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Language Development of 3-6 Year Old Children

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Abstract: ***The present research paper aimed to study the language development of preschool children. The sample for the study comprised of 50 preschool children from 3 to 6 year old age group selected randomly from different preschools of Hyderabad. 'Gesell Language Development Tests - Modified Indian Version' tool was administered on the sample to assess their language development. The analysis has indicated that preschool children scored higher in the following directions aspect than following propositions. Majority of the children were able to tell their name, age, sex, address and distinguish AM, PM, Left, Right and their body parts. Girls scored slightly higher than boys in language tests and children of working mothers scored higher compared to children of non-working mothers.***

Keywords: Language development, Preschool children, Comprehension, Vocabulary, Early childhood

1. Introduction

The acquisition of language is one of the most significant achievements of early childhood. During the early years of life, children master the sound system, grammar of their language and acquire a vocabulary of thousands of words. Language enables children to express their needs with others and to participate in cultural learning in remarkable ways. Language is the basis for children's school readiness and achievement. Because of these reasons, an immense body of research has been dedicated to understand the social-contextual factors that support children's early language and learning. The first three years of school, children take big step in language development as they learn to read. Early language skills have been linked to later successful reading. Pre-literacy and literacy activities can help further children's language competencies in both the preschool years and later schooling.

Common across development is the underlying assumption that learning to communicate successfully, whether through oral language or the written form, requires a solid understanding of the meanings of words, and in early childhood this is critically dependent on repeated but varied language use in socially meaningful, contextually rich interactions (Ambridge et al., 2015). Children whose parents talk a lot to them have faster vocabulary development (Cartmill et al., 2013). Income and maternal education emerged as significant contributing factors to the LQ of the child. Evidence indicates that socio-economic disadvantage is associated with inadequate food, poor nutrition and hygiene, poor maternal education, inadequate stimulation at home, inadequate schooling, and suboptimal physical environment at home (Pike A etal, 2006).

During the preschool years, sentence patterns become increasingly complex and vocabulary diversifies to include relational terms that express notions of size, location, quantity and time. (Clark EV,1993). By the age of four to six or so, most children have acquired the basic grammar of the sentence (Paul R,1981). From that point onward, children learn to use language more efficiently and more effectively. They also learn how to create, and maintain, larger language units such as conversation or narrative (Owens R, 2001). Although there are individual differences in rate of development, the sequence in which various forms appear is highly predictable both within and across stages (Crystal D et al, 1976).

Evidence indicates that untreated speech and language delay in preschool children can persist in 40-60% of the children and these children are at a high risk for social, behavioral, emotional, and cognitive problems in their later years (Law J, Rush R, Schoon I, Parsons S, 2009). Early identification of children at risk for language and other developmental problems can lead to enrolment in intervention programs, which can ameliorate the impact of early risk considerably (Shetty P., 2012).

2. Methodology

The sample for the study comprised of 50 preschool children selected randomly from different preschools of Hyderabad. '*Gesell Language Development Test - Modified Indian Version'* tool was used to assess the language development of children. The tool was administered on children by using different objects like ball, keys, bag and picture cards etc. to assess various aspects – ***Following Directions, Following Propositions, Naming and use of objects, Naming and identification of objects, Action Agent Test, Comprehension test, Ability to give one's name, age, sex, address, Ability to distinguish AM, PM, Right, Left, Indicating parts of the body***.

Table 1: General Profile of the sample **Children, N=50**

Age	Frequency	%	Gender	Frequency	%
3-4 years	29	58	Girls	21	42
4-5 years	7	14	Boys	29	58
5-6 years	14	28			

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Parents

	Education						Occupation			
	UG		PG		Professional Course		Working		Non-working	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Mother	14	28	24	48	12	24	29	58	21	42
Father	12	24	23	46	15	30	50	100	0	0

