

Analysis of Speech and Language Development in Early Childhood Students: Observational Assessment

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ABSTRACT. This study aims to analyze the development of speech and language skills in early childhood based on the results of observations on a 4-year-old 11-month-old child named AZA. Observations were carried out for four weeks using instruments that refer to the indicators from Permendikbud No. 137 of 2014 paragraph 1, covering three main aspects: receptive language (the ability to understand language), expressive language (the ability to express language), and early literacy. The results showed that children's language skills developed gradually from the stage of Not Developing, Starting to Develop, to Developing As Expected in most indicators. Children show the ability to understand two instructions at the same time, listen to stories, express opinions, and recognize and write their own names. These findings show the importance of continuous stimulation from the home environment to support children's language development. This study confirms that the process of language development in early childhood requires a consistent, fun, and interactive approach to achieve optimal outcomes.

Keywords: Children's Language Development, Early Childhood, Observational Assessment, Receptive Language, Expressive Language, Early Literacy

INTRODUCTION

Speaking and language skills are fundamental aspects in the process of early childhood growth and development. At this stage, language development is influenced by various factors, such as environment, parenting patterns, and the intensity of social interaction (Fuaody et al., 2024). In today's social conditions, more and more children are experiencing delays in verbal communication, which is often triggered by suboptimal parenting or excessive exposure to digital technology (N. Hasanah & Sugito, 2020). In today's digital era, excessive use of gadgets by children can hinder their language and communication development. Research shows that children who interact with gadgets frequently tend to communicate less directly with others (Ranti & Mahyuddin, 2023). The presence of gadgets can reduce their chances of social interaction and develop the language skills necessary in daily communication. This issue is even more urgent when many parents are busy working, so that quality interaction with children becomes less (Fajzrina et al., 2022).

In addition, parental parenting also has a significant impact on children's speaking and language development (Yuswati & Setiawati, 2022). Permissive parenting often results in a lack of verbal stimulation for the child, which can contribute to delayed language development (N. Hasanah & Sugito, 2020). Research by Winarsih et al. shows that democratic parenting is more supportive of children's language development than permissive parenting, where children get the opportunity to interact verbally and receive positive stimulation (Winarsih et al.,

2023). Conceptually, language development includes the gradual process of understanding and production of language, which is characterized by the child's ability to grasp the meaning of words and use them in the context of communication (Afipah, 2022). This ability involves not only verbal aspects, but also nonverbal skills such as the use of facial expressions and gestures to reinforce the meaning of the message being conveyed. Assessment of children's language development, especially through an observational approach, is an effective method in identifying the achievements and obstacles faced by early childhood in their communicative process. Through observation, educators and parents can obtain authentic data on the extent to which children are able to understand and express language according to the expected stages of development (Afipah, 2022). In a broader social context, children's language development is also influenced by the environment in which they live, including the presence of literacy in the surrounding environment (Fajarrini & Diana, 2024). A literacy-rich environment encourages children to practice more and use language in meaningful contexts (Sinaga et al., 2021). However, children who grow up in an environment with a lack of language and communication stimulation will face obstacles in their language development (Romdon & Setyaningsih, 2023).

Language skills in children are first formed through interactions that occur in the family environment. From an early age, children begin to recognize and understand language through the sounds they hear from the people closest to the house. In this case, the family plays an important role as an external element that influences how children learn a language. Communication patterns and stimulation provided by parents have a great influence on children's language development. If the family environment does not provide enough stimulation to children's language skills, it can hinder the language acquisition process and cause delays in communication skills (Alfin & Pangastuti, 2020). Seeing this phenomenon, there is an urgent need to understand more deeply about the development of speech and language in early childhood. In the context of the valley of education, direct observation through observational assessment is one way to find out how children's speaking and language development takes place in their daily lives. Previous research has focused on one specific aspect, such as parenting or digital media use, without integrating various factors that interact with each other (Hastuti, 2022). Research in this field still shows limitations in terms of analysis that includes aspects of children's language development consisting of language understanding and disclosure in accordance with Permendikbud No. 137 of 2014 (Kemendikbud, 2014).

