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COMMON ENGLISH WORDS IN ACADEMIC DIGITAL COMMUNICATION AMONG INDONESIAN UNIVERSITY STUDENTS: A SOCIOLINGUISTIC STUDY OF ACADEMIC SERVICE NODES (ASN)

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Abstrak

tetapi kajian sosiolinguistik yang menelaah tingkat kata dalam konteks layanan akademik (Academic Service Nodes/ASN) masih terbatas. Penelitian ini bertujuan mengidentifikasi kata bahasa Inggris umum yang paling sering muncul dalam komunikasi akademik harian mahasiswa Indonesia serta mendeskripsikan sebaran kemunculannya menurut usia, latar belakang pendidikan, dan kontak sosial. Penelitian menggunakan desain kualitatif deskriptif dengan pendekatan sosiolinguistik. Partisipan berjumlah 17 orang berusia 20–23 tahun yang dipilih secara purposif. Data berupa tangkapan layar percakapan WhatsApp dan Instagram Direct Message yang dikumpulkan melalui observasi nonpartisipan dan dokumentasi, kemudian dianalisis dengan model interaktif Miles, Huberman, dan Saldaña. Dari 20 data percakapan teridentifikasi 11 kata bahasa Inggris umum. Kata *deadline* paling sering muncul (6 kemunculan; 30%), diikuti *today* (3), *submit* (2), dan *upload* (2), sedangkan tujuh kata lain muncul masing-masing satu kali. Sebanyak 17 data (85%) berasal dari WhatsApp dan 3 data (15%) dari Instagram. Kata-kata tersebut muncul pada semua kelompok usia, latar belakang pendidikan, dan jenis kontak sosial, dengan fungsi dominan sebagai istilah tugas dan penilaian akademik (12 dari 20 data). Karena data bersifat deskriptif dan berskala kecil, temuan menunjukkan pola kemunculan, bukan pengaruh kausal faktor sosial. Penelitian lanjutan perlu menggunakan korpus yang lebih besar dan desain komparatif.

Kata kunci: kata bahasa Inggris umum; komunikasi akademik digital; sosiolinguistik; Academic Service Nodes (ASN); campur kode

Abstract

Academic communication among Indonesian university students increasingly draws on English vocabulary, yet sociolinguistic studies that examine word-level usage within academic service communication (Academic Service Nodes, ASN) remain scarce. This study identified the common English words that most frequently appeared in everyday academic digital communication among Indonesian students and described how their occurrence was distributed across age, educational background, and social contact. A descriptive qualitative design with a sociolinguistic approach was applied. Seventeen participants aged 20–23 were selected purposively. Data were screenshots of WhatsApp conversations and Instagram direct messages, gathered through non-participant observation and documentation and analysed with the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña. Twenty data entries yielded 11 common English words. Deadline was the most frequent (6 occurrences; 30%), followed by today (3), submit (2), and upload (2); the other seven words each occurred once. Seventeen entries

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(85%) came from WhatsApp and three (15%) from Instagram. The words appeared in every age group, educational background, and type of social contact, and mostly served as terms for academic tasks and assessment (12 of 20 entries). Because the evidence is descriptive and small in scale, the findings show patterns of occurrence rather than a causal influence of social factors. Future studies should use larger corpora and comparative designs.

***Keywords**: common English words; academic digital communication; sociolinguistics; Academic Service Nodes (ASN); code mixing*

INTRODUCTION

Language is the primary means by which people express ideas, negotiate relationships, and sustain social life, and it cannot be separated from the society that uses it. Sociolinguistics studies this relationship by asking how language varies, how speakers choose among available forms, and what social functions those choices serve (Malabar, 2015). Nurpadillah (2023) adds that speakers adjust their language to the social situation, the purpose of the exchange, and the interactional context. Language choice is therefore never only a matter of vocabulary; it is a record of who is speaking to whom, where, and for what purpose.

These choices have become more visible as communication has moved online. Messaging applications and social media platforms such as WhatsApp and Instagram now carry much of the everyday interaction among Indonesian students, allowing quick, informal, and interactive exchange through messages, comments, and direct messages. Language in such spaces is flexible and frequently mixed. Susilawati et al. (2024) report that communication among Generation Z is strongly shaped by digital culture, with more informal and mixed forms. One conspicuous feature is the insertion of English into predominantly Indonesian talk. Gustiana et al. (2025) describe the growing visibility of foreign languages, English above all, in Indonesian language practice, while Kartika et al. (2025) show that younger speakers blend Indonesian and English because English is regarded as modern, practical, and socially attractive.

