



NATIONAL OPEN UNIVERSITY OF NIGERIA

# ECE 120



**Development of Appropriate  
Skills in Children**  
**Module 2**

# **ECE 120 (Development of Appropriate Skills in Children) Module 2**

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# Unit 1 An Overview of Language Development in Early Years

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## 1.0 Introduction

Language is the most awesome of universal human development. It develops with extraordinary speed during the early childhood years. Children vary in the rate at which they learn language but eventually, almost every child masters the complex linguistic system in which he/she is immersed. This process begins in infancy and continues throughout the early childhood years. In this unit, we shall take an overview of the processes of language development from infancy to early childhood and examine the milestones in early childhood language. We shall also look at ways to encourage language development.

## 2.0 Objectives

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- define language
- explain the processes involved in language development from infancy to early childhood
- identify milestones in early childhood language development.

## 3.0 Main Content

### 3.1 The Meaning of Language

The term “language” is used to refer to speech behaviour but more specifically, it refers to those systems through which people communicate with one another. The systems are those based on the use of the voice in the articulation of patterns of sounds, words, and signs representing particular elements of experience. All children in every culture master the complicated system of their native language unless severe deprivation or physical problems interfere. There are over 6,000 national languages in the world. In general, cultures develop words for the concepts that are important to them.

It is likely that many factors – mostly, biological, cultural and experience play a significant role in language development. But to master a language, children must read the intentions of others so they can acquire words, phrases and concepts of their language and also find patterns in the ways other people use these words and phrases to construct the grammar of their language. The important point is that children learn language as they develop other cognitive abilities by actively trying to make sense of what they hear and by looking for patterns and making up rules to put together the jigsaw puzzle of language. The journey to this end commences from infancy.

### Self-Assessment Exercise 1

1. What is language?
2. Name two factors that play significant role in language development.

## 3.2 Language Development

The process of language development begins in infancy and continues throughout the early childhood years. The process of language development can be divided into **pre-linguistic** and **linguistic speech** period.

### The Pre-linguistic Speech Period

Immediately children are born healthy, such newborns can maintain eye contact with someone within their range of vision. At birth, infants engage in undifferentiated crying. In other words, crying is the earliest form of infant communication. Parents quickly learn the many different messages children send in this way. That is, parents especially mothers distinguish between cry to communicate pain and cry to communicate loneliness. This and other forms of pre-linguistic speech consist of vocalisations or voiced sounds. These include crying, cooing, babbling, gestures, emotional expressions.

**Crying:** This is the first way in which the infant is able to communicate with the world at large. Through this medium, babies make known their needs for someone to relieve their hunger, pain, fatigue and other unpleasant bodily states and to satisfy their desire for attention. Parents are able to distinguish the various cries because nature has provided for such differentiation in the total quality of the cries.

**Cooing:** This is the making of soft, repetitive vowel sounds like “ooh” and “aah”. These sounds seem to be produced when the baby is relaxed and contented. The sound is otherwise known as voluntarily produced comfort sound. They are unlearned and are universally found even among deaf infants. They are regarded as playful activities which give the baby enjoyment. They are not used as a form of communication.

**Babbling:** Babbling is the stringing together of consonants and vowel sounds, at first in simple repeated sequences “da-da-da”, “ba-ba-ba”, “ma-ma-ma”. Many of the consonants in babbling are the ones that occur in the language to which the child is exposed. Sometimes, there are those that belong to other world languages or non-existence.

It should be noted that when infants are uttering “da-da-da” sound, they are not calling “daddy”, they are just exploring the sounds of language. It is the adults that often connect the repetitive syllables of babbling to, real objects, people or events reinforcing the infants’ babbling efforts by repeating the sound back to them.

**Gestures:** This form of communication consist movement of the limbs or the body which serve as substitutes for or supplements to speech. As a speech substitute, an idea is conveyed to others by meaningful movement of the limbs or some other parts of the body.

**Emotional expression:** This is communicated through facial and bodily changes. There are pleasant and unpleasant emotions. The pleasant emotions are accompanied by pleasant vocalisations in the form of cooing, chuckling sounds and laughs. The unpleasant emotions are accompanied by whimpering, and crying. Happiness is expressed by relaxing the bodies, waving arms and legs, and smiles appearing on the face.

On the other hand, anger is expressed by tensing the body, slashing movements of the arms and legs, tensing expressions of the face and cries of anger.

Pre-linguistic speech can be summarised as follows in Table 1.

**Table 1: Emergence of Oral Language**

Pre-Linguistic Speech	Description
Undifferentiated crying	At birth, infants signal their needs through this reflexive form of communication.
Differentiated crying	At one month, infants' crying is more precise with different patterns, intentions, intensities and pitches reflecting different emotional states.
Cooing	By six weeks, chance of utterances of vowel sounds occurs as part of infants' expression of contentment.
Babbling	At about 3 to 4 months, infants playfully repeat simple consonant and vowel sounds (ba-ba-ba, da-da-da, ma-ma-ma, je-je-je).

Source: Estes, Linda (2004). *Essentials of Child Care and Early Education*.

