***The Role of the Surrounding Environment in the Language***

***Development of Children 3–6 Years Old***

**Peran Lingkungan Sekitar pada Perkembangan Bahasa**

**Anak Usia 3-6 Tahun**

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***Abstract***

*This study aimed to determine language development in children aged 3-6 years and the role of the surrounding environment in language development. This type of research is descriptive and qualitative. This study uses observation and interviews with four children aged 3-6 in Jakarta from April to May 2022. The results of this study show that children aged 3-6 experience rapid language development. Children can recognize friendship and interact with many people, especially their peers. This study concludes that children can pronounce words clearly and speak in complex and compound sentences. Children can also explain the name of an object and its function, such as a knife used to cut vegetables. The surrounding environment plays a role in children's language development, especially the care provided by the family. Parents can stimulate children's language development through shared games, for example, quizzes, magic boxes, flashcards, music, role-playing, storytelling, read-aloud, and finger puppets. The cultural differences of each child also affect the language development they go through. So, it is necessary to get used to using the national language, Indonesian, beside regional languages, as a medium for communicating with people.*

*Keyword: Environment, Language Development, Parenting, Preschool Children, Social Interaction*

**Abstrak**

Tujuan penelitian ini adalah untuk mengetahui perkembangan bahasa pada anak umur 3-6 tahun dan peran lingkungan sekitar dalam perkembangan bahasa tersebut. Jenis penelitian ini adalah kualitatif deskriptif. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode observasi dan wawancara kepada empat anak berusia 3-6 tahun. Penelitian dilakukan di Jakarta pada bulan April sampai Mei tahun 2022. Hasil dari penelitian ini menunjukkan anak usia 3-6 tahun mengalami perkembangan bahasa yang pesat. Anak dapat mengenal pertemanan dan berinteraksi dengan banyak orang, terutama teman sebayanya. Dari penelitian ini pun dapat dilihat bahwa anak mampu mengucapkan kata-kata dengan jelas serta berbicara dalam kalimat kompleks dan majemuk. Anak juga bisa menjelaskan nama suatu benda dan fungsinya seperti pisau yang digunakan untuk memotong sayuran. Lingkungan sekitar berperan pada perkembangan bahasa anak, terutama pengasuhan yang diberikan oleh keluarga. Orang tua dapat menstimulasi perkembangan bahasa anak melalui permainan yang dilakukan bersama, contohnya tanya jawab (kuis), magic box, flashcards, musik, bermain peran, bercerita, read-alouds, dan finger puppet. Adanya perbedaan budaya dari masing-masing anak berpengaruh juga terhadap perkembangan bahasa yang dilaluinya. Maka perlu adanya pembiasaan untuk menggunakan bahasa nasional yakni Bahasa Indonesia, selain bahasa daerah, untuk media berkomunikasi dengan orang sekitar.

Kata Kunci: Anak Pra Sekolah, Interaksi Sosial, Lingkungan, Pengasuhan, Perkembangan Bahasa

# INTRODUCTION

Children are gifts from God Almighty, handed over and entrusted to parents so that they can be educated and cared for with all their hearts. The family is the first and foremost environment for children to learn [1]. The family occupies a significant position. Therefore the family has a big role in a child's life [2] and optimizes the child's development [3], especially in the early and critical stages. Language is one of the essential developmental aspects of children [4]. Language is a form of communication (whether spoken, written, or signed) based on a system of symbols [5]. A language is a tool used by humans to communicate with each other or interact and convey their ideas. Language acquisition is the process by which humans acquire the ability to understand language and produce or use words and sentences to communicate [6].

Preschoolers are children aged three to six years. At this age, children are in the pre-operational period [7]. As unique individuals, children have extraordinary linguistic abilities [1]. Language development is the basis for a child's ability to write and read to succeed in her/his education [8]. The development of this language started when a person was born. At the infant stage, humans can make sounds or cries as a sign to communicate with those around them but cannot yet understand a word or sentence that is conveyed and received. With increasing age, children's language development also increases. Starting with the child absorbing various vocabulary heard from the environment, the child can pronounce and understand different words combined into a meaningful sentence. This process continues until the child can communicate with those around him.

