

**Pronunciation problems of children with speech delay in the initial,
middle and final positions of words: Evidence from Persian-
speaking girls and boys aged 3 to 8 years in Birjand**

Elahe Taghizadeh¹
Jalilolah Faroughi Hendevalan²
Hossein Navidinia³

Received: 18/03/2020

Accepted: 16/12/2020

Article Type: Research

Abstract

Generally, if a small part of people's language and speech is affected, their social life will be affected as well. This effect can be observed more in children with speech delay disorders which can create many problems for them in adulthood (including their education, communication, self-confidence, etc.). What can add to the existing problem is the fact that in many contexts, students having hearing disorders and normal students go to the same schools and are educated together. Therefore, the need to conduct research to investigate the problems of children with speech disorders and find ways to reduce the negative consequences in these children seem necessary. What can add to the significance of conducting this study is the paucity of studies addressing this issue in the Iranian context. Therefore, this study investigated the pronunciation problems of children with speech delay and its relationship with their age and gender. More specifically, it tried to examine if there are differences among the children's pronunciation problems with the initial, middle and end positions of the words and to investigate the possible relationship that the number of problems may have with the children's age and gender.

The research method is quantitative. The statistical population of this study were 50 children in Birjand Speech Therapy Centers, from whom 20 girls and boys were selected based on purposive sampling. The sample was selected based on their age and gender, because the study investigated a specific age group. Furthermore, the sample was selected in a way that the number of both genders was equal. The children were aged between 3 and 8 years, and all of them had "speech delays." In order to collect data, Phonetic Test was used. This test includes 69 pictures and

¹ MA in Linguistics, Department of English Language, University of Birjand; elaheh.taghizade@birjand.ac.ir

² Associate Professor of Linguistics, Department of English Language, University of Birjand (corresponding author); jfaroughi@birjand.ac.ir

³ Associate Professor of Applied Linguistics, Department of English Language, University of Birjand; navidinia@birjand.ac.ir

measures the children's ability in articulating words correctly. Therefore, the focus of the test is on the way of sound articulation. The content validity of this test has been confirmed by speech therapists. Using the Cronbach's alpha method which is the most common method for calculating reliability. The reliability of the test in this study was calculated to be 0.91. In the first stage of the study, the test was taken from the subjects and then the data were analyzed using SPSS software. Then, the descriptive and inferential statistics were run and reported. To be more organized, the results for each research question were reported in separate sections in the study. The statistical tests used in this study were one-way ANOVA, Pearson correlation, and independent samples t-test.

Based on its purposes, the study is guided by three research questions. The first research question examined if there were any significant differences among the number of pronunciation problems of children at the initial, middle and end positions of the words. One-way ANOVA was used to examine the differences among the number of problems in different positions of the words. The findings indicated no significant differences among the range of the pronunciation problems of children in the different positions of the words. The second research question examined if there was a significant relationship between the children's pronunciation problems and their age. Pearson correlation was used to measure the relationship between these two variables. The findings indicated no significant differences among the children's age and the number of pronunciation errors that they had. The third research question examined the differences between the frequency of errors made by girls and boys in the test. Independent sample t-test was used to examine the differences between the two groups. The results indicated no significant differences between the number of problems that the two groups (girls and boys) had.

The study had some pedagogical implications for the therapists and teachers who try to help these students. The findings of this study found no significant differences among the number of problems the children had in different positions of the words. Also, it found no significant differences among the number of problems the girls and boys had while articulating the words. Furthermore, no significant relationship was found between the children's age and the number of problems they had.

Furthermore, the study had some limitations. First, the number of the participants were 20 children, and the researchers could not find more participants to take part in this study. Therefore, it is suggested that future studies try replicating this study with a larger sample. Also, working on other age groups can be another line of research that can be followed by future studies.

Keyword: Age and Gender, Children's Speech Problems, Speech Disorder, Word Position