## Self-Assessment Exercise 2

1. Identify some pre-linguistic speech of children at infancy.
2. Differentiate between crying and cooing.
3. What is the importance of babbling?

## 3.3 The Linguistic Speech

Near the end of the first year of life, children begin to speak words as they continue to receive favourable feedback for their vocalisation attempts. They begin to imitate and repeat the sounds of frequently heard words. This is called echo speech, which is still part of pre-linguistic behaviour but echo-speech serves as a bridge between pre-linguistic and linguistic speech.

At toddlerhood, children proceed rapidly in their acquisition of language. To them, linguistic speech occurs when meaning is consistently attached to a particular speech sound. When repeated utterances of the same speech sound such as “ba-ba” are consistently met with the same person (baba in Yoruba Language meaning father), infants begin to connect the speech sound with the person, therefore, ‘baba’ becomes the word/name for father in Yoruba language.

Many of the words at this stage carry much meaning than the adult's equivalent; this is referred to as *holophrastic speech*. Holophrases generally represent familiar objects or actions. As toddlers mature, they begin the process of stringing two words together to form simple sentences. A toddler who wants to go in the car with daddy may say “me go”. This is referred to as telegraphic speech because of the limited word usage. Telegraphic sentences are shortened sentences that include two or three key words. These two-word sentences are a major step forward in the young children's use of language.

During the preschool years that is by age 3 through 5, the language understanding of children continues to rapidly expand. Vocabulary increases at an amazing rate, with new words added almost daily. Sentences move quickly beyond the two-word stage to more complex combinations. Children keep on refining their understanding of the rules of communication and becoming more proficient at holding a conversation with others.

**Table 2: Linguistic Speech**

Linguistic Speech	Description
Holophrases	At about 12 months, infants use simple words to express thoughts.  Average one year olds have 5-word vocabularies, 10-word vocabularies at about 15 months and 50-word vocabulary at 19 months
Telegraphic Speech	At about 24 months, children string 2 or 3 words together to form sentences using only the essential nouns and verbs approximately.
Grammatically Correct Speech	By 3 years, children may have vocabularies of some 900 words. They use longer sentences containing all parts of speech. They apply many grammatical principles, though their sentence constructions tend to follow the rules too closely.

Source: Estes, Linda (2004). *Essentials of Child Care and Early Education*.

### Self-Assessment Exercise 3

1. What is holophrastic speech?
2. Give some examples of telegraphic speech.
3. What is the average vocabulary of a 3-year old child?

### 3.4 Milestones in Early Childhood Language and Ways to Encourage Development

**Table 3: Details of the Milestones of Language and how to Enhance the Development**

Age Range	Milestone	Strategies to Encourage Development
Between 2 and 3 years	Identifies body parts; calls self "me" instead of name; combines nouns and verbs; has a 450-word vocabulary; uses short sentences; matches 3-4 colours, knows big and	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Help the child listen and follow instructions by playing simple games.</li> <li>• Repeat new words over and over.</li> <li>• Describe what you are doing,</li> </ul>

	little; likes to hear same story repeated; forms some plurals; answers “where” questions.	<p>planning, thinking.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have the child deliver simple messages for you.</li> <li>• Show the child you understand what he or she says by answering, smiling, and nodding your head.</li> <li>• Expand what the child says. Child: “more juice” You say, “Chris wants more juice”.</li> </ul>
Between 3 and 4 years	Can tell a story; sentence length of 4-5 words, vocabulary about 1,000 words; knows last name, name of street, several nursery rhymes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Talk about how objects are the same or different.</li> <li>• Help the child to tell stories using books and pictures.</li> <li>• Encourage play with other children.</li> <li>• Talk about places you’ve been or will be going.</li> </ul>
Between 4 and 5 years	Sentence length of 4-5 words; uses past tense; vocabulary of about 1500 words; identifies colours, shapes; asks many questions like “why?” and “who”?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Help the child sort objects and things (e.g. things to eat, animals).</li> <li>• Teach the child how to use the telephone.</li> <li>• Let the child help you plan activities.</li> <li>• Continue talking about the child’s interests.</li> <li>• Let the child tell and make up stories for you.</li> </ul>
Between 5 and 6 years	Sentence length of 5-6 words; average 6-year-old has vocabulary of about 10,000 words; defines objects by their use; knows spatial relations ( like “on top” and “far”) and opposites; knows address; understands same and different; uses all types of sentences.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Praise children when they talk about feelings, thoughts, hopes, fears.</li> <li>• Sing songs, rhymes.</li> <li>• Talk with them as you would to adults.</li> </ul>
At every age		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Listen and show your pleasure when the child talks to you.</li> <li>• Carry on conversations with the child.</li> <li>• Ask questions to get the child to think and talk.</li> <li>• Read books to the child every day, increasing in</li> </ul>



		length as the child develops.
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## 4.0 Conclusion

This unit has helped us to understand what language is, the processes involved in acquiring language. The process may appear effortless but in reality, it is a major undertaking for children. Every child eventually masters the complex linguistic system in which he/she is immersed.