One domain in which this blending is easy to observe is academic communication. Students, lecturers, and administrative staff coordinate assignments, schedules, meetings, confirmations, and administrative procedures through WhatsApp groups and direct messages. Nisrina et al. (2024) found that WhatsApp groups are an effective medium for delivering academic information quickly and practically, and Saputra et al. (2021) argue that academic services depend on effective communication to sustain service quality. In this article, such service-oriented academic exchanges are conceptualised as Academic Service Nodes (ASN): the points at which academic information, requests, and responses circulate through digital channels. Because ASN exchanges revolve around recurring administrative and learning tasks, they are a productive setting for examining which English words become routine in Indonesian academic talk.

Previous studies have approached English use in Indonesian communication mainly through code switching and code mixing. Kultsum and Syamsudin (2021) examined both phenomena in an EFL class at a homeschooling institution, and Salsabila et al. (2025) found that English insertions in the social media talk of university students were shaped by communication style, social identity, and digital habits. Suratiningsih and Puspita (2022) showed that English words and expressions made podcast conversation sound modern and expressive, and Marni et al. (2020) linked English elements in the speech of education students to habit, educational background, and environment. Together these studies establish that English insertion is common and socially patterned. However, they

concentrate on the sentence or phrase level, on classroom, entertainment, or general social media settings, or on speakers' language in general. Studies that take individual English words in academic digital communication as their unit of analysis, and that relate those words to participant characteristics such as age, educational background, and social contact, remain limited. A further gap is that the sociolinguistic factors often invoked in this literature are asserted more often than they are examined against participant-level data.

This study addresses that gap by documenting the common English words that occurred in the academic WhatsApp and Instagram conversations of a group of Indonesian university students and by describing how those words were distributed across three sociolinguistic variables drawn from Malabar (2015): age, educational background, and social contact. It does not test whether these variables cause differences in language use; its contribution is an empirically grounded, word-level description that later quantitative or comparative work can build on. Specifically, the study aimed (1) to identify the most frequently used common English words in the everyday academic digital communication of Indonesian university students within the ASN setting, and (2) to describe the occurrence of these words in relation to participants' age, educational background, and social contact.

Research Methods

Design and setting

This study used a descriptive qualitative design with a sociolinguistic approach. The design suits the aim of describing naturally occurring language use, in which the data are words, expressions, and communication contexts rather than numbers (Creswell, 2018; Sugiyono, 2019). The sociolinguistic approach directs attention to how language relates to social characteristics such as age, educational background, and social contact (Nurpadillah, 2023). The setting was virtual rather than physical: academic interaction on WhatsApp (class, community-service, and friendship-circle groups and personal chats) and Instagram direct messages. These platforms were chosen because Indonesian university students use them heavily and because exchanges on them are spontaneous, which gives access to authentic language data. Data collection took place over approximately two months in 2026.

Participants

Seventeen participants were selected through purposive sampling. The criteria were active involvement in academic communication and frequent use of the two platforms. All were undergraduate students or recent alumni aged 20–23 years. The sample deliberately covered different academic relationships to the researcher, as summarised in Table 1. The number of participants is appropriate for a qualitative study that seeks depth rather than statistical representation, although it limits the generalisability of the findings.

Table 1. Characteristics of the participants (N = 17)

Variable	Category	n
Age (years)	20	1
	21	1
	22	10
	23	5

Variable	Category	n
Educational background	Same class	6
	Same study program, different class	2
	Different study program	3
	Different faculty	1
	Different university	4
	Alumnus	1
Social contact	Classmate	6
	Academic friend	10
	Academic contact	1
Platform	WhatsApp	15
	Instagram	2

Data collection and instruments

Data were collected through non-participant observation and documentation. The researcher observed existing conversations without taking part in them, so that participants' language would remain natural, and documented relevant exchanges as screenshots. Only exchanges that contained common English words, defined as English lexical items or simple expressions inserted into predominantly Indonesian talk, were retained. The instruments were the researcher as the primary (human) instrument (Sugiyono, 2019) and an observation sheet that recorded, for every item, the English word, the communication context, the participant's age, educational background, and social contact, and the platform and data source. Because the study is qualitative, no validity or reliability coefficients were computed. Instrument quality was instead addressed through the trustworthiness procedures described below.

Data analysis and trustworthiness

Analysis followed the interactive model of Miles et al. (2014): data collection, data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. During reduction, items were coded and classified by word, communication context, and participant characteristics (Saldaña, 2016). The coded data were displayed in tables of frequency and distribution, and the researcher then interpreted patterns of use, including the communicative function of each word. Frequencies are simple counts of entries in the corpus and are reported descriptively; no inferential tests were applied. Credibility was supported through triangulation of data from the two platforms, documentation of screenshots, persistent observation, and an audit trail of coding and classification decisions (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Independent double coding was not undertaken. As a matter of research ethics, names, profile photographs, telephone numbers, and usernames were replaced with participant codes (P1–P17) before analysis.