3. Data Analysis and Interpretation

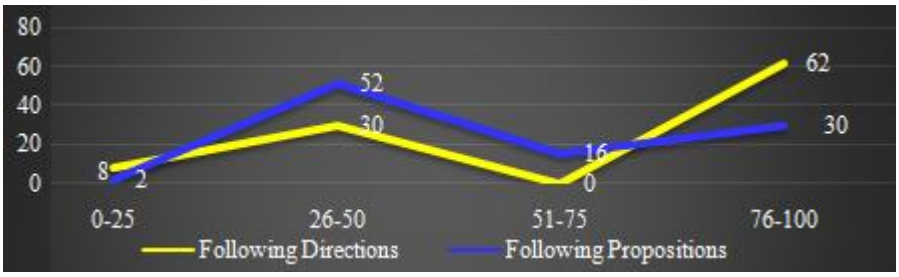

Figure 1: Percentage distribution of children score on "following directions" and "following propositions" aspects N=50

Figure 1 indicates that 62 percent of children scored high in the 'following directions' aspect. They were able to follow the directions like on, under; in etc. 15 percent of children scored average in the same aspect and 8 percent children could not understand the directions.

The above figure shows that majority of children scored less in understanding the propositions like beside, behind, infront of etc.

Parents who contingently respond to their young children's verbal and exploratory initiatives (through verbal descriptions and questions) tend to have children with more advanced receptive and productive language, phonological awareness, and story comprehension skills (Silven M, Niemi P, Voeten M, 2002 and Tamis-LeMonda CS, Bornstein MH, Baumwell L, 2001).

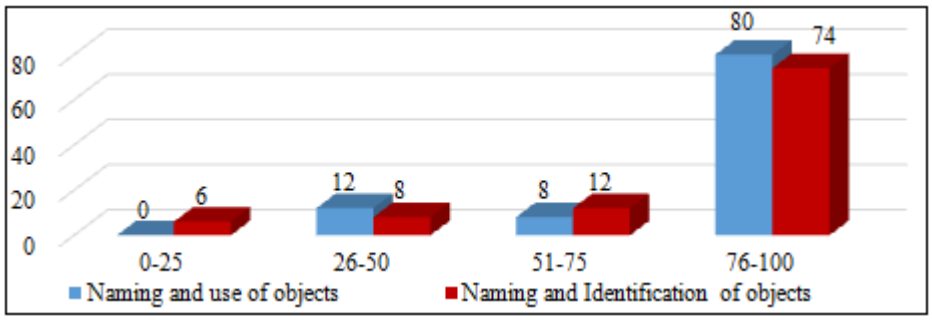

Figure 2: Percentage distribution of children score on "Naming and use of objects" and "Naming and identification of objects" aspects, N=50

The above figure shows that majority of the sample (80%) scored high in 'naming and use of objects' which means children had given names to various objects like bag, keys etc and they explained the use of that particular object. 74% of preschool children were able to name and identify the objects on the picture cards.

There is sound evidence that young children can learn new words introduced by an adult while looking at pictures in books, or when the adult reads the text in the book. To ensure learning, it is important to read the same books more than once. Parents and educators can borrow children's books from their neighbourhood libraries (Mol SE, Bus AG, de Jong MT, Smeets DJH, 2008).

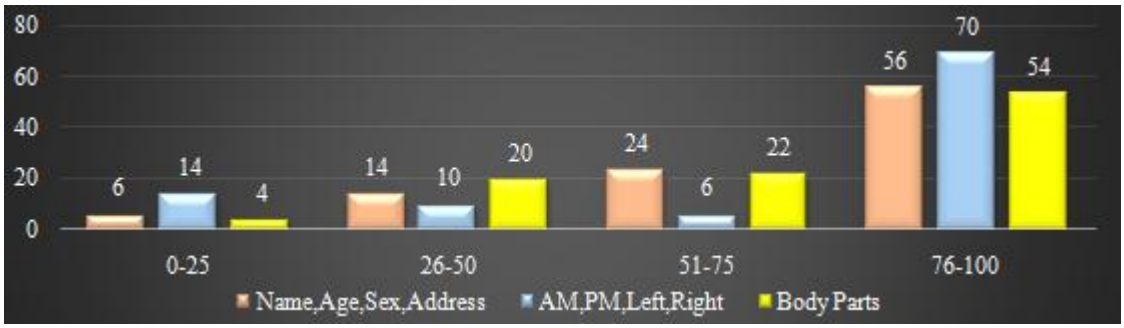

Figure 3: Percentage distribution of children score on "Ability to give Name, age, sex, address, Distinguish AM. PM, Left, Right and Indicating body parts aspects, N=50

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Figure 3 indicates the preschool children score on various aspects – Name, Age, Sex, Address, AM, PM, Left, Right and Body parts. Maximum (56%, 70%, 54%) children scored high on the above aspects. Majority of them were aware of their name, age and gender. 14% children scored less in the aspect of 'distinguish AM, PM, Left and Right'. 76% of children were able to show their body parts like eyes, ears, cheeks, chin, arm, elbow etc.

