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# Relationship Between Parental Communication Patterns and Language Delay in Preschool Children (4–6 Years)

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**ABSTRACT**

**Background:** The family is the primary environment that supports children's language development, especially during the preschool years (4–6 years). However, many parents assume that language development occurs naturally without adequate verbal interaction. This study aimed to examine the relationship between parental communication patterns and the risk of language developmental delay among preschool children.
**Methods:** A quantitative correlational study with a cross-sectional design was conducted at TK Handayani Telaga Biru. A total of 45 mother-child pairs were selected from 70 preschool children using purposive sampling. Parental communication patterns were assessed using a modified 25-item questionnaire covering five interpersonal communication dimensions (Cronbach's alpha = 0.854). The risk of language developmental delay was evaluated using the language sector of the Denver Developmental Screening Test II (Denver II). Data were analyzed using the Continuity Correction Chi-Square test.
**Results:** Most mothers demonstrated ineffective communication patterns (57.8%, n = 26), while more than half of the children were categorized as having suspected language developmental delay (53.3%, n = 24). Statistical analysis showed a significant relationship between parental communication patterns and the risk of language developmental delay among preschool children (p = 0.005).
**Conclusion:** Ineffective parental communication patterns are significantly associated with a higher risk of language developmental delay in preschool children. Parents should be encouraged to use open, responsive, and supportive communication to promote optimal language development during early childhood.



## INTRODUCTION

Language development is a primary neurodevelopmental domain in children that ideally must occur regularly, consistently, and continuously from early life. As an essential aspect of developmental manifestation, a child's linguistic competence does not emerge instantaneously; rather, it relies heavily on the quality of verbal and linguistic stimulation provided by their surrounding environment. Children possess cognitive characteristics that involve a constant tendency to imitate (imitation) the figures and verbal interactions they encounter in their domestic environment. Without adults realizing it, children actively pay attention to, record, and

internalize every single word used in daily communication, such that proper and well-directed verbal stimulation yields a significant impact that underscores all aspects of a child's development (Ngesti W. Utami, 2020).

Given that language skills play a highly crucial fungsional role in supporting daily activities, this capability serves as the primary instrument for children to express their desires, state opinions either directly or indirectly, regulate their emotions, and build adaptive social interactions. Through such an effective communication system, children can optimally explore interpersonal relationships with others (Karim et al., 2021). Therefore, achieving language development milestones during the preschool phase becomes a vital determinant that must not be overlooked, as linguistic fluency serves as a sensitive indicator for the early detection of general growth and developmental abnormalities in children.

Preschool children (4–6 years old) are in a unique developmental period known as the golden age, a critical phase where rapid brain plasticity creates an optimal window specifically for language acquisition and linguistic milestones that significantly determine their subsequent cognitive and social growth. However, because language development is highly individualized, not all children master the same verbal skills, articulation clarity, or vocabulary fluency at the exact same time. Therefore, achieving optimal language development necessitates the active involvement and close attention of various parties, such as parents, teachers, and healthcare workers, in providing targeted communicative stimulation and executing early detection of potential language developmental delays (Tatminingsih, 2020).

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Suboptimal progression in early childhood milestones, particularly within the domain of language acquisition, yields profound immediate and long-term consequences. On a neurodevelopmental level, a lack of early communicative stimulation compromises brain architecture, manifesting as cognitive impairment, poor emotional regulation, and heightened anxiety or fear. In the long term, these early-stage language deficits severely undermine abstract reasoning skills and educational achievement, ultimately culminating in diminished professional productivity during adulthood (Karim et al., 2021). From a global epidemiological standpoint, the burden of these neurodevelopmental vulnerabilities remains remarkably high. The World Health Organization reported that approximately 149.2 million children under the age of five suffered from developmental disorders globally, with projections estimating a surge to 323.3 million cases by 2030. Crucially, low- and middle-income countries bear the brunt of this crisis, accounting for 95% of the global prevalence a disparity that underscores a widespread lack of early childhood screening and verbal stimulation programs.