## 5.0 Summary

Language is the speech behaviour that refers to those systems through which people communicate with one another. Factors like biological, cultural and experimental affect language development. The process of language acquisition can be categorised into two, the pre-linguistic speech and the linguistic speech. Pre-linguistic speech include crying, cooing, babbling and the linguistic speech include holophrases, telegraphic speech and grammatically correct speech.

## 6.0 Self-Assessment Exercise

1. Vividly describe the characteristics of emergence of oral language in the pre-linguistic speech period of children.
2. What are the characteristics of children in the toddlerhood and pre-school years?
3. Explain the language development milestone of children between ages 2 to 4.
4. How can you encourage language development of children between ages 4 and 5?

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## Unit 2 Theories of Language Development

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### 1.0 Introduction

The process of language development is a major task for young children. The theorists that study language acquisition have considerable difficulty in explaining it.

In this unit, we shall examine three different views of how children acquire language, those of the behaviourists, nativists and the interactionists. The behaviourists believe that children acquire language through the same stimulus-response connections that influence learning in all areas.

According to Skinner (1957), children hear language spoken by parents and others, imitate that speech and are rewarded for the efforts. This positive reinforcement encourages them to communicate the more. The nativists theory suggests that every child regardless of culture, intellectual ability or socio-economic status inherits the genetic capability for language. However, the proponents of the interactionists theory suggest that language acquisitions combine innate ability with environmental influence. In this unit, we shall examine the contributions of the theorists to the development of language in the early years.

### 2.0 Objectives

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- explain the behaviourist perspective in how children acquire language
- discuss how the nativists explain that children are biologically primed to acquire language
- describe the interactionist perspective about language development.

### 3.0 Main Content

#### 3.1 The Behaviourist Theory of Language Development Acquisition

One of the proponents of the behaviourist theory was B.F. Skinner. He proposed that language like any other behaviour is acquired through operant conditioning. According to Skinner, the frequency of behaviour can be increased by following it with a wide variety of reinforcement such as praise, a friendly smile or a new toy. It can be decreased through punishment such as disapproval or withdrawal of privileges.

The concept of reinforcement is a central concept in operant conditioning. Reinforcers are stimuli that increase the frequency of the behaviour they follow. In relating this theory to language development, children learn to operate on the environment or to engage in certain behaviour because of the effects of that behaviour.

Research reveals that as the baby makes sounds, parents reinforce those that are most like words with smiles, hugs and speech in return. Moving the theory forward, some

behaviourists believe that children rely on imitation to rapidly acquire complex utterances such as whole phrases and sentences.

For example, children who are reared in Hausa or Yoruba speaking homes learn Hausa or Yoruba and not Edo or Urhobo. Therefore, language development can be explained in terms of imitation and reinforcement. Children learn languages at least in part by observation and imitation. It seems likely that many vocabulary words especially nouns and verbs are learned by imitation.

### **The Role of Reinforcement**

Although Skinner allowed that pre-linguistic vocalisations such as cooing and babbling may be inborn, but parents reinforce children for babbling that approximates the form of real words such as “ba” which in Yoruba resembles “baba”. Children do in fact increase their babbling when it results in adults smiling at them, stroking them and talking back to them.

Research shows that as children progress in their first year, they babble the sounds of their mother tongue with increasing frequency. This shows that children actively attend to the sounds in their linguistic environments and are intrinsically motivated to utter them.

Skinner further said that children acquire their early vocabularies through shaping. Shaping means the gradual building of complex behaviour patterns through the reinforcement of successive approximations of the target behaviour. For example, parents require that children’s utterances be progressively closer to actual words before they are reinforced.

More recent research shows that reinforcement accelerates the growth of vocabulary in young children. To Skinner, multi-word utterances are complex stimulus – response chains that are also taught by shaping. As children’s utterances increase in length, parents foster correct word order by uttering sentences to their children and reinforcing imitation.

Although reinforcement and imitation contribute to early language development, they are best viewed as supporting rather than fully explaining it. Young children create many novel utterances that are not reinforced by or copied from others. Even when children do imitate others’ language, they do so selectively focussing on building their own vocabularies and on refining aspects of language that they are working on at the moment. This takes us to the theory of the nativists.

### **Self-Assessment Exercise I**

1. Name one of the proponents of the behaviourist theory of language acquisition.
2. State clearly what the theory says.
3. Give examples of reinforcement.
4. Reinforcement and imitation fully explain the process of language development. True or False.

## **3.2 The Nativist Theory of Language Acquisition**

While the behaviourist theory explains some aspects of language acquisition, the nativist proponents add further insights into how children develop linguistic competence. The

nativist theorists suggest that every child regardless of culture, intellectual ability or socio-economic status inherits the genetic ability for language.

According to Chomsky (1965), the young child has amazing language skill etched into the structure of the brain. In other words, every child has an inborn tendency to acquire language. This inborn tendency is labelled 'Language Acquisition Device' (LAD). This innate tendency is found in the universality of human language abilities in the regularity of the early production of sounds, even among deaf children and in the invariant sequences of language development, regardless of which language the child is learning.

According to these theorists, LAD contains a universal grammar or set of rules common to all languages. It permits children as soon as they have acquired sufficient vocabulary to combine words into grammatically consistent novel utterances and to understand the meaning of sentences, no matter which language they hear.