Early and consistent participation in routine learning activities, such as shared book reading, storytelling, and teaching about the letters of the alphabet, provide children with a critical foundation for early learning, language growth and emergent literacy (Raikes H etal, 2006).

The provision of learning materials (e.g., books, toys that facilitate learning) has been shown to support young children's language growth and learning (Tabors PO, Roach KA, Snow CE, 2001). Specifically, exposure to toys that enable symbolic play and support the development of fine motor skills has been shown to relate to children's early receptive language skills, intrinsic motivation and positive approaches to learning (Tomopoulos S. etal, 2006).

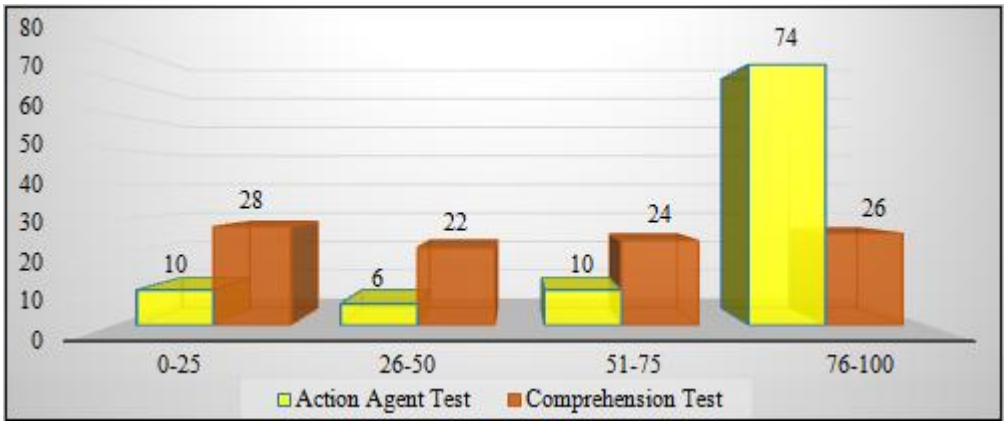

Figure 4: Percentage distribution of children score on "Action Agent Test" and "Comprehension Test", N=50

Figure 4 shows the scores of 'Action Agent test' and 'Comprehension test'. Picture cards were used for Action Agent Test and children were asked questions like 'what speaks?', 'what flies?', 'what swims?' etc. 74% of children were scored high in the Action Agent Test and 10% of children scored below 25 points.

To test the 'Comprehension', few questions were asked children like 'what must you do when you are hungry?'. The above table indicates that 50% of preschool children scored below average and 50% of children scored above average in the comprehension test.

Children begin to put two, then three and more words together into short sentences at approximately 24 months of age. Children's first sentences are combinations of content words and are often missing grammatical function words (e.g., articles and prepositions) and word endings (e.g., plural and tense markers). As children gradually master the grammar of their language, they become able to produce increasingly long and grammatically complete utterances. The development of complex (i.e., multi-clause) sentences usually begins some time before the child's second birthday and is largely complete by age 4. In general, comprehension precedes production (Hoff E, 2009).