The prevalence of children experiencing developmental disorders in low- and middle-income countries is 95%. According to the World Health Organization, the developmental delay rate for children under 5 years of age in Indonesia is 7,512.6 per 100,000 population (7.51%). Data from the Basic Health Research shows that in Indonesia, the phenomenon of social development disorders in preschool children reaches 69.9%. This is caused by disorders in language and personal social development, where lack of interaction with peers makes children quiet and unwilling to socialize or mingle at school, and tends to withdraw (Riskesdas, 2018).

The incidence of global developmental delays (GDD) in early childhood remains a critical public health concern, affecting approximately 5% to 10% of the pediatric population. Within the national demographic landscape, children comprise roughly 33% of the total Indonesian population equating to approximately 83 million individuals among whom an estimated 22 million toddlers experienced generalized growth and developmental abnormalities between 2018

and 2022 (Central Statistics Agency of Indonesia, 2022). Furthermore, predictive models forecast an annual escalation of 3.7 to 4.3 million toddler cases presenting with developmental deviations (Anwar & Sayuti, 2022).

Locally, epidemiological records from the Gorontalo Provincial Health Office (2024) indicate that out of 51,307 registered toddlers from 2022 to August 2024, developmental screening reached a critically low coverage rate of only 15%, representing a mere 7,602 toddlers. Within this screened cohort, explicit language development disorders were documented across multiple areas, including four cases in Bone Bolango Regency, two in Gorontalo City, and two in Gorontalo Regency. This highly constrained screening coverage strongly implies a high probability of underreported speech and language pathology within the wider community, illustrating a classic "tip of the iceberg" phenomenon in regional pediatric surveillance. Functionally, linguistic proficiency stands as a cornerstone of early childhood milestones, serving as the primary semiotic system through which children externalize internal desires, formulate complex opinions, and execute emotional regulation. Consequently, language operates as a fundamental architectural framework for a child's daily adaptive activities, enabling them to communicate effectively, navigate prosocial interactions, and process affective experiences (Sari, 2022).

Neurobiologically, the critical window for linguistic conditioning and maximum neuroplasticity in the pediatric brain spans from two months to five years of age. During this highly sensitive period, high-frequency, intense verbal engagement by parents acts as the primary environmental catalyst for structural vocabulary expansion. Conversely, a deficit in targeted semantic interaction frequently results in mechanical phonological mimicry, a condition wherein children articulate novel phonemes without achieving underlying semantic comprehension (Shaumi, 2022). From a sociological and clinical perspective, the domestic micro-environment serves as the primary incubator for language acquisition, where early micro-level guidance directly fosters cognitive capacity and creative expression. Parents routinely mobilize distinct communication strategies as instruments of informal education; hence, the structural communication patterns established within the household directly modulate early childhood milestones. Ultimately, bidirectional parent-child interactions, executed through structured familial communication paradigms, establish the ultimate developmental trajectory for a child's expressive and receptive speaking skills (Aud et al., 2021).

Based on a preliminary study conducted by researchers, the number of students at Handayani Kindergarten has increased over the past three years. In 2022, there were 60 students, in 2023, there were 63 students, and in 2024, there were 70 students. Interviews conducted by researchers with kindergarten teachers revealed that three children were still slow in their language development. For example, they could only pronounce a few words but their pronunciation was unclear. Furthermore, these three children were quiet and interacted little with their peers. The teachers also reported that some parents who accompanied their children to study did not interact with their children, merely accompanying or supervising them. They rarely discussed problems they encountered during learning with their children. Parents were not particularly concerned with their children's language, which sometimes lacked pronunciation errors. Parents often found the children funny and simply laughed at them.