Because the LAD is specifically suited for language processing, children master the structure of language spontaneously and swiftly. They regarded the deliberate training by parents as unnecessary. To them, children are biologically primed to acquire language. In other words, children are genetically prewired to attend to language and to deduce the rules for constructing sentences from ideas.

There are evidences supporting Chomsky's theory in literature. We shall examine a few of them in this section. Newborn nannies are remarkably sensitive to speech sounds and they everywhere reach a major language milestone in a similar sequence. This is consistent with a biologically based language programme.

Also, the ability to master a grammatically complex language system seems to be unique to humans as efforts to teach language to non-human primates have met with limited success. Furthermore, evidence for specialised language area in the brain research shows that many parts of the brain are involved in language development and that each person may have a unique pattern of organisation for language ability and a sensitive period for language development that language learning occurs during one or two sensitive periods which begins at about 18-24 months and last till puberty, have also been interpreted to support the theory.

It is now widely accepted that humans have a unique, biologically based capacity to acquire language. This is a major contribution of Chomsky's theory to the current views of language development. However, this theory has been challenged on several grounds. Researchers have great difficulty specifying Chomsky's universal grammar. The major problem is the absence of a complete description of these abstract grammatical structures.

Moreover, Chomsky's assumption that grammatical knowledge is innately determined does not fit with certain observations of language development. Children are found to continue to refine and generalise many grammatical terms. They engage in much piecemeal learning and making errors along the way.

## **Self-Assessment Exercise 2**

1. What is LAD?
2. Explain the theory of the Nativists.

3. What is the major contribution of this theory to language learning?

### 3.3 The Psycholinguistic/Interactionist Theory

The proponents of this theory include Piaget (1959) and Vygotsky (1962). The proponents suggest that language acquisition involves the combination of innate ability and the environmental influences such as exposure to parental speech and reinforcement. There are two perspectives of the interactionist theory - one applies to the information-processing and the second on social interaction.

Some information-processing theorists assume that children make sense of their complex language environment by applying powerful cognitive capacities of a general kind. They noted that regions of the brain housing language also govern similar perceptual motor and cognitive abilities. The example given to support this is the fact that damage to parts of the left hemisphere results in difficulty comprehending both language and other patterned stimuli such as music. They agree with Chomsky's nativist perspective that infants are amazing analysers of speech and other information.

The other theorists, which are those who emphasise that child's social skills, suggest that social skills and language experiences are centrally involved in language development.

For example, an active child, well-endowed for making sense of language strives to communicate. In doing so, he cues his caregivers to provide appropriate language experiences which help him relate content and structure of language to its social meaning.

## 4.0 Conclusion

The process of language acquisition may appear effortless but in reality it is a major undertaking for children. Theorists have proposed three different views of how children acquire language. Theorists like B.F. Skinner believed that children acquire language through the same stimulus-response connections that influence learning in other areas and Chomsky suggests that every child is pre-wired to listen to language in such a way that they come to understand the rule of grammar. However, the interactionists highlight the importance of the influences of both the biological structures and the environment influences on language acquisition.

## 5.0 Summary

Researchers examined the theories of language development from three perspectives. There are those who believe in behaviourism. For example, Skinner (1957) argued that children acquire language through the stimulus-response connections. Children hear language spoken by parents and others. They imitate such speech and are rewarded for their efforts. This positive reinforcement encourages them to communicate more.

On the other hand, Chomsky (1990) and others believe that children are genetically pre-wired to attend to language. They have inborn tendency that primes the nervous system to learn grammar. However, the psycholinguistic theory views language learning as a process that involves an interaction between environmental influences and an inborn tendency to acquire language.

## 6.0 Self-Assessment Exercise

1. With vivid examples to illustrate, describe the behaviourist theory of language development.
2. Explain the Nativist theory of language development. Give examples of research findings to support this theory.
3. What is the interactionist perspective of language development? How can you sustain this theory in line with your knowledge of language acquisition?

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## Unit 3 Listening Skills

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### 1.0 Introduction

Listening is the language skill that children (i.e. those without hearing impairments) use the most in the outside world. Research reveals that on average, people spend 70 percent of their waking hours communicating and three-fourths of them allocated to listening and speaking. Unfortunately, despite the predominance of listening, it is the one that is taught the least in the classroom and most people get little or no training in listening. Listening is therefore referred to as the neglected or forgotten communication skill or language art. In this unit, we shall examine the definitions, roles, strategies and challenges of listening skill.

### 2.0 Objectives

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- explain the concept of listening
- discuss the roles of listening in language development
- identify the functions that can foster listening
- discuss the obstacles to good listening.

### 3.0 Main Content

#### 3.1 Definitions of Listening

It is not an easy task to define listening because we use the word in everyday conversation to mean different things. For example, if a teacher says a child is not listening, it often means that the child is not thinking along with the teacher. If a parent says to a child that the child is not listening to him/her, it means the child is not obeying or doing what the parent is saying and in an advocacy context, “you are not listening” often means you are not agreeing with the advocate.