Results and Discussion

Results

Corpus overview

The corpus comprised 20 data entries from the 17 participants. Seventeen entries (85%) came from WhatsApp, drawn from a class group, a community-service (KKN) group, a friendship-circle group, and personal chats; three entries (15%) came from Instagram direct messages written by two participants. Every entry was an Indonesian-based message that contained at least one common English word, and the 20 entries yielded 11 distinct words.

Most frequently used words (research question 1)

Table 2 ranks the 11 words by frequency. *Deadline* was the most frequent word, accounting for six entries (30%) written by six different participants (P5, P7, P8, P11, P12, and P13), so its prominence does not stem from a single speaker. *Today* followed with three entries (15%) from two participants, and *submit* and *upload* each occurred twice (10%). Together these four words made up 13 of the 20 entries (65%). The remaining seven words (*please*, *link*, *okay*, *quiz*, *point*, *translate*, and *project*) each occurred once (5%).

Table 2. Frequency of common English words in the corpus (N = 20 entries)

Rank	Word	Freq.	%	Indonesian equivalent	Platform	Typical context
1	*Deadline*	6	30	*batas waktu*	WhatsApp	Asking about, mentioning, or advising on assignment deadlines
2	*Today*	3	15	*hari ini*	WhatsApp	Informing or asking about the class schedule
3	*Submit*	2	10	*mengumpulkan / menyerahkan*	WhatsApp	Submission of an acceptance letter and of a report
3	*Upload*	2	10	*mengunggah*	WhatsApp	Uploading assignments to an online platform
5	*Please*	1	5	*tolong*	WhatsApp	Requesting help to create a Zoom link
5	*Link*	1	5	*tautan*	WhatsApp	Referring to a Zoom meeting link
5	*Okay*	1	5	*tidak apa-apa*	WhatsApp	Reassuring a classmate who apologised
5	*Quiz*	1	5	*kuis*	WhatsApp	Sharing information about a quiz

Rank	Word	Freq.	%	Indonesian equivalent	Platform	Typical context
5	*Point*	1	5	*poin / inti*	Instagram	Advising a friend to grasp the main point of a question
5	*Translate*	1	5	*menerjemahkan*	Instagram	Advising against mentally translating every word
5	*Project*	1	5	*proyek*	Instagram	Discussing progress on a thesis project

The transcripts show how the words were embedded in Indonesian sentences, for example "*Deadline mu kapan?*" (P11), "*Kita masuk jam 14:00 today*" (P1), "*Karena kemarin kita udah submit kemungkinan belum keluar LoA-nya*" (P4), and "*Upload tugas sy lewat Class room*" (P14). In each case Indonesian supplied the grammatical frame and the English word the content item.

Communicative functions

Grouping the words by the function they performed in context gives the pattern in Table 3. This grouping is the researchers' interpretive classification, based on the communication contexts recorded for each entry. Terms for academic tasks and assessment (*deadline*, *submit*, *upload*, *quiz*, and *project*) accounted for 12 of the 20 entries (60%). The other entries referred to time (*today*), performed interactional work (*please* and *okay*), described learning strategy (*point* and *translate*), or named digital access (*link*).

Table 3. Communicative functions of the words (N = 20 entries)

Function	Words	Entries	%
Academic task and assessment terms	*deadline, submit, upload, quiz, project*	12	60
Temporal reference	*today*	3	15
Interactional and politeness markers	*please, okay*	2	10
Learning-strategy terms	*point, translate*	2	10
Digital-access term	*link*	1	5

Occurrence across sociolinguistic variables (research question 2)

The words appeared in every category of every variable (Tables 4 and 5). By age, 22-year-olds, who formed the largest group (10 participants), produced 12 entries, 23-year-olds produced six, and the 20- and 21-year-old participants produced one entry each, in both cases *deadline*. By educational background, classmates produced the widest range of words (eight entries covering six different words), while participants from other classes, programs, a faculty, and universities, as well as the alumnus, each contributed between one and four entries. By social contact, the ten academic friends produced ten entries, the six classmates eight, and the single academic contact

two. Because classmates are exactly the participants in the "same class" category, the two rows are identical.

Table 4. Distribution of entries by age (N = 20 entries)

Age	Participants	Entries	Words (frequency)
20	1	1	*deadline*
21	1	1	*deadline*
22	10	12	*deadline* (2), *today* (2), *submit* (2), *upload* (2), *please*, *link*, *okay*, *project*
23	5	6	*deadline* (2), *quiz*, *today*, *point*, *translate*

Table 5. Distribution of entries by educational background and social contact (N = 20 entries)

Variable	Category	Participants	Entries	Words (frequency)
Educational background	Same class	6	8	*today* (3), *link*, *please*, *okay*, *upload*, *deadline*
	Same program, different class	2	2	*quiz*, *submit*
	Different study program	3	3	*deadline* (2), *submit*
	Different faculty	1	1	*deadline*
	Different university	4	4	*deadline* (2), *upload*, *project*
	Alumnus	1	2	*point*, *translate*
Social contact	Classmate	6	8	*today* (3), *link*, *please*, *okay*, *upload*, *deadline*
	Academic friend	10	10	*deadline* (5), *submit* (2), *quiz*, *upload*, *project*
	Academic contact	1	2	*point*, *translate*

