

Assessment of Language and Communication Skills of 2- 5 Year Old Children in Rural Areas of Ernakulam District

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Abstract: The study on Assessment of language and communication skills of 2- 5 years old children in rural areas of Ernakulam district was taken up by the investigator with the objectives to assess the language and communication skills of selected children, to identify the number of children having delay among the selected sample, to develop a booklet on activities that would help stimulate language and communication skills in children. The area selected for the study included rural areas of Ernakulam district in Kerala. The sample for the study comprised of 100 children within the age range of 2-5 years. Purposive and simple random method were used as the sampling techniques. The tool used for the study consisted of LEST [Language Evaluation Scale of Trivandrum 0- 3 years] and LEST [Language Evaluation Scale of Trivandrum 3-6 years]. A booklet was developed on activities that would help to stimulate the language and communication skills in children. The results of the study pointed out that none of the children in the two year old age group had any delay. In the three year old category, out of 12 girls, three had missed milestones, while boys (4) had missed a few milestones. In the four year old category, out of 67 children assessed, four girls and two boys had missed a few milestones. It was soothing to note that all the seven children studied in the 5 year old category did not have any delay in the milestones tested.

Index Terms: Children (2-5 years), Communication delay, Language delay, LEST

I. INTRODUCTION

Language and communication skills are the ability to understand others and express oneself using words, gestures or facial expression. According to Hentry Sweet "Language is the expression of ideas by means of speech sounds combined into words. Words are combined into sentences, this combination answering to that of ideas into thought". "Language as a system of symbols that allows members of a society to communicate with one another" (Macionis and Geber, 2005). Santrock (2005) refers

to "Language as a form of communication, whether spoken or written that is based a symbol".

Language development is critical in the first five years of a child's development. They will learn and master many skills and abilities, most of which are language and communication. Children can communicate with their parents, friends and teachers. Language provides an important opportunity for a child to interact with members of his / her family and other children outside his / her group and to identify himself / herself as an individual (Meduasi, 1999). The first three years are remarkable in the language they learn. They have the ability to learn more than one language at a time, and it is easy for children to learn one additional language. Research shows that there are more than one ways to learn a language during the critical period. Language is part of communication. Initially, children have the ability to communicate even though they have no language. Children use non-verbal and non-verbal communication to express their needs. They cry, grumble, and use body language. As they get older, children use strategies such as sign language and gestures to communicate their needs.

Now a days, children are suffering from lots of communication and language delay. Language and communication delays are increasing day by day. There are various reasons behind it. Today parents are not interacting much with their children properly. They don't interact with each other either. They are mostly engaged in Social Medias. But in olden days, families were joint in nature where there were many members in the family. Through it the children were getting lot of opportunity to interact with their parents and the family members. Today parents are unable to spend time with their children because they are engaged more

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with aspects related to their jobs. Children are spending most of their time on screen too, watching videos and such things than in actual verbal interaction. Due to these factors language delays is more common.

According to the University of Michigan Health System, delayed speech or language development is affecting 5 to 10 percent of preschool-aged children. One in 5 children are now learning to speak or use words later than other children their age. Some children may also exhibit behavioural problems because they feel frustrated when they cannot express what they want or need. Sometimes delays can be a warning sign of a more serious problem, including hearing loss, developmental delay in other areas, or autism spectrum disorder (ASD). Child language delay can also be a sign of a learning problem that is not determined until the school year.

Speech delay screening and identification may lead to early intervention and therapy. Early intervention not only “treats” the child, but also provides education, support and guidance to parents. Early intervention can affect child's growth. This will help them to communicate, interact with others, and improve their social skills and emotional development. Research suggests that 70-80% of late-speech infants overcome a language delay, which is only a significant proportion of their peers is 20% - 30% (Ellis EM et.al, 2008). Research shows that when children are not proficient in their language skills, they may have persistent language difficulties and have difficulty reading and writing when they arrive at school (Sharma M., Purdy, S.C. & Kelly, A.S. (2009). It is difficult to know which of the late speakers are and who belongs to the non-catching group (Dale, P et.al, 2003)

Early intervention provides parents with the tools they need to facilitate speech and language development. Parents and / or caregivers are the centre of early intervention because they provide the everyday language models needed to help children develop language and communicate more effectively. Through early intervention, parents can teach valuable early-language strategies, thereby helping them to facilitate child's speech and language development during play, reading books, eating, bathing, and daily routines. They can teach specific queuing and / or feedback strategies for specific speech sounds. Remediation includes improving communication skills in child's play and daily routines. This is the most common result that young children with communication delays expect from speech and language interference.

