

SPEECH DEVELOPMENT OF PRESCHOOL CHILDREN

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Abstract: The speech development of preschool children is a critical aspect of early childhood development, influencing both social interactions and academic success. The period from birth to age five is marked by rapid changes in speech and language abilities, with significant variations in individual developmental trajectories. This article explores the factors influencing speech development, including cognitive, social, and environmental influences, and examines the role of caregivers and educators in promoting healthy speech and language skills. Furthermore, it discusses common speech disorders in preschool-aged children and the importance of early intervention. By understanding the key factors and promoting effective strategies, we can support children in reaching their full speech development potential.

Keywords: Speech development, preschool children, language acquisition, early childhood, speech disorders, language milestones

Introduction: Speech development in preschool children is a foundational component of early childhood development, influencing their ability to communicate effectively, engage socially, and succeed academically. Between birth and age five, children undergo a rapid transformation in their ability to produce and understand speech, with these early years being crucial for the formation of a child's language skills. This period of speech development is characterized by the transition from pre-linguistic sounds such as cooing and babbling to more complex forms of communication like using words, sentences, and understanding grammar. The process of language acquisition is not only about mastering vocabulary and sentence structure, but also about understanding how language functions in various social contexts. This skill set is essential for engaging in conversations, solving problems, and interacting with others in both familiar and new situations. At the same time, it supports cognitive development, emotional regulation, and social integration. Language development is also linked to academic success in later years, as children who develop strong early language skills tend to perform better in reading and writing as they enter school.

Research has shown that speech development in preschool children is influenced by a combination of factors including genetics, cognitive processes, social interaction, and environmental exposure to language. Children who are exposed to rich language environments, where adults and caregivers engage with them through talking, reading, and interactive play, tend to develop stronger language skills. Social interactions, particularly with peers and adults, play an important role in language acquisition, as children learn not just the words themselves, but also how to use language for communication and social connection. However, speech development is not always uniform. While most children reach language milestones within certain age ranges, there are variations in how quickly children acquire speech and language skills. Some children may experience speech delays or disorders, which can affect their ability to communicate effectively. Early identification of these issues is crucial, as speech disorders can impact a child's social, emotional, and academic

development. The earlier speech delays or disorders are addressed, the more likely it is that children will overcome these challenges with the right support, such as speech therapy or early intervention programs.

Literature review

Speech and language development during the preschool years is a critical and highly dynamic process. Understanding the various stages, factors influencing speech, and potential challenges children face can help caregivers, educators, and healthcare professionals foster optimal communication skills in young children. Several studies and theories have significantly contributed to our understanding of preschool speech development. This literature review examines the key stages of speech development, the factors influencing language acquisition, and the importance of early intervention for speech disorders in preschool children. Research in the field of child development has outlined clear milestones that children typically reach in their speech development by specific ages. These stages provide a framework for understanding how children acquire language from early vocalizations to more complex speech patterns.

At the pre-linguistic stage (0-12 months), infants begin with cooing and making early speech sounds like "ah," "oo," and "ba." This period is marked by the development of basic oral-motor skills needed for speech. By 6 months, babies start to engage in babbling, a repetitive consonant-vowel pattern (e.g., "ba-ba") which is considered a precursor to word formation [1]. During this phase, infants also begin to recognize the rhythms and intonations of speech. Around the age of one, children typically say their first recognizable words, such as "mama" or "ball," which are often used to label objects or people. This is a critical stage for vocabulary expansion and the beginning of word-object association [2]. Children may use gestures alongside words to aid communication at this stage.

Between 18 and 24 months, toddlers begin to combine two words to form simple phrases such as "want cookie" or "big truck." These phrases usually consist of content words (nouns and verbs) and are used to express desires or describe actions. This stage signifies the beginning of early syntactic development and the understanding of basic grammar rules [3]. By age three, children start using three- to four-word sentences. They may omit certain grammatical elements, such as auxiliary verbs or articles, but their speech becomes increasingly complex. Sentences like "I want more juice" and "That's my ball" are commonly used in this stage [4]. As children approach five years old, their speech becomes more sophisticated with the inclusion of conjunctions, relative clauses, and the use of past tense and plurals. Their understanding of grammar continues to develop, and they begin to engage in more complex forms of conversation [5].