Discussion

Why task-related vocabulary dominates

The dominance of *deadline* and the other task and assessment terms (60% of entries) is best understood from the nature of ASN communication. These exchanges revolve around recurring obligations (when work is due, how and where it is handed in, what will be assessed), so the vocabulary that attaches to these obligations is used again and again. The Indonesian equivalent of

deadline, *batas waktu*, is a two-word phrase, whereas the English item is a single, widely recognised word, which fits the claim that English words are favoured because they are practical and familiar (Gustiana et al., 2025; Kartika et al., 2025). The same reasoning applies to *submit*, *upload*, and *link*, which belong to the vocabulary of online platforms and may reach students in English through the interfaces of the learning systems and meeting tools they use daily. This explanation is plausible but was not tested here, because the study did not ask participants why they chose the English forms. It does agree with Saputra et al. (2021), who stress that academic services depend on efficient communication, and with Nisrina et al. (2024), who show that WhatsApp groups are a practical channel for exactly this kind of information.

The fact that six different participants each produced *deadline* once also matters. It suggests a shared repertoire within this student network rather than the idiolect of one or two speakers, which is the kind of pattern that Kartika et al. (2025) describe for younger speakers who treat English items as a normal part of their communicative style.

Borrowing and mixing: degrees of integration

The transcripts show that the English words are not all integrated into Indonesian to the same degree. *Deadline*, *upload*, *submit*, and *link* take Indonesian grammatical material directly: the possessive pronoun in *deadline mu*, the passive prefix in *di upload*, the colloquial aspect marker *udah* before *submit*, and expressive lengthening in *linkkk*. These forms behave like established loanwords of Indonesian academic and digital registers. By contrast, *today* and *okay* have long-standing Indonesian counterparts (*hari ini* and *tidak apa-apa*), and the *okay* entry is in fact a short English clause ("It's okay Sri") followed by Indonesian. These cases look more like code mixing at the word or phrase level than like lexical borrowing. Kultsum and Syamsudin (2021) describe code mixing as the insertion of words, phrases, or expressions from another language, and Salsabila et al. (2025), Suratiningsih and Puspita (2022), and Marni et al. (2020) document such insertion in social media, podcast, and student talk. The present data extend these studies to the word level in academic service communication, and they also suggest that a word-level inventory should distinguish established loanwords from momentary insertions, since the two probably have different social meanings.

The interactional items support the same reading. *Please* and *okay* did not name academic content; they softened a request and reassured a classmate. Using English for these small pragmatic tasks fits reports that English is seen as modern and socially attractive (Kartika et al., 2025) and that English insertion makes talk more expressive (Suratiningsih & Puspita, 2022). Whether these speakers actually chose English to sound friendlier or more polite cannot be decided from screenshots alone and would require follow-up interviews.

Platform differences

WhatsApp supplied 85% of the entries, in line with the position of WhatsApp groups as the main channel of academic information among students (Nisrina et al., 2024). The three Instagram entries differed in kind: they came from personal advice and reflection on learning and thesis work (*point*, *translate*, *project*) rather than from announcements and logistics. This contrast hints that platform and communicative purpose go together, but it rests on three entries from two participants and on a sample in which 15 participants were observed on WhatsApp and only two on Instagram. The platform shares therefore describe the corpus and should not be read as differences in the rate of English use.

What the data can and cannot say about social factors

English words occurred in every age group, every educational background, and every type of social contact, which is consistent with the view that language use varies with social characteristics and relationships (Malabar, 2015; Nurpadillah, 2023) and with Marni et al. (2020), who relate English elements in student speech to habit, educational background, and environment. The data do not, however, show that age, education, or social contact influenced which words were used or how often. Three features of the design prevent such a claim.

First, the variables barely vary. Fifteen of the 17 participants were 22 or 23 years old, and entries per participant were practically the same across age groups (1.2 for both 22- and 23-year-olds, and 1.0 for the 20- and 21-year-old participants). Second, the corpus contains only exchanges that already included English words. Selecting data on the outcome means that the frequencies describe what was in the sample, not how often participants used English rather than Indonesian equivalents such as *batas waktu* or *mengumpulkan* in comparable situations. Third, no contrast group (older speakers, non-academic contacts, or students outside the researcher's network) was included. The entries per participant also show no consistent gradient: classmates produced 1.3 entries each, academic friends 1.0, and the single academic contact 2.0, but the last figure comes from one participant who produced two words in one message. The fact that six participants were classmates of the researcher may additionally have favoured the informal, in-group register in which items such as *okay* and *today* appear.