As part of a deeper understanding effort, the author made observations on one of the students of RA (Raudhatul Athfal) Bahrul Ulum At-Taqwa, named AZA, who is currently four years old. Based on initial observations, AZA showed active behavior in observing and imitating the words of those around him, both from parents and friends in his Kindergarten environment. He seems responsive to verbal communication and shows an interest in expressing opinions and imitating the expressions he hears. This shows the importance of the role of social and environmental interaction in the process of language development in early childhood. This research gap shows the importance of conducting a more comprehensive study using qualitative methods to gain deeper insights into early childhood language development. By prioritizing social context, communication habits in the family, and interactions with the environment, this research has the potential to make an important contribution to our understanding of early childhood development.

The purpose of this study is to explore and document the development of speech and language in early childhood in RA Bahrul Ulum AT-Taqwa students. The benefits of this study are not only for the development of science in the field of psychology and education, but also to provide recommendations for parents, educators, and policymakers in dealing with language development issues. In doing so, we hope to create a more supportive environment for children in a critical phase of their development. This study aims to analyze the development of speaking

and language skills of early childhood students in RA Bahrul Ulum At-Taqwa through observational assessment, as well as identify the extent to which children have achieved indicators of receptive and expressive language development in accordance with Permendikbud No. 137 of 2014 (Kemendikbud, 2014).

METHOD

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach with a single case study type, which aims to deeply understand the development of speech and language skills in early childhood in a natural context. This approach was chosen because it allows researchers to explore the child's communication process in its entirety based on direct experience and real situations (Sugiyono, 2021). The subject of the study is a 4-year-old boy, with the initials AZA, who is a student of RA Bahrul Ulum At-Taqwa. The selection of subjects is carried out purposively with the consideration that the child shows a high interest in the speech around him and is active in imitating the conversations of parents and peers. This research was carried out for a month, starting from May 2025. Data was collected through three main techniques, namely participatory observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. Observations were carried out directly in the home and school environment to record verbal behavior, verbal expressions, frequency of speech, and children's responses to communication from others. Interviews were conducted with parents to find out information about parenting patterns, communication habits at home, and the use of digital media. Meanwhile, documentation in the form of photos of activities and progress records was used as complementary data to strengthen field findings (Sugiyono, 2021).

Data analysis using an interactive model of (Miles & Huberman, 2014), which includes three stages, namely: data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions and verification. Data reduction is carried out by sorting out relevant information based on the focus of the research, then presented in the form of a descriptive narrative to interpret the dynamics of children's language development, and ending with inductive conclusions that continue to be tested for validity throughout the research process. To ensure the validity of the data, triangulation of sources and techniques is used. Source triangulation is done by comparing data from observations, interviews, and documentation, while triangulation techniques are done by combining different methods of data collection against the same object (Arikunto, 2014). The entire research process is carried out by upholding the principles of research ethics, including obtaining written permission from the subject's parents before the implementation of observation and documentation. The identity of the subject is disguised and the confidentiality of the data is fully maintained, with the use of information solely for academic and scientific purposes (Satori & Komariah, 2011).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

AZA is a 4-year-old boy who shows healthy growth and physical development and according to his age stage. It weighs about 18 kilograms and is estimated to be 110 cm tall. In his daily life at RA Bahrul Ulum At-Taqwa, AZA shows a high interest in activities related to verbal communication, especially speaking, singing, and role-playing. During free play time, AZA tends to choose activities that stimulate his language skills, such as playing the role of being a salesman or a parent, where he imitates the words he often hears from his teachers, parents, or friends. He also often recounts experiences or events he experienced, both at home and during his trip to school, in his own simple but communicative language. Although the sentence structure is not

completely perfect, AZA is able to convey ideas orally with lively facial expressions and intonation.