Other people may define listening as “hearing what people are saying”, “You listen to the rumbling noise you hear”, “it means to hear something, e.g. people talking or animals making sounds, etc.”. Others may define listening as “paying attention and using one’s imagination”. From the above definitions, effective listening goes beyond merely receiving sounds.

Listening is not just a noun, it could be viewed as a verb; that is, it is a process; it is what the listener does. According to McSporran (1997), listening is the necessary, interactive process that enables the brain to construct meaning from the sounds that are heard. For the purpose of this unit, listening is defined as the process of taking in information through the sense of hearing and making meaning from what was heard.

The kind of listening that children need in learning environment is effective listening which involves receiving i.e. taking in the verbal or nonverbal message, attending to that is engaging effort and desire to keep our attention focussed completely on the message, assigning

meaning that is interpreting or understanding the message through cultural contexts and personal intellectual and emotional process.

Let us compare listening with hearing so that we can distinguish between the two and also be able to describe what effective listening is.

**Table 1: Listening versus Hearing**

<b>Listening</b>	<b>Hearing</b>
Is a cognitive ability that is learned and practised.	Is a sensory function that develops on its own.
Is a thought process and does not begin until children try to interpret the sounds they hear.	Is the act of receiving sounds, and begins even before birth.
Relies on experience, skill and practice.	Depends on physiology in the ear to transmit impulses to the brain.
Comprehends sensory input.	Processes sensory input.
Is very focussed and intentional. We have to become aware, filter our distractions and focus attention.	Is involuntary and not necessarily focussed. We hear many different sounds simultaneously that compete for attention.
Occurs when there is a clear purpose in mind.	Does not necessarily have a specific purpose.
Can be improved through practice and training.	Can often be improved through technology.
Often benefits from patience and wisdom of advancing age.	Often declines in older adults and needs to be augmented.

Source: *Learning to Listen, Listening to Learn* by Jilango, M.R. (2007)

### **Self-Assessment Exercise 1**

1. Define listening.
2. Name at least three variables that affect listening.
3. What kind of listening do children need in a learning environment?

## **3.2 The Role of Listening in Language Development**

Listening is where language development begins. The four communication skills are listening, speaking, reading and writing. Table 6 below shows the relationship among the four skills.



**Table 2: Listening as One of the Four Communication Skills**

	<b>Oral language relies on spoken words</b>	<b>Text-based language relies on print materials</b>
Receptive - receives and interprets a message.	<b>Listening</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Usually begins at birth to 1 year.</li> <li>Children learn to make sense out of the messages they hear.</li> </ul>	<b>Reading</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Typically begins near age 5.</li> <li>Children use oral language to decipher written language.</li> </ul>
Expressive – composes and transmits a message.	<b>Speaking</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Often begins near the end of the first year.</li> <li>Children use language to express their ideas.</li> </ul>	<b>Writing</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ordinarily begins near age 6.</li> <li>Children use knowledge of language and printed words to express their ideas.</li> </ul>

The above table explains the relationships between listening and other communication skills.

Listening is directly linked to reading because both are receptive language skills requiring the receiver to interpret a message. Listening is so fundamental that children who have listening comprehension problems usually have problems with speaking reading and writing.

According to research, the role of listening in language development includes the following:

### **Pre-birth to 1 year old**

- A foetus attends to the mother's voice and can distinguish it from the voices of other women.
- Newborns are sensitive to pitch. They chuck more rapidly when they are interested in something. When speech and other sounds are played, newborns suck more rapidly in response to language. This demonstrates a preference for speech.
- Listening affects mood. Infants on respirators breathe more rhythmically when music with a strong beat, rather than a lullaby is played softly in the background.
- Vocal imitation is one of the earliest communicative strategies used by children.
- Newborns are able to distinguish the sounds of all languages.

### **1 to 3 years old**

- Toddlers use repetitive pointing and pantomime as important communication tools.
- Toddlers learn to interpret what another is talking about - even if an object referred to is out of sight.

- By 15 months, many toddlers have an oral vocabulary of about 10 words.
- By 16 months, most toddlers can understand simple requests.
- By age 2, most children have a speaking vocabulary of about 50 words.
- 97 percent of 3-year olds can connect two or three words to form phrases and simple sentences.
- Listening requires the ability to pay attention.

### **3 to 8 years old**

- Listening is the foundation for speaking, reading, and writing in children in hearing impairments.
- By age 5, a child's receptive vocabulary soars to nearly 8,000 words.
- The relationship between listening comprehension and reading comprehension gets stronger as children's word recognition becomes increasingly automatic.

## **Self-Assessment Exercise 2**

1. What are the basic communication skills?
2. Name the oracy skills.

### **3.3 General Functions of Listening**

- Children learn by listening because language is fundamental to perception, memory, thinking and behaviour. They listen to obtain information, learn and develop thinking skills.
- Effective listening can make a real difference when it comes to recognising danger, making wise decisions and reacting appropriately.
- Another important function of listening is to cultivate appreciation, enjoyment and positive attitudes and values.

### **3.4 Obstacles of Listening**

There are four broad categories of obstacles to effective listening. These include:

- Physiological
- Cognitive and language processing
- Psychological and
- Issues with experience, skill and training.