The finding that the same stock of academic vocabulary appears across different relationships can still be read cautiously. A shared academic environment, rather than any single demographic category, may explain why words such as *deadline* travel across classes, programs, faculties, and universities, but only a comparative design that measures use against opportunity could show this.

Contribution and practical meaning

The study contributes an empirically grounded, word-level inventory of English in ASN communication, a layer that sentence-level code-mixing studies tend to leave unexamined. In practical terms, the vocabulary identified is task-oriented, so lecturers and academic administrators who write announcements can expect students to understand terms such as *deadline*, *submit*, and *upload* readily. Less established items, especially those that carry interactional meaning, should not be assumed to be equally transparent to all readers, and the same applies to students with less exposure to English.

Conclusion and Suggestions

This study set out to identify the common English words used in the everyday academic digital communication of Indonesian university students and to describe how their occurrence relates to age, educational background, and social contact. Regarding the first question, eleven common English words were found in WhatsApp and Instagram conversations: *deadline*, *today*, *submit*, *upload*, *please*, *link*, *okay*, *quiz*, *point*, *translate*, and *project*. *Deadline* was the most frequent, and most words named academic tasks and assessment, which reflects the recurring routines of academic service communication. Some of these words behave as established loanwords that take Indonesian grammatical marking, while others are better described as momentary insertions of English into Indonesian talk.

Regarding the second question, the words appeared among participants of every age, every educational background, and every type of social contact represented in the study. The study therefore documents the presence of English vocabulary across these social categories but does not demonstrate that any of the three factors causes differences in word choice. Indonesian remained the base language of every conversation, and English words served as supporting vocabulary.

Several suggestions follow from these findings.

- **Students** can continue to use these words where they ease academic coordination, while keeping messages clear for interlocutors who are less familiar with English, especially in more formal exchanges with lecturers and staff.
- **Lecturers and academic institutions** can treat this vocabulary as part of the actual language of academic services and use it deliberately in announcements and instructions, adding Indonesian explanations where precision matters. The findings can also serve as teaching material on language variation and digital communication.
- **Future researchers** should work with larger and more varied participant groups and with other platforms such as Telegram, Discord, Microsoft Teams, or Google Classroom. They should include conversations that do not contain English words so that rates of use can be calculated, compare the English word with its Indonesian equivalent in the same contexts, add interviews about motives for word choice, and use independent coding. Quantitative or mixed-methods designs would allow the influence of social factors to be tested rather than only described.

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English instruction at the elementary level lays the linguistic foundation on which later communicative competence is built, and pronunciation is one of its most consequential yet least emphasised components. In English as a foreign language (EFL) settings, accurate sound production does more than make speech intelligible: it supports listening comprehension and helps learners form a positive self-image as speakers of the language (Toledo-Silva, 2024). Segmental features, such as the articulation of individual vowels and consonants, and suprasegmental features, such as stress and intonation, together determine whether learners can be understood and can understand others (Toledo-Silva, 2024). When pronunciation is treated as an afterthought, young learners are likely to hesitate to speak, and hesitation in turn reduces the practice through which pronunciation improves.

This problem is visible in the classroom that became the site of the present study. In the fourth grade of a public elementary school in North Lombok, West Nusa Tenggara, preliminary observation showed that learners struggled with English phonemes that have no counterpart in the Indonesian sound system, including /θ/, /ð/, and several diphthongs. Participation was low because lessons were predominantly teacher-centred, leaving learners with few opportunities to use the sounds they were taught in meaningful communicative situations. Such conditions are consistent with the observation that pronunciation difficulties in young learners are often linked to instruction that lacks a phonologically rich and engaging environment (Misna & Pamungkas, 2025).

Play-based learning (PBL) is a plausible pedagogical response. It positions play, rather than transmission, as the central medium through which children construct knowledge by means of experience, social interaction, and contextual exploration (Hamdi et al., 2025). Edwards (2017) distinguishes three forms along a continuum between children's freedom and teacher guidance: open-ended play, initiated by children; modelled play, in which the teacher demonstrates and scaffolds verbally; and purposefully-framed play, in which play is structured around explicit learning objectives. The theoretical rationale is reinforced by Vygotsky's (1978) account of play and the Zone

of Proximal Development (ZPD), under which teachers and peers help learners achieve what they cannot yet accomplish alone. For pronunciation, this suggests that games can supply the repeated, low-pressure, socially supported practice that drill-based teaching often fails to provide.