Based on observations conducted by researchers at Handayani Kindergarten, some parents still communicate with their children in the same way they would with other adults. For example, they don't use the phrase "please" when asking for something, call their children by their names, and shout. Some parents even speak rudely in front of their children. Even more worrying is the fact that children are now bold enough to speak disrespectfully to their elders. Some children also use language inappropriate for their age, such as imitating adults even though they don't necessarily understand the meaning of the words or sentences they are saying. Some parents also use regional languages with their children, aiming to introduce them to their native language so that their children can understand it. This lack of parental understanding of their children's language development makes parents less concerned with children's sometimes adult-like language.

Related research by (Sari, 2022) explains that parental communication patterns are communication that occurs within families, where the source is parents to children or children to parents, which have certain patterns. The research proposal concludes that family communication patterns have a positive influence on children's physical, emotional, cognitive, psychosocial, and linguistic development, as evidenced by the p-value (0.003 < 0.05). Thus, family communication patterns are crucial in supporting children's language development, including their social interaction skills.

Based on the background description above, it can be concluded that the lack of effective parental communication patterns results in children experiencing challenges in their language development. The purpose of this study was to determine the relationship between parental communication patterns and the risk of delayed language development in preschool children (4-6 years old) at Handayani Telaga Biru Kindergarten.

## METHODS

### Study Design and Setting

This research is a quantitative study that aims to analyze the relationship between parental communication patterns and the risk of delayed language development in preschool-aged children. A quantitative approach was chosen because it relies on the collection and analysis of numerical data to explain, predict, and control the phenomena being studied. The research design used is a correlative analytic with a cross-sectional approach, meaning data collection is conducted at a specific point in time without tracking the progression of time. The investigation is non-directional because it does not specify the direction of the variable relationship.

### Population and Sample

The study population consisted of all 70 children aged 4–6 years at Handayani Kindergarten. Using Slovin's formula with a 10% margin of error ($e = 0.10$), the required sample size was determined to be 45 mother-child pairs. A non-probability purposive sampling technique was employed, with selection bias strictly controlled through rigid eligibility criteria. The inclusion criteria required children to be active students aged 4–6 years whose primary caregiver was their biological mother living in the same household. The exclusion criteria disqualified children with severe congenital or sensory deficits, or severe neurodevelopmental conditions like extreme ADHD that caused uncooperative behavior or acute tantrums during the Denver II language screening. The recruitment process was executed by auditing the student registry, approaching mothers consecutively during school hours, distributing research information sheets, and securing written informed consent. Eligible dyads were enrolled chronologically until the target quota of 45 respondents was fully reached

#### Data Collection Instrument

This study used both primary and secondary data. Secondary data were obtained from the administrative records of Handayani Kindergarten to verify participants' demographic information. Primary data were collected directly from mothers through questionnaires and from children through developmental screening. Parental communication patterns, as the independent variable, were measured using a modified 25-item questionnaire adapted from Dwi Ayu (2022), covering five interpersonal communication dimensions: openness, empathy, supportiveness, positiveness, and equality. The instrument demonstrated good validity, with all items showing significant Pearson correlation values ($p < 0.05$), and high reliability (Cronbach's alpha = 0.854).

The dependent variable, risk of language developmental delay, was assessed using the language domain of the Denver Developmental Screening Test II (Denver II). The assessment was conducted according to standardized procedures based on the child's chronological age. Performance on language-related tasks was scored as Pass, Fail, No Opportunity, or Refusal. Based

on Denver II criteria, children were classified as Normal if they had no delays and a maximum of one caution, or Suspect if they had two or more cautions and/or at least one developmental delay. Respondent characteristics were collected using a demographic questionnaire, while child developmental status was assessed using the standardized Denver II observation sheet.