**Physiological obstacles:** include permanent, irreversible and significant hearing loss or impairment. This is a formidable obstacle to listening. About 50 percent of severe hearing loss is thought to be genetic but other causes are injury or illness.

**Cognitive and language processing obstacles:** Cognitive conditions that commonly interfere with a child's ability to listen effectively include attention difficulties, learning disabilities, language disorders and language processing problems.

**Psychological obstacles:** The ability to listen can be impaired by distracting or upsetting factors such as fatigue, hunger, illness or toileting needs. When children are under severe stress, for example, if they are physically or emotionally abused, they are understandably pre-occupied with that situation and may appear to be inattentive, distant and withdrawn.

**Obstacles of experience, skills and training:** Experience, skills and training affect listening. This includes the child's interest in the message, perception of the speaker and proficiency in the language.

### Self-Assessment Exercise 3

1. List the functions of language.
2. What are the obstacles to good listening?

## 4.0 Conclusion

The importance of listening is very crucial as this is the first communication and foundation skill children need to succeed in other language arts. Despite the predominance of listening in the other skills, listening is least taught and it is almost neglected. Therefore, there is the need to re-awake interest in this skill and consciously strategise to inculcate the skill in the children.

## 5.0 Summary

In this unit, we defined listening as the process of taking in information through the sense of hearing and making meaning from what we hear and noted that children need effective listening that involves receiving information, attending to the information and assigning meaning by interpreting to understand.

We established that listening is where language development starts from and listening is directly linked to reading. Functions of listening include listening to get information, ultimate appreciation and enjoyment, recognise danger and make wise decisions. Finally, obstacles to good listening include physiological, cognitive and language processing obstacle, psychological and obstacles of experience, skills and training.

## 6.0 Self-Assessment Exercise

1. Attempt a comprehensive definition of listening.
2. Distinguish between listening and hearing.
3. Discuss the importance of listening in language development in early childhood.
4. Explain the obstacles to good listening.
5. How can listening be promoted in early childhood?

## 7.0 Reference/Further Reading

Jilango, M.R. (2007). *Learning to Listen, Listening to Learn*. Washington DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children.

## Unit 4 Early Literacy Development (Reading and Writing)

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### 1.0 Introduction

Language and literacy are related but not identical. Although all children learn oral language, many find reading and writing more difficult. Illiteracy is a burden that some adults carry with them throughout their lives.

Research evidence supports that reading and writing go together because reading and writing are skills that children develop simultaneously. Early reading is supported and improved by early writing. Young children need reading to help them learn about writing and they need writing to learn about reading.

In other words, one area of development supports the other area. It is important to provide a variety of authentic writing experiences as it is to provide opportunities to explore and learn about reading. In this unit, we shall examine the concept of literacy, explain reading skills and writing skills and describe ways that the skills could be enhanced in the early years.

### 2.0 Objectives

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- explain the concept of literacy
- describe reading and writing skills
- identify ways to enhance literacy skills in early years.

### 3.0 Main Content

#### 3.1 Concept of Literacy

Literacy is language in use. It involves listening, speaking, reading and writing. These skills are all parts of early literacy learning and they are all connected. It is important for young children to learn to understand spoken language, become aware of the different sounds in language and start learning about printed letters and words.

Literacy is the ability to read and use written information appropriately in a range of contexts; for example, to speak or acquire information to develop critical thinking. Being literate enables children to construct meaning from print. Children learn about literacy through the everyday things that happen in their house, classroom and in their community. It is important to encourage a love for reading and to demonstrate the power of writing to communicate ideas. As with oral language development, the early childhood years are pivotal for learning to read and write.

## Self-Assessment Exercise 1

1. What is literacy?
2. Identify some literacy skills.
3. Differentiate between literacy and language.

### 3.2 Reading Skills

Reading is the ability to construct meaning from written materials. In most languages, reading is the cornerstone of learning. The foundation for reading is built in early childhood. Reading is a complex process that depends on perceptual, cognitive and linguistic processes. It relies on skills in the integration of visual and auditory information. Accurate awareness of the sounds in the child's language is an extremely important factor in subsequent reading achievement. Reading also requires the ability to make basic visual discriminations.

#### Benefits of Reading

We read to get information and use it for various benefits. These include:

- Reading is a key to unlocking the benefits society has to offer.
- Good readers find endless pleasure in literature. Reading is magical. It can transport one to the worlds unknown, reveal aspects of the inner self previously undiscovered and raise possibilities unimagined.
- Reading makes textbook learning possible. It is also closely related to vocational efficiency.
- Skilled reading offers a gateway to ideas and information.
- Reading promotes civic consciousness, fosters civic engagement and rouses us from complacency.
- Reading promotes personal development. It can engender quiet reflection and move one to action.

## Self-Assessment Exercise 2

1. What is reading?
2. Identify two benefits of reading.

### 3.3 Writing Skills

Writing is an extraordinary complex process for young children. It requires children to formulate personal opinions or ideas and then translate them into written symbols that represent words they use in oral language. The process is very demanding on both an emotional and intellectual level.