There are several terms in aspects of language development, including language, speech, and communication [8]. Communication and interaction between preschool children and their parents, without realizing it has an essential role so that children have high abilities in terms of language [9]. Language development in children consists of receptive and expressive development [10]. Receptive development shows the child's ability to listen to sounds from other sources and respond with the form of answers, behaviors, or other reactions. Meanwhile, expressive development is related to the child's ability to express verbal expressions, desires, and needs.

Language development is an indicator of a child's cognitive development. It relates to the success or delay in thinking and communicating in their environment [8]. Children can imitate and absorb a word used in communicating with their environment through reason and intellect. By using language, children can also socialize and actualize themselves through a sentence according to what they think. Language skills are sensitive to delays or damage to other systems involving children's cognitive, motor, psychological, emotional, and environmental abilities [9]. In social life, the environment is an essential factor in developing a child's language. Children's language in interaction depends on the environmental conditions in which the child lives and interacts throughout his life. Lack of observation and screening, especially in terms of the negative side of the environment, will also negatively influence the child's development. For example, if a child lives and interacts in an unfavorable environment for a lifetime, the child will follow the language they usually speak in that environment.

The results of research conducted by [8] concluded that several factors could affect children's language development, including (1) brain development and intelligence, (2) gender, (3) physical condition, (4) family environment, (5) economic conditions, (6) social setting/cultural environment, and (7) bilingualism (2 languages). Stimulus from the closest people, namely parents, will be processed by the child to make the child mature in thought patterns, action patterns, and speech patterns. Another study by [9] concluded that parenting styles have a significant relationship with the language development of preschool children (aged 3-6 years). Therefore, parenting patterns are one of the supporting factors for achieving children's speech and language development according to their age stages. Furthermore, [11] concluded that democratic parenting is a stimulus in early childhood language development so children can explore language skills adequately. Conversely, authoritarian parenting makes early childhood quiet.

In contrast, permissive parenting does not explore children's language skills. Reinforced by the research results [12] that parenting applied by parents also influences its development and the parenting pattern that should be applied is democratic parenting. For example, research [13] describes that the language development of preschool children in Kindergarten in Indralaya Village is mainly in the poor category. In fact, according to [14], families, especially parents, play a significant role in fostering and developing language skills in children so that children communicate actively and effectively in their later lives when they grow up. Thus, further research needs to observe the role of the surrounding environment in children's language development, especially for preschool-age children. After going through the golden age, many changes occur in a child's brain development. So parents must continue to provide a good stimulus so that the development achieved by the child remains optimal. Therefore, this study aimed to determine language development in children aged 3-6 years and the role of the surrounding environment in language development.

# MATERIALS AND METHOD

This type of research is descriptive and qualitative. This research wants to examine an object without manipulation. However, this research can describe, explain, and answer in detail the problems under study by studying the events that became the topic of the problem. Data collection in this study used the method of observation and interviews with four children aged 3-6 years. We conducted the research in Jakarta from April to May 2022. The data analysis technique was to process and prepare the data needed for analysis. These data are from interview transcripts, videos, and observation notes. The research results are associated with the results of the theoretical study. Then the appropriate conclusions are drawn and describe the core of the topic of the problems discussed.

# RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

## Result

The first respondent is D, a three-year-old girl. When the researcher asked the respondent some simple questions such as name and age, she could understand the question's meaning and fluently give appropriate answers. Furthermore, when the researcher asked about her activities, she could answer and describe the activities. She can even add an explanation to her answer, so she does not just answer briefly. For example, she explains that she can eat by herself. D can also clearly retell what activities she did yesterday with her parents and brother. For example, she can tell she went together to watch the cinema and even mentioned the name of the film she watched. She also recounted the vehicle used to go there and the events that occurred while watching the cinema. When the questions turned to animals and fruits, she was also able to answer questions fluently and appropriately.

D can name the animals she knows, such as lions, tigers, zebras, giraffes, pandas, bears, goats, and cats. She can also name various fruit she knows, such as apples, bananas, oranges. When asked about animal sounds, D can also answer this question correctly. For example, she can say that an animal that sounds "baa" is a goat while a cat sound "meow." She even started the conversation by saying she would ride a horse somewhere, which continued by making a sound like a horse. Regarding fruits, she can distinguish the color of the fruit mentioned; for example, apples are red, bananas are yellow, and watermelons are red while the seeds are black. She can also mention the taste of the fruit, such as mango, some are sour, and some are sweet. D can also describe her favorite animal, namely a rabbit; where this rabbit is white and likes carrots. She also knows that carrots can make eyes healthy and not sick. She also talked about other items such as shampoo used when bathing.