In classroom learning activities, AZA is known as an active and confident child. He was often the first to raise his hand when the teacher asked the students to come forward to tell a story or sing. AZA is also able to understand verbal instructions consisting of two or more commands, such as *"Please tidy up the toy and put it back in place,"* and it executes it well. He can name various objects, recognize basic colors, say numbers 1 to 10, and be able to identify vowel letters, especially those in his nickname. AZA's social communication skills are also developing quite well. He actively interacts with his friends and does not hesitate to ask questions if he has difficulties. In addition, he often provides verbal responses to teachers' questions with a clear and fairly complete vocabulary. In religious activities, AZA follows the memorization of short prayers and letters of the Qur'an by imitating the teacher's pronunciation. He also shows an interest in singing children's songs and can say them with appropriate intonation. In general, AZA shows very positive speaking and language development, with the ability to understand and use language as an active communication tool in its social environment. This shows that environmental factors, family support, and learning patterns applied in RA also play a major role in the process of children's language growth and development at an early age.

Description of Children's Language Development

Language development in children is an important part of their growth and development, and this aspect can be explained through various theoretical approaches and the results of recent research. Jean Piaget, an expert in developmental psychology, explains that children go through a number of stages in their cognitive development. In the context of language, Piaget sees language as a means by which children communicate what they experience cognitively (Purnamasari & Qurniatun, 2023). In the early days of life, children are in the sensorimotor phase, where they learn through direct experience with their environment. After that, they enter the preoperational stage (age 2-7 years), where language skills develop more rapidly (Purnamasari & Qurniatun, 2023). Another important contribution comes from Vygotsky, who highlights the important role of social and cultural interaction in the language learning process. He believes that language is the main tool for thinking and communicating, which develops through social relationships. According to her, children acquire language skills when they interact with more experienced adults or friends, who are *in the "proximal developmental zone"*, a concept that emphasizes the importance of support from the environment in the child's learning process (Purnamasari & Qurniatun, 2023). This approach shows that language development is not only internal, but also influenced by intense social relationships. Research from (Kustini, 2023) mentioned that simple play activities can be an effective tool in improving children's verbal skills. Exploratory activities such as small experiments using eggs are able to provide an interesting and interactive learning experience, so that children can more easily understand and express their ideas. Aini et al. (2022) revealed that emotional closeness between parents and children has a positive effect on early literacy skills. Regular and affectionate communication creates a comfortable atmosphere for children to dare to express themselves and enrich their vocabulary.

Mumtaz et al. (2023) emphasized that community involvement is also important in supporting language development. When people are aware of the importance of language skills from an early age, more spaces and activities such as play groups will be created that are beneficial for children. However, not all factors have a positive impact. Purwanto & Adjie (2021) stating that excessive use of gadgets can hinder children's language skills. The lack of direct interaction due to staring at the screen for too long makes the child lose the opportunity to develop his communicative skills. Therefore, parents need to manage the time to use gadgets and involve children more often in daily conversations. According to Mardhatillah et al. (2023), after the COVID-19 pandemic, child-focused teaching approaches and varied media use have been

proven to support language development. Techniques such as storytelling and interactive reading can improve children's listening and speaking skills, especially when they are encouraged to ask questions or reinterpret the content of the story (Syamsiyah & Hardiyana, 2021). The quality of learning in the classroom is also very decisive. Teachers who are able to build a fun learning atmosphere, for example through storytelling techniques that involve children directly, will help children understand and remember new vocabulary (Mardiyah, 2023). Engaging learning media, such as pop-up storybooks, educational animations, or visual aids, also strengthen children's interest in learning languages (H. N. Hasanah et al., 2022). When children feel interested, they will participate more actively and their language skills will improve (Ariani & Ujianti, 2021). In general, children's language development is the result of an interaction between individual factors and their environment. Piaget's and Vygotsky's theories provide a solid foundation for understanding how children absorb and use language through social experiences and daily activities. Therefore, creating a supportive learning environment, involving parents, teachers, and the community, is essential in helping children reach their best language potential.

