best understood as an illustration of what active, well-resourced parental involvement can look like, rather than as a representative picture of how phonological awareness is stimulated across the wider population of families served by KB Cahaya Hati. The frequent alignment between the findings and prior literature is also, at least in part, an artefact of how the four roles were defined at the outset of the study: because modelling, mentoring, organizing, and teaching were adopted directly from constructs already established in the home literacy environment and parental-involvement literature, most of what parents were observed doing could be expected to fit neatly into an existing category and its corresponding citation. A more critical reading of the data also reveals some tension rather than pure consistency: parents in this study reported using digital media only as a limited supplement guided by continuous parental interaction, yet they simultaneously reported time constraints as a barrier, which raises the practical question of how consistently that guided, interactive use of digital media can actually be sustained once parental time is limited, a tension the findings describe but do not fully resolve. Read this way, the contribution of this study lies less in confirming that the four dimensions of parental involvement matter, a point already well established in the literature, than in showing concretely how one family enacted and balanced these roles from day to day, including the compromises involved when time and resources are constrained.

4. CONCLUSION

Based on the research findings and the discussion outlined above, this study draws the following conclusions in relation to its three research objectives: the form of parental involvement, its supporting and inhibiting factors, and its implications for early literacy programs.

In answer to the first objective, parents at KB Cahaya Hati enact their role in developing children's phonological awareness through four interrelated dimensions. Modelling is carried out by demonstrating correct pronunciation of letter sounds and syllables during shared reading, viewing, and play. Mentoring is carried out by providing emotional support, positive reinforcement, and scaffolded guidance as the child practices new skills. Organizing is carried out by creating and managing a home literacy environment rich in books, letter cards, puzzles, and selectively used digital media. Teaching is carried out by directly and systematically introducing letter-sound relationships through structured, play-based activities, from naming letters, to combining sounds, to reading simple words.

Factors that support parents' role in developing children's phonological awareness are the environment, parental education, and economic conditions. Meanwhile, a factor that hinders parents from developing children's phonological awareness is limited time for stimulating their children's development.

These findings imply that early literacy programs in early childhood education should not rely on school-based stimulation alone but should actively involve parents by equipping them with practical strategies for modelling, mentoring, organizing, and teaching phonological skills at home, while also taking into account the time constraints many families face. As the evidence presented here comes from a single family, these implications are offered as a starting point for early childhood education providers rather than as generalizable conclusions, and would benefit from confirmation through further studies involving a broader and more diverse range of families.

5. BIBLIOGRAPHY

- [1] H. Bennett, A. Denston, and A. Arrow, "The effectiveness of a parent-implemented, phonological awareness programme on the phonological awareness skills of preschool children," *Asia-Pacific Journal of Language and Literacy*, vol. 46, pp. 125–143, 2023, doi: 10.1007/s44020-023-00034-6.
- [2] A. Wirth, S. C. Ehmgig, and F. Niklas, "The role of the Home Literacy Environment for children's linguistic and socioemotional competencies development in the early years," *Social Development*, vol. 31, no. 2, pp. 372–387, 2021, doi: 10.1111/sode.12550.
- [3] L. Bigozzi, G. Vettori, and O. Incognito, "The role of preschoolers' home literacy environment and emergent literacy skills on later reading and writing skills in primary school: A mediational model," *Frontiers in Psychology*, vol. 14, art. 1113822, 2023, doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2023.1113822.
- [4] D. B. Deitcher, D. Aram, and D. Abramovich, "Parents' literacy beliefs, home literacy activities, and children's early literacy skills: Stability and progress approaching first grade," *Behavioral Sciences*, vol. 14, no. 11, 2024, doi: 10.3390/bs14111038.
- [5] E. Silva-Chelles, N. Viana, F. Mata, and J. Lopes-Silva, "Home literacy interventions and children's emergent literacy and oral language skills: A systematic review and discussion of underlying mechanisms," *Review of Education*, vol. 13, art. e70027, 2025, doi: 10.1002/rev3.70027.
- [6] J. Cusiter, K. Short, A. Webb, and N. Munro, "Combined language and code emergent literacy intervention for at-risk preschool children: A systematic meta-analytic review," *Child Development*, vol. 96, no. 4, pp. 1519–1545, 2025, doi: 10.1111/cdev.14252.
- [7] T. Inoue, S.-Z. Zhang, M. Su, Y. Meng, H. Shu, and G. K. Georgiou, "Are parental influences on emergent literacy and word reading skills the same across socioeconomic contexts? A multisite study in China," *Journal of Educational Psychology*, vol. 117, no. 4, pp. 603–625, 2025.
- [8] E. Penderi, A. Karousou, and I. Papanastasatou, "A multidimensional-multilevel approach to literacy-related parental involvement and its effects on preschool children's literacy competences: A sociopedagogical perspective," *Education Sciences*, vol. 13, no. 12, art. 1192, 2023, doi: 10.3390/educsci13121192.
- [9] G. Alonso, K. M. Opingo, H. Revalde, and V. Calasang, "Assessing the relationship between parental involvement and foundational literacy and numeracy skills in early childhood education," *Journal of Learning and Development Studies*, vol. 5, no. 7, 2025, doi: 10.32996/jlds.2025.5.7.5.
- [10] S. Nag, S. B. Vagh, K. M. Dulay, M. Snowling, E. Donolato, and M. Melby-Lervåg, "Home learning environments and children's language and literacy skills: A meta-analytic review of studies conducted in low- and middle-income countries," *Psychological Bulletin*, vol. 150, no. 2, pp. 132–153, 2024, doi: 10.1037/bul0000417.

- [11] S. Kim, M. Chae, and D. Yim, "The effect of home literacy environment on receptive and expressive vocabulary skills in preschool children," *Communication Sciences and Disorders*, vol. 27, no. 1, pp. 14–26, 2022, doi: 10.12963/csd.22874.
- [12] R. M. Hunkin, "Key influences on the development of emergent literacy skills: A literature review," *BU Journal of Graduate Studies in Education*, vol. 16, no. 3, pp. 12–18, 2024.
- [13] A. Højen, A. S. M. Schmidt, I. S. Møller, and L. Flansmose, "Unequal home literacy environments between preschool-age boys and girls predict unequal language and preliteracy outcomes," *Acta Psychologica*, vol. 230, art. 103716, 2022, doi: 10.1016/j.actpsy.2022.103716.
- [14] A.-M. Adams, E. Soto-Calvo, H. N. Francis, H. Patel, C. Hartley, D. Giofrè, and F. R. Simmons, "Characteristics of the preschool home literacy environment which predict writing skills at school," *Reading and Writing*, vol. 34, pp. 2203–2225, 2021, doi: 10.1007/s11145-021-10133-w.
- [15] J. Walkey, "The impact of explicit phonics instruction on emergent literacy," *Canadian Journal for New Scholars in Education*, vol. 15, no. 2, 2024.
- [16] C. R. L. Parry, S. Kumar, and C. Galligane, "Integration of tablets in phonological awareness and phonics instruction: A systematic review," *Journal of Research in Childhood Education*, vol. 38, no. 4, pp. 559–576, 2024, doi: 10.1080/02568543.2023.2301110.