The second respondent is R, a four-year-old girl. During the interview process, R was quite fluent in communicating with the researcher. She can answer the questions and adjust his focus on one topic so that the answers she gives do not stray far from the topic of the question. She can tell in detail how the activities she did while at school. She even explained how to invite friends to play and how teachers teach in schools. She described how her teacher taught in an everyday language so that she felt happy and comfortable during the learning process. R also understands politeness towards older people, one of which is her parents. She can apply this courtesy in the words she speaks; for example, when called by her parents or when to ask her parents, she uses polite language and good speech.

K is the third respondent, a five-year-old boy. When asked about the object used for cutting, he could answer accordingly, a knife. He can also name his favorite food and describe the taste and the texture. Although he cannot explain the taste in detail, he can already tell what is good and what is not. He can also receive simple but clear instructions for doing something, such as picking up a glass. He can understand the instructions given and can do them correctly. He can also name objects used to carry out an activity, such as a broom to sweep and a mop to mop the floor. Although his answer is not fast, he can answer it correctly. Then he can also give directions to do something or go somewhere. For example, he can give directions to the bathroom.

RA is a 6-year-old boy who became the fourth respondent. In the interview process, several questions related to grouping an object, for example, whether a car and crackers were the same. First, he answered correctly that the two things were not identical. Then he can explain the difference between the two objects, starting from the size and the color. He can even distinguish categories of objects; a car is a vehicle, while crackers are food. RA can also follow the instructions to take several objects at once, such as the Qur'an, house key, and car keys. He did it precisely and correctly according to the instruction. RA can also read a few sentences of questions in his book fluently and precisely and can give appropriate answers to the questions. For example, he reads the question about what we should wear before riding a motorbike. RA can answer that by wearing a helmet. He also knows that we must wear a seat belt before a car drives. He can also complete a missing sentence regarding an activity, for example, "Toni spilled water, so Toni ... the table". He could answer it by wiping.

In addition, RA can also describe some of his playmates, starting from their names and behavior. For example, he described A as a handsome and kind friend. He also explained that they often play together because their house is not too far away. They can even mention what games they often play. Then he described B as a bad friend because he often makes him fall. Furthermore, he described C as a friend who is kind and thoughtful. He also explained that they often play together because their house is not far away. He also mentioned that they often played kickball together. Besides being able to describe his friends, RA can also memorize a song and sing it well. He can even live or feel the emotions of the song he sings.

## Children's Language Development

Language development has several aspects, such as language, speech, and communication [8]. Expressing one's feelings and thoughts to others helps to keep in touch with the world of thoughts, feelings, communication, and information from others. This language ability is a benchmark of a person's intelligence because this language is not just making sounds or learning words. Language development is also the basis for a child to develop writing and reading skills, as was the case in research for children aged 3-6 years. With their language skills and great vocabulary, they can read or spell a word in their book. They already understand what they read and can give appropriate responses or answers to what they read. Then, the ability to write and read, which also increases, will help them succeed, especially in education. As in the theory of cognitive development, thinking is a prerequisite for language and reasoning [4]. Because this language ability is in line with a child's cognitive abilities, if the language skills are excellent, the cognitive abilities will also be good and support the educational process. Usually, children who experience rapid development in their language are intelligent. On the other hand, not achieving intelligence abilities can affect language development disorders in preschoolers [15].

The language development of children aged 3-6 years has characteristics such as speaking using simple sentences consisting of four to five words and correctly carrying out three instructions spoken by others in a row. In this study, K (5 years) and RA (6 years) were able to pick up several objects precisely according to the instructions. Even K can show directions to a specific room, which means the child already knows the direction and can use it according to the context. Children's language development generally consists of two stages: the paralinguistic stage, which takes place in the infant phase, and the linguistic stage, which takes place at the preschool age. Children will try to communicate with those around them in the infant phase by crying, laughing, and screaming. At preschool age, children begin to say two holophrases in a fast sequence (like mama eats) until they use complex grammatical elements. For example, children can use simple sentence patterns, task words, pluralization, affixes, prefixes, suffixes, and simple forms [1]. In line with the results of research [16], the dominant factor in influencing the receptive language skills of children aged 3-6 years is communication that occurs during interactions or activities with parents, such as reading fairy tales or telling stories.