**Data Analysis**

Data were analyzed using SPSS version 26 software, utilizing both descriptive and inferential statistical methods. Univariate analysis involved calculating frequencies and percentages to outline the categorical distributions of respondent characteristics, parental communication patterns, and the risk of language developmental delay. For bivariate analysis, a Chi-Square (chi) test of independence specifically utilizing the Continuity Correction for the 2 x 2 contingency table was applied to analyze the relationship between the independent and dependent variables. Prior to hypothesis testing, strict statistical assumption testing for the Chi-Square model was verified, confirming that 0% of the cells had an expected count of less than 5, with a minimum expected count safely established at 8.87. Furthermore, to determine the precision and clinical significance of the findings, a 95% Confidence Interval (CI) was computed, and strength of association measures specifically the Phi (phi) coefficient and Contingency Coefficient were calculated alongside the p-value to evaluate the exact magnitude and practical strength of the correlation between parental communication and child language outcomes.

**Ethical Considerations**

Ethical approval for this study was obtained from the Health Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Health Sciences, Universitas Muhammadiyah Gorontalo (Ethical Clearance No. 095/KEPK-FIKES/IV/2025). Written informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to data collection. Participants' confidentiality and anonymity were maintained throughout the study, and all data were used exclusively for research purposes.

## RESULTS

**Respondent Characteristics**

Distribution of Respondent Characteristics by Child Age and Gender at Handayani Kindergarten.

**Table 1. Distribution of Respondent Characteristics by Child Age and Gender (n=45)**

| Characteristics | Frequency*(n)* | Presentation (%) |
|---|---|---|
| **Age** | | |
| 4 Year | 12 | 26.7 |
| 5 Year | 31 | 68.9 |
| 6 Year | 2 | 4.4 |
| **Gender** | | |
| Boy | 10 | 22.2 |
| Girl | 35 | 77.8 |

Based on the age group of respondents, the majority of children were 5 years old, amounting to 31 people (68.9%), with an average of 35 girls (77.8%).

**Table 2. Distribution of Respondent Characteristics of Mothers by Age, Education, and Occupation (n=45)**

| Characteristics | Frequency*(n)* | Presentation (%) |
|---|---|---|
| **Age** | | |
| < 20 Year | 9 | 20.0 |
| 20 – 35 Year | 33 | 73.3 |
| > 35 Year | 3 | 6.7 |
| **Last Education** | | |
| Elementary school | 11 | 24.4 |
| Junior High School | 5 | 11.1 |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| High School | 26 | 57.8 |
| University | 2 | 4.4 |
| Not In School | 1 | 2.2 |
| **Work** | | |
| Housewives | 31 | 68.9 |
| Self-Employed | 5 | 11.1 |
| Civil Servants | 4 | 8.9 |
| Laborers | 5 | 11.1 |

Based on the mother's age, the majority of respondents were in the age range (20 – 35 years) amounting to 33 people (73.3%), with an average high school education level of 26 people (57.8%), and the majority working as housewives (IRT) amounting to 31 people (68.9%).

**Table 3. Description of Parental Communication Patterns at Handayani Telaga Kindergarten (n=45)**

| Communication Patterns | Frequency *(n)* | Presentation (%) |
|---|---|---|
| Good Communication Patterns | 19 | 42.2 |
| Poor Communication Patterns | 26 | 57.8 |

Based on the table above, the majority of mothers have poor communication patterns, amounting to 26 people (57.8%), and the lowest are mothers who have good communication patterns, amounting to 19 people (42.2%).

**Table 4. Overview of the Risk of Delayed Language Development in Preschool Children (4-6 Years Old) (n=45)**

| Language Development | Frequency *(n)* | Presentation (%) |
|---|---|---|
| Normal | 21 | 46.7 |
| *Suspect* | 24 | 53.3 |

Based on the table above, the majority of children have suspected language development, namely 24 people (53.3%), and the lowest is normal language development, namely 21 people (46.7%).