Analysis of Early Childhood Speech and Language Development Through Observational Assessment

At the age of 4 to 5 years, children experience significant progress in the language aspect. This development is divided into three main categories, namely listening (receptive), speaking ability (expressive), and the early stage of literacy. These three aspects are interconnected and form an important foundation for more complex communication skills in the future. Observational assessment of these abilities provides educators and parents with valuable insights into each child's progress and developmental milestones.

Receptive Language Skills (Listening)

Receptive language refers to a child's ability to comprehend words, instructions, and information they hear. At the age of 4–5, children typically begin to demonstrate significant improvements in this domain. They can understand two-step directions, recognize adjectives such as “kind” or “brave,” and grasp the meaning of short stories read to them. These abilities suggest that children are actively processing linguistic input from their surroundings and forming mental connections between words and actions. When a child successfully follows instructions like “Pick up your favorite book,” it shows that their understanding has matured, even if they cannot yet reproduce the sentence fluently. This stage highlights the crucial role of listening in shaping language comprehension and setting the foundation for effective communication.

Expressive Language Skills (Speaking)

Expressive language, in contrast, involves a child's ability to articulate ideas, feelings, and needs through speech or gestures. This ability represents the output side of the communication process and reflects how well a child can transform their understanding into verbal expression. Children aged 4–5 typically display increasing fluency and creativity in language use. They can repeat simple sentences, ask meaningful questions, provide relevant answers, and express emotions such as “happy” or “angry.” Furthermore, they begin to justify their opinions, retell short stories, and engage in conversations using a growing vocabulary. This period marks the emergence of self-expression and social competence, as children use language to negotiate, share experiences, and build relationships. Teachers and caregivers play a critical role in nurturing expressive skills by providing rich linguistic interactions and modeling correct speech patterns.

Early Literacy Levels

Early literacy represents the transitional phase between oral language and formal reading and writing. During this stage, children begin to understand that symbols (letters) correspond to sounds and that these symbols can represent words and meanings. Children aged 4–5 can often recognize letters, identify initial sounds of familiar objects, and even read or write their names.

They also start associating written words with stories or images, signaling the development of comprehension skills. Although this is still a pre-reading and pre-writing stage, it forms the essential groundwork for future academic success. Encouraging early literacy through activities such as storytelling, letter recognition games, and drawing helps strengthen phonological awareness and curiosity about print.

Levels of Child Development

To evaluate the progress of children in these three areas, their performance can be classified into four developmental levels. The “Not Yet Developed (BB)” level indicates that a child requires full guidance and modeling to perform tasks. At the “Beginning to Develop (MB)” stage, the child shows emerging abilities but still needs reminders and support. “Developing as Expected (BSH)” describes children who can perform tasks independently and consistently, while “Developing Very Well (BSB)” refers to those who not only master the skills but can also assist peers. These classifications help educators and parents identify individual needs, provide targeted support, and celebrate progress. In conclusion, analyzing speech and language development through observational assessment offers a holistic view of children’s communicative growth. By understanding how receptive, expressive, and literacy skills evolve together, educators can create meaningful learning experiences that promote confident, capable, and communicative young learners.

Table 1. Language Understanding Ability (Receptive Language)(Afipah, 2022)

No	Indicator	Sunday			
		1	2	3	4
1.	Able to listen to words in their mother tongue or other languages.	MB	MB	BSH	BSH
2.	Can understand two instructions given simultaneously.	BB	MB	BSH	BSH
3.	Able to capture the content of the story read to him.	BB	MB	BSH	BSH
4.	Understand and recognize various adjectives, such as "mischievous," "kind," or "brave."	MB	MB	BSH	BSH
5.	Can distinguish various sounds in Indonesian, including correct pronunciation.	BB	MB	BSH	BSH