In the three-year-old stage, their language skills develop very quickly. They began to be able to recognize friends, and they began to interact with many people, especially children of the same age. They began to recognize many new words from the interaction process so that they had rapid progress in pronouncing a word and communicating with other people. At this age, children will also always tell stories or ask questions at any time. Parents will see that the children will start a conversation and start talking about things they like and things that interest them. As experienced in the interview with D. At one time, she started the conversation by talking about how she had ridden a horse in an animal park. She loved the experience of riding the horse and passionately shared it with others. Children can also speak clearly with strangers so that these strangers can understand and respond well. At this age, children can also use instructional words, understand new words and continue to learn to use them in a sentence. At this stage, the role of parents is needed as a supervisor so that they can direct children in a positive direction and not fall into a hostile environment.

At the four-year-children stage, children begin to communicate using sentences that are more complex than before. Children also expand their vocabulary at this age, although sometimes mistakes are made in pronouncing a word. When having conversations or communicating with other people, children will also start to focus on one topic and will not quickly lose interest. Parents and those around them can invite them to chat more often and listen to stories. People around them need to show focused behavior, such as using eye contact with the child so that the child is more interested and focused so that she/he can talk more and improve her/his language skills. In the interviews, R talked about her experiences at school, where she invited her friends to play and saw her teacher teach and others. Children will talk more about their activities if people around them listen to the stories seriously. This process can improve the language and storytelling skills possessed by a child.

At the five-year-old stage, children's language skills have developed even better where children can pronounce words clearly and speak using complex and compound sentences. Children can use correct grammar all the time. In addition, the vocabulary they have is also increasing and multiplying. Children also enjoy starting conversations and talking with other children or older people. Children will wait their turn to speak in group conversations and not interrupt other people's conversations. Children will also be happy to share experiences experienced by themselves and will detail the experience.

At the six-year-old stage, the language skills will become better than before. The vocabulary they have will also increase rapidly. The language used also develops according to the learning process experienced. Communication with other people is a lesson to develop their abilities independently. According to the early childhood education programs Directorate of the Ministry of Education and Culture, in the early childhood education programs level learning module, six-year-old children can read word for word (word pointer), reread, and correct misread words. This case is what happened to RA. He was able to pronounce the word. His language skills align with a child's cognitive skills, which are the basis for a child's academic development.

## Children's Social Interaction

The interactions experienced are related to their immediate environment, namely family members. Children often chat about various simple things they usually do in daily activities, which can improve their speaking skills. It is proven by the respondents, who can answer all interview questions confidently and in context. This sign tells that children understand the topics because they are used to communicating with their family members. Families, especially parents, are educators at home who help children understand things around them. As in D's experience, her parents taught her that carrots are good because they make the eyes healthy and do not hurt. So, she likes carrots for healthy eyes. The family is also the primary educator in speech and manners children use in the language. As in R's experience, she always uses good language and manners when talking to older people, for example, parents. It is because she knew that the elder was worthy of respect. This good manners behavior illustrates the behavior carried out by her parents in her family environment so that R can get used to doing this.

Not only in the family environment, but parents also provide opportunities to explore the external environment around them, such as their peers, neighbors, or other people. Children often go outside and play with their peers not far from their house, as in RA's experience where he played with his two friends who were around his house. They often play together both online playing games and kickball games. In the process of playing together, of course, a communication process is needed as a medium for expressing oneself and increasing vocabulary. The systematic process of playing with peers can improve their language skills and also their ability to socialize with other people [17]. Children go to formal or informal schools and meet the teacher. In addition to playing a role in improving communication skills, the teacher also oversees the child's vocabulary so that the child does not fall into negative environmental influences. Children are also free to explore the surrounding environment to increase their knowledge, for example, being invited to watch a movie or go to the zoo. Doing this gives the child new knowledge of things related to where they went. Children who can interact quickly will get rapid language development as well because children will spend much time interacting with other people [18].