**Table 5. The Relationship between Parental Communication Patterns and the Risk of Delayed Language Development in Preschool Children (n=45)**

| Communication Patterns | *Language Development* | | | | | | *p.value($x^2$)* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Normal | | *Suspect* | | Total | | |
| | *n* | *%* | *n* | *%* | *n* | *%* | |
| Good Communication Patterns | 14 | 31.1 | 5 | 11.1 | 19 | 42.2 | 0.005 |
| Poor Communication Patterns | 7 | 15.6 | 19 | 42.2 | 26 | 57.8 | |

The results showed that most parents with poor communication patterns had children classified as being at risk of language developmental delay (suspect) (42.2%, n = 19), while 15.6% (n = 7) of children with poor parental communication patterns demonstrated normal language development. Among parents with good communication patterns, the majority of children exhibited normal language development (31.1%, n = 14), although 11.1% (n = 5) were still categorized as being at risk of language delay. Statistical analysis using the Chi-square test revealed a significant relationship between parental communication patterns and the risk of language developmental delay among preschool children aged 4–6 years at Handayani Kindergarten, Telaga Biru (p = 0.005). These findings indicate that children whose parents demonstrate ineffective communication patterns are more likely to experience suspected language developmental delays compared with children whose parents exhibit effective communication patterns.

## DISCUSSION

The results of this study demonstrated a statistically significant relationship between parental communication patterns and the risk of delayed language development among preschool children aged 4–6 years at Handayani Telaga Biru Kindergarten ($p = 0.005$). These findings indicate that parental communication plays an important role in supporting children's language development during the preschool period. Children who were raised in families with ineffective communication patterns were more likely to experience suspected language delays than children whose parents practiced effective communication. This finding is consistent with previous studies that reported a significant association between family communication and language development. Sari (2022) found that parental communication patterns positively influence children's physical, emotional, cognitive, psychosocial, and language development. Similarly, Putri et al. (2022) and Shaumi (2022) reported that family communication patterns contribute significantly to children's speaking abilities and communication competence. Effective communication allows children to receive adequate linguistic stimulation, develop vocabulary, and improve their ability to express thoughts and emotions.

The preschool period is widely recognized as the "golden age" of development, during which children experience rapid growth in cognitive, emotional, social, and language domains (Tatminingsih, 2020). During this sensitive developmental stage, environmental stimulation becomes a critical determinant of developmental outcomes. Therefore, active involvement from parents, teachers, and healthcare professionals is essential to provide appropriate stimulation and early detection of developmental problems (Anwar & Sayuti, 2022). Language development is a fundamental aspect of child development because it serves as the primary tool for communication and social interaction. Through language, children express needs, thoughts, feelings, and experiences while simultaneously building relationships with others (Karim et al., 2021). Language ability is also considered an important indicator of overall development because impairments in cognitive, motor, emotional, or environmental domains may be reflected in language delays (Setiawati et al., 2023).

The findings of this study support the Family Communication Patterns Theory proposed by Koerner and Fitzpatrick, which emphasizes the importance of conversation-oriented family environments. Families characterized by open communication encourage children to actively participate in discussions, ask questions, express opinions, and develop critical thinking skills. Conversely, families that rely primarily on one-way communication tend to provide fewer opportunities for children to practice language skills. The finding that most parents exhibited ineffective communication patterns suggests that many children experienced limited opportunities for meaningful verbal interactions within the home environment.

Furthermore, these findings can be interpreted through Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, which explains that language development occurs through social interactions with more knowledgeable individuals. Parents act as primary facilitators who provide scaffolding within the child's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). Through storytelling, questioning, discussions, and daily conversations, parents assist children in acquiring new vocabulary and communication skills. When these interactions are limited, language acquisition may be hindered, increasing the likelihood of developmental delays (Novitasari & Prastyo, 2020).

The present study found that many parents with ineffective communication patterns rarely provided motivation, guidance, or opportunities for meaningful conversation. Parents often did not ask about children's daily experiences, encourage verbal expression, or engage in activities such as storytelling and shared reading. These findings support previous studies indicating that parental involvement and motivation are essential components of language stimulation. Pradita et al. (2024) and Wulansari (2023) emphasized that parental encouragement and active participation significantly influence children's language acquisition and communication confidence. Likewise, Noor Baiti (2020) reported that positive communication between parents and children contributes substantially to language development outcomes during early childhood.