Table 2. Language Expression Ability (Expressive Language) (Afipah, 2022)

No	Indicator	Sunday			
		1	2	3	4
1.	Repeat simple sentences they have heard.	BB	MB	BSH	BSH
2.	Ask questions with the correct sentence structure.	MB	MB	BSH	BSH
3.	Provide relevant answers to the questions asked.	BB	MB	BSH	BSH
4.	Expressing emotions and attitudes using words such as "happy," "evil," or "good."	BB	MB	BSH	BSH
5.	Mention the vocabulary he already knows.	MB	MB	BSH	BSH
6.	Expressing opinions to others.	BB	BB	MB	BSH
7.	Explaining the reasons for wanting or disagreeing with something.	BB	BB	BSH	BSH
8.	Retelling stories or fairy tales they have heard.	BB	MB	BSH	BSH
9.	Continue to expand his vocabulary.	BB	BB	MB	MB
10.	Actively participate in conversations.	BB	MB	BSH	BSH

Table 3. Early Literacy (Afipah, 2022)

No	Indicator	Sunday			
		1	2	3	4
1.	Mention the letters he already knows.	MB	MB	BSH	BSH
2.	Recognize the initial sounds of the names of surrounding objects.	MB	BSH	BSH	BSH
3.	Group images based on the same initial sound/letter.	BB	MB	BSH	BSH
4.	Understand the relationship between the shape of the letter and its sound.	BB	MB	BSH	BSH
5.	Able to read one's own name.	MB	BSH	BSH	BSH
6.	Able to write your own name.	MB	BSH	BSH	BSH
7.	Understand the meaning of words in a story.	BB	MB	BSH	BSH

Based on the results of an observational assessment of the development of speaking and language skills in early childhood on behalf of AZA, which was carried out for four consecutive weeks, it can be concluded that the development of children's language skills shows a significant and positive increase in each indicator, both in the aspects of receptivity (language understanding), expressive (expressive ability), and early literacy. First, the ability to understand language (Receptive Language). In the receptive aspect, the child shows excellent development from week to week. At the beginning of the observation, most of the indicators were still in the Not Developing (BB) and Starting to Develop (MB) categories. However, towards the end of observation, the child's ability increased to Develop as Expected (BSH) in almost all indicators.

This can be seen from his ability to listen to conversations in his mother tongue and other languages, follow two commands at once correctly, and understand the content of the story being read. Children also begin to be able to recognize the meaning of adjectives such as "*naughty*," "*kind*," and "*brave*," and can distinguish sounds in Indonesian, including the correct pronunciation of words. This reflects that the child's language receptive function has developed consistently in the expected direction according to his age stage. In the expressive aspect, progress also appears to be gradual and convincing. In the first and second weeks, most of the indicators still show the BB and MB categories. However, with consistent stimulation from the surrounding environment, the child is then able to express himself more independently in the third and fourth weeks. AZA begins to be able to repeat simple sentences that he hears, give appropriate answers to the questions asked, and express emotions with the right vocabulary. He has also been able to express his personal opinion and explain the reasons behind his wishes, even though it is still in a simple sentence structure. The ability to actively participate in conversations began to grow, characterized by the desire to retell the stories he had heard and his activeness in dialogue. Although some aspects, such as vocabulary expansion, are still in the Starting Development (MB) stage, the progress is leading to stable and positive development.

In the early literacy dimension, children show quite good development. From the beginning he was only able to name a few letters with the help, now he begins to recognize and name the initial sound of the surrounding objects and group images based on the initial sounds/letters. She is also able to read and write her own name, which is an important achievement in the aspect of early literacy. In addition, children begin to understand the relationship between the shape of the letter and the sound, and can grasp the meaning of the words in the story they hear. This is an indicator that the foundation of children's early literacy skills has begun to form and develop according to their age stages.