Empirical evidence points in the same direction, although with important differences in design and context. Sağlam and Kartal (2023) reported, in a mixed-methods pre-test/post-test study of 15 experimental and 15 control students in Türkiye, that drama activities produced significantly greater gains in pronunciation than conventional instruction (Wilcoxon $z = 3.301$, $p < .05$). Tekman and Yeniasır (2023) observed over seven weeks that third-graders in Northern Cyprus taught through games displayed more enthusiasm, speaking confidence, and progress in word pronunciation and intonation than a conventionally taught group. Hamdi et al. (2025) found, in a qualitative study of 18 kindergarten children in Indonesia, that Edwards' three play types supported active participation and contextual vocabulary use, and they identified a further dimension, interpersonal constructive play, reflecting empathy and cognitive initiative in peer interaction. Toledo-Silva (2024) reported that surveyed teachers considered repetition, modelling, multimedia, and interactive language games beneficial for young learners' pronunciation. Complementary work indicates that learning embedded in social context improves retention and motivation (Zhicong et al., 2023) and that games can support vocabulary acquisition and pronunciation (Young & Wang, 2014).

Despite this body of work, a research gap remains. Existing studies concentrate on vocabulary and general speaking skills, involve different age groups or media (university students learning from video, kindergarten vocabulary lessons), or rely on teacher surveys rather than classroom observation. Studies that describe, from direct classroom evidence, how play is actually enacted in pronunciation teaching to elementary learners in the Indonesian public-school context remain scarce. Moreover, it is unclear whether Edwards' typology, formulated mainly around teacher–child interaction, adequately captures the peer interaction that characterises children's language play.

The present study therefore describes the implementation of play-based learning in teaching English pronunciation to fourth-grade students, identifies the types of play that emerged in the classroom, and examines the challenges and opportunities that accompanied implementation. Its contribution is an in-depth, context-bound account of how play, modelling, feedback, and peer interaction were combined in practice, not a test of causal effects on pronunciation achievement.

Research Method

Research design and setting

This study used a qualitative approach with a descriptive case-study design. The design was chosen because the aim was to interpret the meaning of instructional practices and the natural dynamics of classroom interaction, not to quantify changes in scores (Creswell, 2018; Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). The study was conducted in one fourth-grade class at a public elementary school in Kayangan District, North Lombok Regency, West Nusa Tenggara, a school in which English was already part of the curriculum. Data were collected on 15 July 2026, in the second semester of the 2025/2026 academic year, across two classroom sessions held on the same day. The findings are intended to illuminate this classroom and are not meant for broad generalisation.

Participants and sampling

Participants were one English teacher and 20 fourth-grade students, selected through purposive sampling. Fourth grade was considered an appropriate level for introducing more structured pronunciation instruction in light of learners' cognitive and linguistic development. Five

students were later selected for interview on the basis of their relevance to the research focus; they are referred to as S1–S5 in this article to protect their identity.

Instruments and data collection

Three techniques were used. First, classroom observation was carried out with the researcher in the role of observer, using a structured checklist adapted from Edwards' (2017) play typology. The checklist contained 10 indicators in five categories (open-ended play, modelled play, purposefully-framed play, student engagement, and social interaction), each accompanied by narrative notes, and was supplemented by field notes. Second, semi-structured interviews with the teacher and five students followed an interview guide covering instructional strategies, perceived effectiveness, and challenges (teacher), and engagement, motivation, and learning experiences (students). Interviews were conducted in Indonesian and translated for reporting. Third, documentation, consisting of photographs, observation and interview guides, and field notes, was used to corroborate the other two sources.

Instrument quality and trustworthiness

Because the instruments were qualitative, validity and reliability coefficients were not computed; quality was instead established through trustworthiness criteria. Credibility was supported by direct engagement in two sessions, source and method triangulation across observation, interview, and documentation, and member checking with the teacher. Transferability was supported by detailed description of the context, dependability by an audit trail of systematically organised field notes, and confirmability by documented researcher reflexivity. Permission to conduct the study was obtained from the school.

Data analysis

Analysis followed the interactive model of Miles et al. (2014): data condensation (selecting, focusing, and transforming raw data), data display (narratives, tables, and matrices), and conclusion drawing and verification. Coding was guided by Edwards' (2017) typology but remained open to categories not anticipated in advance, which allowed peer learning to emerge as an additional category. Findings were organised by research question and displayed in triangulation matrices before being interpreted through Edwards' (2017) typology and Vygotsky's (1978) ZPD.

Results and Discussion

Results

Implementation of play-based learning. The teacher implemented the approach in three stages. In planning, the teacher set the learning objective, selected animal and fruit vocabulary suited to the learners' level, prepared picture cards, and considered the time available and the class size. Teacher Interview 2 states that games were chosen by their fit with the objective, the difficulty of the material, and their capacity to involve all students. In implementation, the lesson opened with vocabulary introduction using picture cards and an explanation of the rules. The teacher then modelled each word and had the class repeat it chorally before the Picture Guessing Game, in which students guessed pictures and pronounced the English names, individually and in groups. During play, the teacher moved among students, corrected errors by modelling the target word, and praised accurate attempts (Teacher Interview 7). In closing, teacher and students reviewed the vocabulary together, and the teacher noted which students needed further guidance. The structured checklist recorded every indicator as observed (Table 1).