II. LITERATURE SURVEY

Sunderajan, Kanhere (2019) conducted a cross sectional study at Pediatric outpatient department of a teaching hospital. They investigated the prevalence and risk factors of speech-language delay in children aged 1-12 years. The sample consisted of eighty four children at the age groups of 1-12 years. The

guardians of these children were requested to answer a questionnaire and the investigator recorded the history of the child's morbidity pattern and the risk factors for speech delay and also assessed the child's developmental milestones. The study found that the prevalence of speech and language delay was 2.53%. Medical risk factors include birth defects, seizure disorder and ortho-antifungal disorders. Family reasons were low parental education, generalizability, good family history, multilingual environment, and inadequate stimulation. Several studies revealed that untreated speech and language delays persisted in 40% –60% of children, and these children are at increased risk of social, emotional, behavioural, and cognitive problems as they reach adulthood (Morgans, Eecen, et al, 2017). The extent of speech delay is difficult to quantify because it is traditionally believed that speech delays occur in families, which is not the cause of alarm. Often the "wait-and-see" policy leads to delayed diagnosis and intervention for speech delays. As a first-degree relative of the affected member, a good family history of speech-reading disorders (sarcasm, unclear speech, late speech, poor vocabulary, dyslexia) is associated with speech and language delay (Parakh, Parakh, Bhansali, 2012). Well-educated parents not only engage with their children but also use more complex words, which stimulate and enhance their children's language skills (Mallhi, Singhi, 1999). A large family size is an important factor for speech delay (Karbasi et.al, 2011).

Duff & Tomblin (2018) conducted a study on the topic Literacy as an Outcome of Language Development and its Impact on Children's Psychosocial and Emotional Development. In this study he found that the literature generally supports the existence of a strong link between spoken language skills and subsequent reading and behavioural development. The relationship between early spoken language and later reading development is thought to be causal in nature, and speech skills, especially phonetic awareness and listening comprehension, are the basic precursors of successful reading. Children with a deficiency in phonological processing are more likely to have early decoding problems, which may lead to reading comprehension problems. Although words can be decoded, children with hearing comprehension may have difficulty reading comprehension problems.

Nair, (2014) and his assistants conducted a study on the topic “Effect of Early Language Intervention among Children 0–3 y with Speech and Language Delay”. The main objective of the study was to assess the effect of systematic clinic and home based early language intervention program in children reporting to the early language intervention clinic with full partnership of specially trained developmental therapist and the parents. The results obtained pointed out that out of the 455 children aged 0 to 3 years who completed the 6-month intervention successfully, the mean pre- and post-intervention language factors (LQ) were 60.79 and 70.62, respectively, and the observed 9.83 increase was statistically significant. According to a survey by INCLEN Trust, 8% of the children have speech and language delays. Several

population-based studies have recommended that screening infants for language delays reduces the number of children requiring special education, leading to improved language performance (Mallhi, Singh).

III. OBJECTIVES

- To assess the language and communication skills of selected children.
- To identify the number of children having delay among the selected sample
- To develop a booklet on activities that would help stimulate language and communication skills in children.

IV. PROPOSED APPROACH

A. Selected Area

The area selected for the study included four Anganwadi under the Muppathadam ICDS office and eight anganwadi under Vypin ICDS Office in Ernakulam district. Anganwadi were selected from the rural areas because it was presumed that there was lack of awareness about language development and communication skills in children. The investigator also wanted to check the level of awareness of the mothers/caretakers in those localities on aspects related to milestones of language development and methods to stimulate language development in children.

B. Selected sample

The investigator selected a sample of 100 children in the age group of 2-5 years from the rural anganwadi of Ernakulam district. This age group was chosen because it is the apt age or critical age for language development and any delay had to be corrected by age 2 or at least before 5. The investigator adopted purposive sampling techniques to select the sample from the area. Purposive sampling is referred to as judgmental sampling or selective or subjective sampling. In purposive sampling method the researchers select the sample according to researcher's knowledge and reliability.

C. Tools

The selection of an appropriate tool is an important part of research. The tool selected for the present study in order to collect information and assess the level of language and communication skills in children was LEST which is a standardised scale called the 'Language Evaluation Scale Trivandrum 0-3 year & Language Evaluation Scale Trivandrum 3-6 year'.

About the tool : LEST is a simple language screening tool used for early intervention, which is developed and validated by Child Development Centre (CDC), Trivandrum, Kerala. LEST is used in neurodevelopmental follow up clinic. LEST consists items related to receptive language development and expressive language

development of children. LEST (0-3) includes 33 items as well as LEST (3-6) contains 31 items.

Mode of usage: To rate LEST, the investigator first assesses the chronological age of the children. A vertical line was drawn by keeping a scale at the point corresponding to the chronological age of the child in months given horizontally in the X axis. All items that are indicated in bold blocks and that lie on the left side of the scale were expected to be completed or achieved by the children. If the child did not attain the age appropriate milestones, then that item is considered as missing or as a delayed development in the child.

D. Conduct of the study

A cross sectional survey method was planned to assess the language and communication skills in the selected children between the age group of 2-5 years. Survey method is a direct method to finding facts and collects the data directly from the sample.

E. Creating a Booklet

The investigator prepared a booklet for the mothers as well as anganwadi workers on developing language and communication skills in children. The booklet briefly explained about language and communication skills in children, importance of language and communication skills, language milestones, causes and signs of language delay, daily activities and games for communication and activities to encourage speech and language development.

F. Data Analysis

The collected data was consolidated, tabulated and analysed using percentages.