The development of writing skills depends on a child's oral language facility and rich background experience. Writing has a special appeal to children as they feel increased permanency in comparison to speech. Children get a great feeling of creative achievement when they can repeatedly turn to a piece of work they themselves have written. Writing

celebrates the open-ended opportunity wherein children can express their feelings, ideas and fantasies.

At first, children particularly at pre-school age do not distinguish writing from drawing. When they try to write, they scribble just as they do when they draw. However, as they experiment with lines and shapes by scribbling and drawing, they develop more than just fine motor skills, notice print in storybooks and observe adults making marks on paper (writing), they attempt to print letters and later words. It is around the age 4 that children's writing shows some distinctive features of print.

Children often include picture-like devices in their writing, for example, using a circular shape to depict 'sun'. Gradually, between ages 4 and 6, children do realise that writing stands for language. This fact takes us to the issue of handwriting.

Handwriting is the writing done with a writing material – chalk, felt pen, marker, pen, pencil, etc. It is a person's particular style of writing. Handwriting is defined as penmanship. It is a tool for communication and self-expression.

The act of writing requires ability to formulate an idea in the mind, appropriate syntactic pattern, plan the correct graphic form for each letter and word and correct manipulation of the writing tool to produce letter shapes. Handwriting involves recognising and remembering different shapes (symbols) and relating them to spoken language.

It entails ability to reproduce these symbols by creating one's own written communication. It is imperative to provide pre-writing activities in visual, auditory, perceptual and oral language to enhance the understanding of the basic primary principles involved in literacy generally.

Moreover, there should be activities to improve the control of the hand like drawing, painting, moulding, building, colouring, matching exercises. These activities will ensure eye-hand coordination, left-right orientation and gain fine motor control.

Children will advance in perception to contribute to their ability to print/write. Writing centre could be created to provide many opportunities for early writing experiences which are essential for the literacy development. Simple writing materials such as pencils, pens, crayons, markers, recycled paper for rough drafts; lined paper for finished writing, etc. should be made available in the child's environment to promote writing.

### **Self-Assessment Exercise 3**

1. List three pre-writing activities.
2. Why is writing important to the child?
3. How can you enhance writing?

### **3.4 Literacy Teaching Strategies**

There are countless ways to encourage children's love for reading, writing, speaking and listening. Here are some of the best ways. As you read through, think about how many of these ideas can be worked into children's play activities.

1. **Conversation:** It is important to hold meaningful thought - provoking conversation with children. When talking with children, listen and respond to what they have to say. Use unusual words, expand what they say, offer more description and use more grammatically mature language. Challenge children to imagine, remember and think about things they see and hear around them. Invite them to play with sounds and words and think about spoken language itself. These activities will keep the conversation lively and children will actively participate using all their senses.
2. **Reading Aloud:** High-quality children's books should be used. Read aloud to the hearing of the child/children at least once every day. Share a variety of stories, poems and information with them over time. Talk about the text, before, during and after reading. Offer activities related to the materials read aloud. Select the favourites among the materials and read again and again.
3. **Exploring the Sounds of Language:** Exploring the sounds of language will increase phonological awareness. Children have to play with sounds and words and often find this quite funny. Play games and listen to stories, poems and songs that involve:
  - **Rhyme** - words that end with the same sound.
  - **Alliteration** - words that begin with the same letter.
  - **Sound matching** - find which word begins with a specific sound e.g. "Listen to the word duck. Duck starts with the /d/ sound. Which of these words starts with the same sound as duck: bird, dog, or cat?"
4. **Include Alphabet Activities:** Provide materials to help children learn the letters of the alphabet. The list could include ABC books, magnetic letters, alphabet blocks and puzzles and alphabet charts. These materials help to connect level names to meaningful things for children.
5. **Support emergent readers as they try to read books and other forms of print:** Young children need ties and spaces to explore books and print on their own or with friends.

You can help them by:

- reading favourite books especially predictable books with which children can chime in.
  - filling the child's/children's environment with meaningful print such as daily schedules, labels that show where materials are stored, reminders or creating a well-designed library centre stocked with lots of good books.
1. **Support emergent writing:** Young children need easy access to materials so they can build their writing skills, including scribble writing, random letter strings and invented spelling. Ensure to offer the children:
    - a demonstration of writing
    - opportunities for meaningful writing such as writing library books, checkout slips, charts that summarised a shared experience, etc.
    - writing materials that children can use in their play e.g. pencils and notepads to take orders or create lists.



2. **Explain how books and print work:** While introducing and reading books or other texts, help children learn the conventions of print by:
  - pointing to the print as you read it
  - inviting children to notice the differences between pictures and print
  - showing how books in English are read from left to right and top to bottom
  - pointing out different parts of books like the cover and the title page
  - encourage them to join in with repeated lines when you read their favourite stories.
3. Offer activities that explore a topic: When children choose and then study a topic such as shoes, they gain valuable background knowledge and have opportunities to use reading, writing and language skills. Children can listen to the teacher, read topic-related information books and look at the books on their own. Children can gather data using observation, experiments and interviews, act out what they have learned during dramatic play or rewind observations and information.

## 4.0 Conclusion

Above all we have discussed in this unit, ensure that children enjoy and succeed in reading, writing and spoken experiences. When children have fun with literacy activities, they will come back again and again creating healthy learning habits now and for years to come.