Table 1. Observation checklist results (Meeting 1, 15 July 2026)

Category (Edwards, 2017; adapted)	Indicators	Observed	Key evidence
Open-ended play	2	2 of 2	Students tried words independently, repeated them, and self-corrected after hearing the teacher or classmates
Modelled play	2	2 of 2	Teacher modelled each word before repetition and guided hesitant students individually
Purposefully-framed play	2	2 of 2	Games targeted animal and fruit vocabulary and the stated pronunciation objective
Student engagement	2	2 of 2	Students answered enthusiastically, pronounced target words, and interacted with peers
Social interaction	2	2 of 2	Students helped and corrected one another and worked in groups
Total	10	10 of 10	Field notes: a few students were initially shy but became more willing after support

The checklist records presence or absence of a behaviour and does not rate its quality or frequency, so the 10 of 10 result shows that the behaviours occurred in the observed lessons, not how strongly. Notably, the group competition was not observed as a separate session; it is based on the teacher's account that students spontaneously modified rules, helped struggling classmates, and organised small inter-group competitions (Teacher Interview 8).

Types of play. Table 2 organises the evidence by Edwards' typology and the additional category that emerged.

Table 2. Types of play in pronunciation instruction

Type	Observed practice	Interview evidence
Open-ended play	Independent attempts, repetition, self-correction, experimenting with unfamiliar words	S1: the game was "more fun and more challenging"

Type	Observed practice	Interview evidence
Modelled play	Teacher demonstration, choral repetition, individual correction	Teacher: the lesson began with vocabulary and a demonstration of correct pronunciation before play (Interview 3)
Purposefully-framed play	Picture Guessing Game with animal and fruit themes tied to the objective	Teacher: games were not chosen randomly (Interview 2)
Peer learning (additional)	Students corrected and modelled words for classmates and discussed tasks in groups	S3 asked a friend how to say *butterfly*; S2 asked friends when forgetting a word; S1 reported teaching friends

Peer learning was not uniform. According to Student Interview 13, some students preferred asking classmates because they were shy of the teacher, whereas others, reluctant to ask peers, preferred to ask the teacher directly.

Challenges and opportunities. Table 3 summarises both.

Table 3. Challenges and opportunities in implementation

Type	Aspect	Source and evidence
Challenge	Differences in ability	Teacher: guidance had to be adjusted to each student's level (Interview 5)
Challenge	Limited vocabulary	S4 found *mangosteen* hard because it was new and long; S3 found *butterfly* hard because it was long; students confused *elephant* with *eleven* (Student Interviews 12)
Challenge	Limited time and media	Teacher (Interview 5)
Challenge	Classroom management	Teacher: difficulty when the class became noisy (Interview 5); field notes
Challenge	Shyness and nervousness	S3: "I felt shy because I wasn't used to it"; S5 was afraid of making mistakes
Opportunity	Motivation	Teacher: a more enjoyable atmosphere increased motivation (Interview 6)
Opportunity	Participation	Teacher: students more enthusiastic and willing to pronounce words than in conventional lessons (Interview 4)

Type	Aspect	Source and evidence
Opportunity	Pronunciation practice	All 5 interviewed students answered "yes" when asked whether the game helped their pronunciation
Opportunity	Peer interaction and confidence	Students asked and helped one another; S1 and S4 reported high confidence, while others were still overcoming shyness

The pattern is double-sided. The same features that made the lesson lively, such as noise, group work, and open participation, produced demands on time, media, and class management. The unanimity of the five students' positive answer should be read cautiously: it is a perception reported by a small, purposively selected group, and the students described the improvement as slight.

Discussion

Why play lowered the barrier to practice. The first explanation lies in how the game reframed pronunciation attempts. In a guessing game, saying a word aloud is a move in the game and not a performance to be judged, so errors carry less social cost. Students described learning "without realising" and without boredom (Student Interview 9) and tried words even when unsure of accuracy, which the checklist recorded under open-ended play. This reading fits Edwards' (2017) view that open-ended play fosters curiosity and initiative, and it is consistent with Hamdi et al. (2025), who found that exploration and interaction encourage active construction of language knowledge. Repetition is the second mechanism: learners said the target words repeatedly because they wanted to win the round, not because a drill demanded it. The game thus converted what is often mechanical repetition into goal-directed repetition, which is the practical significance of purposefully-framed play. Toledo-Silva (2024) similarly reported that teachers regarded games as a context for repeated pronunciation practice, although that conclusion rests on teacher surveys and the present observation adds direct classroom evidence of how such repetition was organised.