Interestingly, some children demonstrated normal language development despite having parents with ineffective communication patterns. This finding suggests that language development is influenced by multiple environmental factors beyond family communication alone. One possible explanation is the role of early childhood education institutions. Kindergartens provide structured language stimulation through storytelling, dialogue, singing, role-playing, and question-and-answer activities that encourage children to practice both receptive and expressive language skills.

This interpretation is supported by Herlianty (2020), who reported a significant relationship between participation in early childhood education programs and language development. Similar findings were reported by Ngesti and Aulia (2020), who demonstrated that stimulation provided by preschool teachers contributes positively to child development outcomes. Therefore, educational environments may serve as protective factors that compensate for limited stimulation at home. Conversely, several children were categorized as being at risk of language delay despite having parents with good communication patterns. This finding indicates that language development is influenced by various biological, psychological, and environmental factors. During developmental screening, some children displayed symptoms such as inattention, impulsivity, hyperactivity, and difficulty maintaining focus, which are characteristic of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD).

Children with ADHD often experience difficulties in processing linguistic information and maintaining effective communication. They may exhibit delayed speech, impaired conversational turn-taking, difficulty understanding sentence structures, and challenges in expressing ideas coherently (Noor Baiti, 2020). Consequently, even when parents provide adequate language stimulation, neurodevelopmental factors may limit children's ability to benefit fully from these interactions. Several studies have also identified other factors associated with language development, including parental education, occupation, socioeconomic status, parenting style, and parental stimulation. Komalasari Wuri (2021) reported that parental education and occupation are associated with language development outcomes among toddlers. Likewise, Sulistiani (2020) found that parental stimulation significantly influences child development. Studies conducted by Salamah et al. (2021), Kurniasari and Mardliyah (2022), and Sari Sembiring et al. (2023) further demonstrated that parenting practices and parental involvement contribute substantially to language development during the preschool years. In addition, Nggreyini and Salmarini (2023) reported that demographic factors, including parental income, may influence developmental outcomes among preschool children.

In the contemporary digital era, digital media exposure has emerged as an additional environmental factor affecting language development. Smartphones, tablets, and television have become increasingly integrated into children's daily activities. According to the Displacement Hypothesis, excessive screen exposure may reduce opportunities for meaningful parent-child interactions because digital media displaces direct verbal communication experiences. When digital devices are frequently used as substitutes for interpersonal engagement, children receive fewer opportunities to practice conversational skills, vocabulary acquisition, and language comprehension. The negative impact of excessive screen exposure may be particularly pronounced among families with ineffective communication patterns. In such environments, children experience a dual deprivation of language stimulation: limited parent-child interaction and excessive passive media consumption. Consequently, opportunities for language learning through social interaction become substantially reduced, potentially increasing the risk of delayed language development.

Overall, the findings of this study highlight that language development is a multifactorial process influenced by parental communication patterns, educational stimulation, parenting practices, neurodevelopmental conditions, socioeconomic characteristics, and digital media exposure. Nevertheless, parental communication remains one of the most modifiable factors and serves as the foundation for children's language acquisition. Therefore, interventions aimed at preventing language delays should focus on strengthening parental communication skills, increasing parental involvement in daily interactions, promoting literacy activities at home,

supporting early childhood education programs, and encouraging appropriate management of children's screen time.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the findings, most preschool children were five years old and female, while the majority of parents were aged 20–35 years, had a high school education, and were housewives. More than half of the parents demonstrated ineffective communication patterns, and most children were classified as having suspected language developmental delays. Statistical analysis revealed a significant relationship between parental communication patterns and the risk of language developmental delay among preschool children at Handayani Kindergarten ($p = 0.005$). These findings suggest that effective parental communication plays an important role in supporting optimal language development during early childhood. Therefore, parents should be encouraged to engage in open, responsive, and supportive communication to promote their children's language skills and overall development.

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