## The Role of the Surrounding Environment

The increase in language skills a child possesses is measured by writing or reading skills and includes communication skills to express and understand the feelings of oneself and others. Good language skills will significantly support a child's ability to think, solve problems and build relationships with others. Language and speech are part of communication that are interconnected and cannot be separated. Children's language development generally uses long sentences, both spoken and written. Children already know, use, and understand more than thousands of words when communicating. Children first develop aspects of their language, then they will begin to master speaking skills.

Language development is one of the indicators in a child's cognitive development related to his success or delay in thinking and communicating in his environment. Various nature and nurture factors influence individual differences in language development and skills [19]. A child cannot speak and communicate with the surrounding environment if they have no freedom to convey what is in their heart and what they hear. Therefore, the family is one of the closest environments where family members must provide opportunities for children to learn from the experiences they have heard. Children will spend more time at home with parents or siblings. Hence, the intensity of interaction with family members occurs more. As explained by [20], parents have a significant role in assisting and guiding children's language development because parents, especially mothers, are the closest people to children. Evidence-based intervention for child development effectively improves responsive parenting practices and child health and development outcomes and is feasible [21]. The study's results [22] explored three pathways in which socio-economic status can influence children's language development, one of which is through the quantity and quality of caregiver-child interaction (caregiving).

Children and parents who are often actively involved in the communication by reading or telling stories related to the activities they are experiencing will acquire fairly good language skills [18] and can improve their ability to interact verbally with others. Parents can stimulate children's language development through games that are done together, for example, question Java (quiz), magic box [23], flashcards [24], [25], music [26], [27], role-playing and storytelling [28], [29], read-aloud [30], and finger puppet [31]. In line with the research results [32], there is an effect of stimulation by parents on language development in pre-school-age children. Parents with any educational background need to optimize children's development so that children grow into individuals with high creativity and have good attitudes [33]. To grow into such a child, parents need to recognize their potential and facilitate the development of their children [2]. One of the key success factors lies in parents' knowledge about children's growth and development [34], [35]. In line with the results of research [14], parents need to carry out language development for children, such as pioneering and laying the foundation for language, motor training, getting used to, maintaining and supervising children's language, preventing children from speaking inappropriately, developing language skills through playing, and communicating actively in the family.

In addition, every behavior or speech spoken by parents will be an example a child will imitate. Children need to get good experiences from childhood. Experiences during early childhood shape biological and psychological structures and functions in ways that influence health, well-being, and productivity throughout the life course [36]. In addition, children will gain experience from the environment [37]. Therefore, parents must carry out stimuli to improve children's language and social skills early. The task of parents is to develop children's language skills by informing and consistently applying polite and correct words when communicating in the family, practicing the pronunciation of short or straightforward sentences, and inviting children to know the surrounding objects. Usually, children who rarely play with their peers will have slower language development than children who often play with their friends because they will have fewer ideas due to a lack of interaction with the outside environment. Lack of practice in issuing or listening to ideas and opinions makes it difficult for children to do this in their environment.

Cultural differences in each child also affect the development of the language he goes through [38]. For example, children who live in an area will actively use the local language where the child lives, so the conversation using Indonesian will be difficult because they rarely use it in everyday life. Likewise, children who use slang daily to communicate with each other will have difficulty using Indonesian properly and correctly according to the actual rules.

# CONCLUSION

Language is a tool to express feelings and thoughts to others. Language ability is a benchmark of a person's intelligence because this language is not just making sounds or learning words. The results of this study indicate that children aged 3-6 experience rapid language development. With their language skills and great vocabulary, children can read or spell a word in their book. Then, the ability to write and read, which also increases, will help them succeed, especially in education. In addition, children can recognize friendships and interact with many people, especially their peers. From this study, children can pronounce words clearly and speak in complex and compound sentences. Children can also explain the name of an object and its function, such as a knife used to cut vegetables.

The surrounding environment plays a role in children's language development, especially the care provided by the family. Parents can stimulate their children's language development through shared games, for example, quizzes, magic boxes, flashcards, music, role-playing, storytelling, read-aloud, and finger puppets. The cultural differences of each child also affect the language development they go through. So, it is necessary to get used to using the national language, Indonesian, besides regional languages, as a medium for communicating with people so that the communication process can run smoothly.

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