Modelling as scaffolding. The teacher's sequence of modelling, choral repetition, individual correction, and positive feedback is a clear instance of scaffolding within the ZPD (Vygotsky, 1978). The support was graduated: whole-class modelling first, then individual help for those who still struggled, withdrawing as accuracy improved. Students who said they were initially afraid, nervous, and shy reported becoming more willing after encouragement (Student Interview 14), which suggests that modelling and feedback served affective as well as cognitive functions. This is the point at which Edwards' categories, usually described as separate, were found to depend on one another: modelled play provided the accurate input that made open-ended experimentation safe, and purposeful framing kept that experimentation directed at the objective.

Peers as a second source of scaffolding, and its limits. Peer correction, mutual help, and spontaneous rule variation indicate that learning was socially mediated and not only teacher-led. Students functioned as more knowledgeable others for one another, as when S1 taught friends or S3 learned *butterfly* from a classmate. These behaviours correspond to the interpersonal constructive dimension that Hamdi et al. (2025) identified in kindergarten, and their appearance in a fourth-grade class suggests that the dimension is not confined to early childhood. It also supports the view that Edwards' typology, which centres on teacher–child interaction, may under-describe elementary language play. Yet the finding that some students avoided asking peers, and

others avoided asking the teacher, shows that peer scaffolding was unevenly used. Without structured peer-learning tasks, the most reticent learners may receive the least support, which is a practical weakness of relying on spontaneous interaction. The same caution applies to the spontaneous group competition, which is reported by the teacher and was not independently observed.

Comparison with earlier studies. The findings are consistent in direction with Tekman and Yeniasır (2023), whose teacher observations also showed greater enthusiasm and speaking confidence in game-based classes, and with Sağlam and Kartal (2023), who found that an enjoyable, repetition-rich activity (drama) was associated with pronunciation gains. They differ in an important respect: both studies compared groups or measured scores, whereas the present study has no comparison group, pre-test, or post-test. The students' report of a slight improvement therefore supports plausibility but not effect. Likewise, Zhicong et al. (2023) showed that socially contextualised learning improves retention, but in an adult, video-based vocabulary setting, so its relevance here is as a principle (social context supports processing) and not as direct confirmation.

What the game did not clearly address. Two critical observations qualify the picture. First, the difficulties students themselves named, *elephant* confused with *eleven*, and long words such as *mangosteen* and *butterfly*, concern word length and lexical familiarity more than the specific phonemes /θ/ and /ð/ identified in the preliminary observation. The lesson data do not show that these problematic sounds were explicitly targeted, so a vocabulary game, however well run, may improve lexical retrieval and willingness to speak more readily than accuracy on difficult phonemes. Second, the challenges of mixed ability, limited time, and noise are not defects of play as such but consequences of its interactive, student-centred nature: more learner talk requires more time, media, and management. This interpretation is theoretically coherent but was not tested here.

Implications. Teachers can treat play as a vehicle for purposeful practice only when games are tied to explicit sound or word targets, preceded by modelling, and accompanied by corrective feedback. Peer learning should be planned, for example through paired tasks with defined roles, so that it reaches shy learners. Schools can support this with varied media and adequate lesson time. The study's limits are those of a single-day, single-class case with a small interview sample and no outcome measurement; the claims above are therefore interpretive, and the relationship between play and measurable pronunciation gains remains an open question for longitudinal and mixed-methods research.

Conclusion and Suggestions

This study set out to describe how play-based learning was implemented in teaching English pronunciation to fourth-grade students, which types of play emerged, and what challenges and opportunities accompanied it. First, the teacher implemented the approach systematically through planning, implementation, and closing, using a Picture Guessing Game with animal and fruit vocabulary, preceded by modelling and accompanied by corrective and positive feedback. Second, Edwards' open-ended, modelled, and purposefully-framed play were all present and complemented one another, and peer learning emerged as an additional pattern in which students corrected and helped each other, which suggests that the typology may need to accommodate student-to-student interaction in language classrooms. Third, the opportunities reported were greater motivation, participation, enjoyment, and willingness to practise, while the challenges were limited time and media, mixed abilities, limited vocabulary, noisy classroom management, and shyness. The challenges appear to arise from the interactive and student-centred character of play and not from its weakness.

These conclusions concern observed practice and reported perceptions in one classroom. They do not demonstrate that pronunciation accuracy improved, and they should not be generalised beyond this case. What the study does indicate is that play supports pronunciation learning when it is purposeful, scaffolded by the teacher, and socially supported by peers, not when play is left unstructured.

For teachers, games should be diversified beyond picture guessing (for example songs, matching cards, and movement games), tied explicitly to target sounds, and combined with modelling and feedback. Peer learning should be planned through structured pair or group roles so that shy learners also receive support, and time and noise should be managed through fixed game durations and clear rules. For schools, more varied learning media, professional development on play-based strategies, and adequate English lesson time are recommended. For future researchers, longer observation across more meetings and more sites is needed, together with mixed-methods or quasi-experimental designs that use standardised pronunciation measures, and further inquiry into peer learning as a possible extension of Edwards' taxonomy.

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