V. RESULT AND DISCUSSIONS

In the study the age range of the participants was 2-5 years. Only 1 percent among the selected children was 2 years old. Twenty six percent of children were three years of age and below and 67% fell in the age group of four years. Seven percent of the children were 5-year-olds. The result shows that more children included in the study were in the age range of 3- 4 years. Out of the selected 100 respondents, 46 percent of the children were girls and remaining 55percent were boys.

The table above Table show that out of the 12 girls and 14 boys assessed in the three year old category only three girls (25%) had problems with one milestone namely telling the gender of the child when asked. This may not be completely acknowledged as a delay because there may be other reasons that the child was not taught about this aspect earlier and the child was totally unaware of the concept.

Table I: Language delays/ Missed milestones identified using LEST in 3 year old children

Delayed / Missed Milestones identified	Girls		Boys	
	(N = 12)	%	(N = 14)	%
Does not understand distinction between personal pronoun.	0	0	2	14
Does not have a speaking vocabulary of 10-20 words.	0	0	3	21
Does not identify all objects and pictures.	0	0	1	7
Not able to combine words	0	0	4	29
Does not ask for personal needs	0	0	3	21
Concept of one.	0	0	1	7
Names four pictures.	0	0	1	7
Gives own name when asked.	0	0	1	7
Understand common adjectives.	0	0	1	7
Tells gender when asked.	3	25	2	14

Hence it could be tested whether the child understands the concept after teaching. As regards the boys, it was seen that more boys when compared to girls were yet to complete their milestones. Four boys (29%) showed a delay in combining words and two of them (14%) could not report their gender. Three boys (21%) had lesser vocabulary and also had difficulty in communicating their needs. There was some concern with one boy who showed delay in many of the aspects studied which has to be taken into consideration and reassessed. It was recommended to the parents that they take the child for assessment and therapy which would be highly beneficial for the child as it is the right time for intervention.

Table II: Language delays of 4 year old children

Delayed / Missed Milestones identified	Girls		Boys	
	(N = 29)	%	(N = 38)	%
Uses voice to pointing	1	3	0	0
Understand distinction between personal pronoun	1	3	2	5
Speaking vocabulary of 10-20 words.	0	0	1	3
Concept of one	2	7	1	3
Names four pictures	0	0	1	3
Listen to story and rhymes	1	3	0	0
Understand common adjectives	1	3	1	3
Tells gender when asked	2	7	2	5
Uses three word sentences	0	0	2	5
Know some spatial concepts	1	3	0	0
Understand 2 or more propositions	1	3	2	5
Uses can't, don't, plurals	2	7	1	3
Uses and in sentences	1	3	2	5
Recognizers 3 or more colours	2	7	2	5
Say functions of 3 objects	4	14	0	0
Uses word consists of any 8 out of p, m, n, w, h, b, k, g, t, d, ng, f sounds	3	10	0	0
Comprehends simple present and future tense	2	7	0	0
Uses what, who & why questions	2	7	0	0

Table II discuss in detail on the number and percentage of children showing a lag in their milestones of language development. It is clear that none of the children showed prominent delay but there were some who missed some of the milestones. In the girls category it can be noted that two children (7%) had some difficulty with concept of numbers, gender discrimination, and formation of plurals, colour recognition and

the like. Four children (14%) had problems with saying functions of objects which has to be considered seriously and another 10 percent had problems with usage of words having consonants. On the other hand in the boys section, number of boys having missed milestones seemed to be fewer in that only two children (5%) showed problems such as using words in sentences, colour recognition, saying gender and the like.

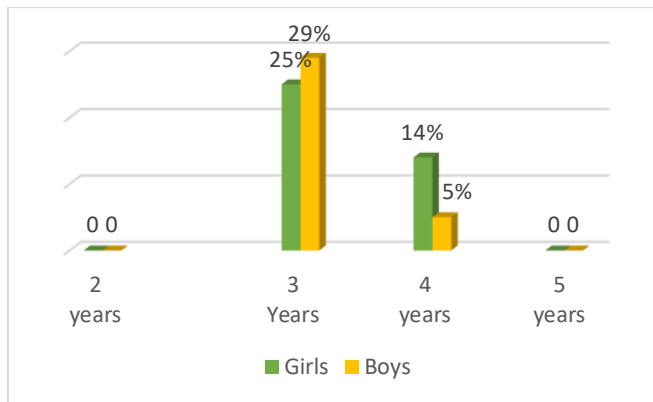


Fig 1: Language Delays Identified in Children using LEST

From fig 1, it was evident that none of the children in the two year old age group had any delay. In the three year old category, out of 12 girls, three had missed milestones, while boys (4) had missed a few milestones. In the four year old category, out of 67 children assessed, four girls and two boys had missed a few milestones. It was soothing to note that all the seven children studied in the 5 year old category did not have any delay in the milestones tested

CONCLUSION

The present study discusses “Assessment of Language and Communication skills of 2-5 year old children in selected rural areas of Ernakulam District”. It assesses language and communication skills of selected children to identify the number of children having delay. We can conclude that the estimate of language delay among the participants are decreasing significantly and identifying and intervening the delay at the right time ensures the proper growth and development of the child.

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