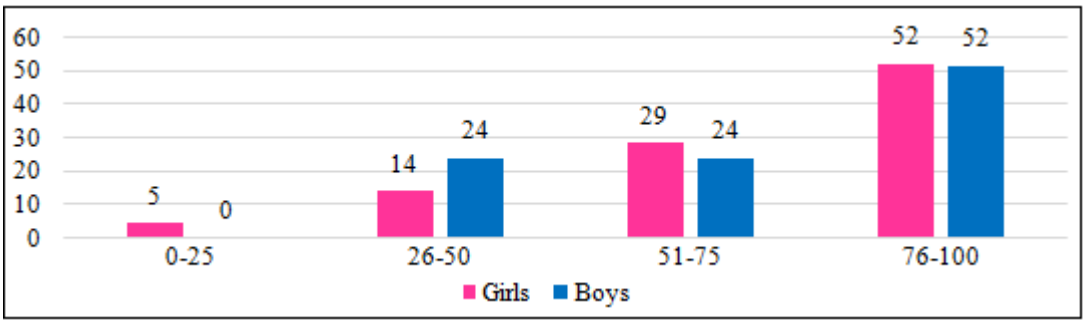

Figure 5: Percentage distribution of Language Development Score of girls and boys, N=50

Figure 5 indicates that girls scored higher than boys in the language development. Child characteristics, such as gender and birth order, have been linked to early measures of language and learning. For example, girls tend to have a slight advantage over boys in the early stages of vocabulary development (Pan BA, Rowe ML, Singer J, Snow CE, 2005).Toddler girls were ahead of boys in first word combinations. This finding is in accord with that of other large-scale studies on English-speaking children (Bornstein et al,2004; Fenson et al., 2007).

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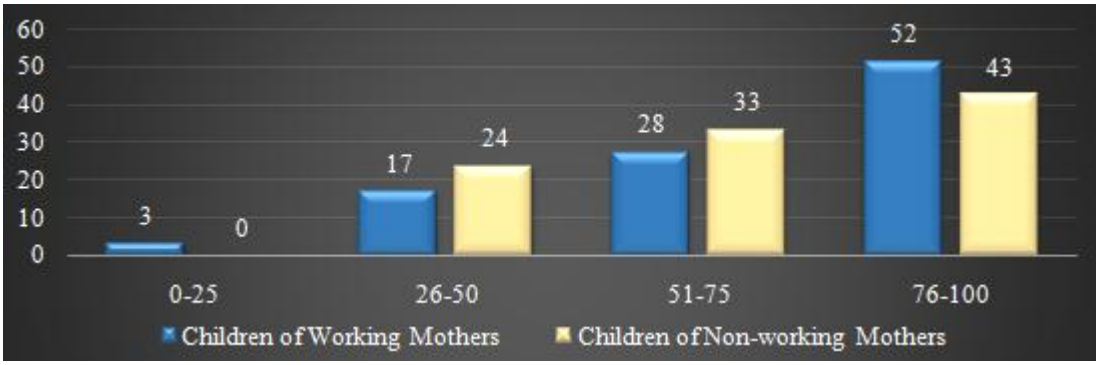

Figure 6: Percentage distribution of Language Development Score of children of working mothers and non-working mothers, N=50

Figure 6 shows that children of working mothers scored high on language development compared to the children of non-working mothers. In general, children appear to learn more frequent forms first and make fewer errors with them (Rowland, 2007; Ambridge et al., 2015). These results suggest that interventions that train parents and practitioners to talk and interact with young children, especially those that focus on promoting the use of more sophisticated language and a greater variety of sentence structures and word endings, should result in children learning to produce and understand more complex grammatical sentence types more quickly (Theakston, 2015).

4. Conclusion

The National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy among Children and Young People 2011-2020 draws attention to the needs of children who are struggling with language development. A proposed action in the strategy is the development of learning outcomes for the curriculum, including learning outcomes in oral language for pre-school children and children in infant classes. An issue that arises from this proposal is whether learning outcomes might be derived from Aistear as it currently exists, or whether aspects of Aistear (e.g., the Communications Strand) might feed into a revised and expanded curriculum framework in English for children aged 3-8 years.

From a social-interactionist perspective, the pragmatic use of language, its communicative function, is seen as the driving force of language learning for the child, and the motivation for the child's acquisition of the structural components of vocabulary and grammar (Tomasello, 2003). Related to this, the adult's role is seen as rooted in the desire to facilitate the child's communicative intent and to develop the child's communicative competence. Recent research, focusing specifically on developing language and literacy skills in Oral Language in Early Childhood and Primary Education (3-8 years).

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