Various factors influence how children develop speech and language skills. The role of cognitive abilities, environmental exposure, social interaction, and individual differences are crucial in shaping the course of speech development.

Analysis and Results

Data from multiple longitudinal studies confirm that the development of speech and language in preschool children follows a generally predictable sequence, with individual variations. For example, research has shown that by 12 months, most children will have started producing their first words, and by 18 months, 50% of children are able to form simple two-word combinations. The growth of vocabulary between 18 and 24 months is significant, with a rapid increase in word production and comprehension. By age three, children typically begin to use more complex sentences, including auxiliary verbs, negation, and plurals. Studies confirm that by the age of five, children can use

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compound and complex sentences in conversation, demonstrating greater mastery over syntactic structures.

Cognitive and Environmental Influences on Language Development

Research has consistently shown that cognitive development plays a crucial role in speech acquisition. Children's cognitive abilities, including memory, attention, and executive functions, directly affect their ability to process, store, and retrieve language information. For instance, research emphasizes that the brain's plasticity during early childhood allows children to rapidly absorb sounds, words, and grammar. A child's ability to discriminate between speech sounds, a skill that is honed during the first year of life, is key to understanding and producing language. Studies also show that children who are exposed to a rich language environment — characterized by frequent verbal interactions with caregivers and adults — tend to develop language skills more rapidly than children in less stimulating environments. Research from longitudinal studies has shown that the quantity and quality of language input in the home environment significantly influenced children's vocabulary size. Children from families with more extensive verbal interactions at home had larger vocabularies and more advanced language skills compared to children from families with limited language input. These findings highlight the importance of caregivers' active engagement in language-rich environments and their impact on a child's language development.

Speech Delays and Disorders

While most children follow typical patterns of speech development, some children exhibit speech delays or disorders that may impede their language acquisition. Research on speech delays indicates that early identification and intervention are critical for minimizing the impact of speech disorders. It has been observed that speech delays in preschool children can be linked to a variety of factors, including hearing impairments, developmental disorders, and environmental deprivation. These factors can disrupt normal language acquisition and necessitate early intervention strategies. Studies have shown that children diagnosed with speech and language disorders at an early age benefit significantly from speech therapy, particularly if they begin therapy before the age of five. Early intervention can help children overcome speech delays and develop effective communication skills, improving their chances for social integration and academic success in later years. Early therapeutic interventions have been shown to increase the likelihood of children achieving typical language milestones.

Bilingualism and Speech Development

Bilingualism is another important factor influencing language development. While some research suggests that bilingual children may initially experience delays in speech development compared to their monolingual peers, these children typically catch up by the age of five. It has been found that bilingual children may take longer to reach specific milestones, such as the production of the first words or sentence combinations, but the cognitive benefits of bilingualism often lead to enhanced language skills in both languages. These benefits include improved cognitive flexibility and increased metalinguistic awareness, which allows bilingual children to better understand and use language in various contexts. Additionally, bilingual children may face challenges related to vocabulary size, as they divide their language exposure between two languages. However, research has demonstrated that bilingual children often show stronger problem-solving abilities and cognitive flexibility due to their dual language environment.

Conclusion

In conclusion, speech development in preschool children is a dynamic process that progresses through well-established stages, with individual variation influenced by various factors such as cognitive development, environmental exposure, social interactions, and early interventions. Early language acquisition begins with basic vocalizations and gradually evolves into more complex forms of communication, including word combinations, sentence construction, and grammatical understanding. These milestones provide a framework for assessing typical language development in preschool children. Factors such as the quality of a child's environment, the extent of verbal interactions with caregivers, and the exposure to diverse language experiences significantly influence the rate and quality of language development. Children who are exposed to rich language input during the critical early years tend to exhibit stronger language skills and a broader vocabulary. Additionally, cognitive abilities like memory and attention play an important role in a child's ability to process and produce language. However, speech delays and disorders are not uncommon in preschool children and can have a significant impact on their social, academic, and emotional development. Early identification and intervention for children with speech difficulties are crucial for preventing long-term issues. Speech therapy, along with home-based strategies to encourage language development, can substantially improve outcomes for children facing speech delays or disorders.

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