Discussion

The results of the observational assessment of AZA's language development show that his growth in the receptive, expressive, and early literacy domains is progressing well and aligns with expected developmental milestones for children aged 4–5 years. This finding reinforces the idea that language development at this stage is highly influenced by the child's environment,

including interactions at school, home, and within the community. AZA's ability to understand verbal instructions and retell stories in his own words reflects a strong foundation in receptive language. His capacity to grasp meaning and connect spoken words with actions suggests that his cognitive processing and auditory comprehension are developing effectively. These outcomes are consistent with Piaget's view that children in the preoperational stage begin to use language as a medium to represent and communicate their experiences. Furthermore, the expressive language progress observed in AZA demonstrates an active use of vocabulary and confidence in verbal interaction. His ability to repeat sentences, answer questions appropriately, and express feelings indicates that expressive language functions are emerging in a healthy and natural manner. This mirrors Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, which emphasizes that language develops through social interaction and guidance from more capable peers or adults. The supportive role of teachers and peers in RA Bahrul Ulum At-Taqwa provides AZA with consistent linguistic stimulation, allowing him to imitate, practice, and refine his speech. The improvement from "Beginning to Develop (MB)" to "Developing as Expected (BSH)" across the observation period demonstrates how structured social engagement and rich language exposure can accelerate communicative competence.

In addition, the early literacy development shown by AZA reveals an encouraging pattern of readiness for formal learning. His ability to recognize letters, associate sounds with symbols, and write his name indicates that phonological awareness and symbol recognition are taking shape. These abilities mark the transition from oral to written communication, a critical step in early childhood education. This finding aligns with research by Aini et al. (2022), which emphasizes that early literacy is nurtured through consistent interaction and emotional warmth. Activities such as storytelling, singing, and drawing serve not only as entertainment but also as linguistic scaffolding that strengthens comprehension and memory. AZA's interest in story-based learning and his growing ability to connect printed words with meaning highlight how literacy learning can be made enjoyable and developmentally appropriate.

The consistent improvement in AZA's receptive, expressive, and literacy skills also underscores the effectiveness of the learning environment and family support. His teachers' use of interactive methods such as role-playing and singing creates a meaningful context for communication. Meanwhile, family engagement at home provides continuity in linguistic exposure, which is crucial for children's progress. This aligns with the findings of Mumtaz et al. (2023), who stress the importance of community and family participation in language enrichment. In AZA's case, balanced exposure between formal learning and informal communication opportunities allows him to internalize vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation naturally, rather than through rote memorization. In conclusion, the observation of AZA's language development provides valuable insight into how early childhood education, family support, and interactive play combine to shape children's communicative abilities. The steady progress from early comprehension to confident expression and literacy awareness reflects a holistic developmental process that involves both cognitive and social dimensions. Educators and parents play an essential role in maintaining this positive trajectory by continuously offering responsive communication, stimulating learning activities, and nurturing curiosity. Therefore, AZA's case exemplifies how integrated support between school and home can successfully foster well-rounded language development in early childhood.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of qualitative research conducted through observational assessment of early childhood students at RA Bahrul Ulum At-Taqwa particularly the subject with the initials AZA it can be concluded that the development of AZA's speech and language abilities shows consistent and positive progress throughout the observation period. This improvement is evident across three main aspects. First, in the area of receptive language skills, AZA demonstrated significant growth in listening comprehension, understanding complex verbal instructions, grasping the content of stories, and distinguishing between sounds and the meanings of descriptive words. These findings indicate that the child's comprehension abilities are developing in accordance with age-appropriate language milestones. Second, regarding expressive language skills, AZA was able to express emotions, answer questions, share opinions, and retell personal experiences or previously heard stories. This aspect illustrates that the child has begun to actively use language as a tool for communication and social interaction. Finally, AZA's emergent literacy skills show readiness for formal literacy learning, as evidenced by the ability to name letters, recognize initial sounds, read and write their own name, and understand the relationship between letters and sounds. Altogether, these findings reflect a well-rounded progression in language development that aligns with the expected developmental stage of early childhood.

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