## 5.0 Summary

Literacy refers to the language in use. It involves listening, speaking, reading and writing. Reading is the ability to construct meaning from written materials. Reading is a key to unlocking the benefits society has to offer. Writing has a special appeal to children. Literacy development can be enhanced with the following strategies - conversation, reading aloud, exploring the sounds of language including alphabet activities, supporting emergent readers, writing and explaining how books and print work.

## 6.0 Self-Assessment Examination

1. Discuss the difference between language and literacy.
2. Make a case for including reading into the school time-table for children.
3. Why should teachers teach children writing?
4. Discuss in details the strategies one can use to enhance literacy development among children in early years.

## 7.0 References/Further Reading

Benson, H.S. (2008). "Emergent Writing: Developing Writing Skills in the Early Childhood Classroom. Best Practices PBS Teachers (Online)."

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## Unit 5 The Role of Language In Early Years

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### 1.0 Introduction

The importance of language in early years cannot be over-emphasised because language development is a crucial part of early childhood development. Jean Piaget and Lev Vygotsky observed that while children are developing thinking skills, they simultaneously build a symbol that aids their comprehension of the world because the development of the thought and language are closely associated with their development.

In this unit, we shall examine the role of language development of the cognitive, emotional, and social and the preschool development of the child and his literacy acquisition.

### 2.0 Objectives

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- explain the role of language development on children's cognitive development
- discuss the importance of language development on the psychosocial development of the child
- discuss the role of language in the acquisition of literacy skills.

### 3.0 Main Content

#### 3.1 Language and Cognitive Development

Language is critical for cognitive development. Language and cognitive development are intrinsically connected. The journey starts with the brain cells or neurons that send signals through axons. The axons develop myelin sheaths called cells that insulate the axons and enable them to send messages 100 times faster.

The area of the brain where language comprehension is controlled (Werniche's area) becomes myelinated several months before the part of the brain responsible for language production started developing. Children therefore first develop comprehension called "receptive language" and later "expressive language" develops.

During the preschool years, children develop language skills that help to improve their memory, curiosity, concentration, thinking and reasoning skills. These skills are useful for acquiring new vocabulary, grammar skills and symbolic thought. Children are capable of using their imagery aspect of their thinking in order to express ideas, ask questions, link between past and the future.

#### Self-Assessment Exercise I

1. Name the first stage of language development in children.
2. Identify some factors that enhance language development.

## 3.2 Language and Emotional Development

Language is closely tied with emotional development. This connection starts immediately after the baby is born. The first form of communication with the mother or parents is by gazing, later on smiling, cooing and babbling follow. These actions elicit talking and touching from the mother. Later, the infants use nonverbal to communicate how he is feeling and receive appropriate emotional support needed. Later, the child will use vocabulary to express his emotion of fear, anger, sadness, happiness, etc.

Research has shown that children that listen attentively and follow instructions will understand how to keep themselves and others safe. Children use language to express their anger or frustration instead of using physical means such as temper tantrums, punches or kicking. Children develop empathy by seeing from another person's point of view. Children have fun when they play with words. They sometimes play with invented words and sentences which may be nonsense songs or rhymes.

### Language and Social Development

Children use language to communicate. As they grow older, they use speech more and more to exchange ideas and information thereby increasing in vocabulary growth. When they have well developed language skills, clear speech, they are confident to express their opinions and enjoy playing with other children. Such children are at an advantage in getting along with their peers. These help children to understand the importance of sharing and taking turns. They tend to enjoy cooperative play, creative play and games that require instructions or rules.

## 3.3 Language and Academic Development

Language development is one of the strongest predictors of academic success. Young children that are school ready are those who have extensive vocabularies and can speak fluently in conversations. If they have internalised rules of grammar, then they tend to be able to read easily than children without such skills.

As we have learned earlier on, language development forms the basis for learning to read. Children extend their understanding of grammar through conversations with people - particularly teachers and parents by sharing pictures, stories, songs, rhymes, etc. These in turn help with reading comprehension. In addition, speaking, listening, reading and writing develop concurrently rather than sequentially.

In order to read and read, children must understand that letters are symbols representing the sounds of speech; children who enjoy using language and develop a love for books tend to enjoy mark-activities such as using crayons on paper, or chalk on chalkboard. These motivate them to communicate using symbols.

More importantly, children who cannot express their thoughts in a coherent manner or slow with speaking or speech development sometimes may be in danger of language delay or some other types of developmental problem.

## 4.0 Conclusion

The importance of language in early childhood development cannot be overemphasised. It contributes to the cognitive, social emotional and academic development of the children. Children who show signs of delay and some developmental problems are easily identified for intervention.

## 5.0 Summary

Language development is a crucial part of early childhood development. Language is critical to cognitive development. Language skills help to improve children's cognitive skills such as reasoning, memory, curiosity, etc.

Language is also tied to emotional development. Children use language to express their feelings instead of using physical means like kicking, punching, etc. When children develop large volume of vocabulary, they are confident to interact and cooperate with others during play. Language is one of the strongest academic determinants.

## 6.0 Self-Assessment Exercise

1. Explain how language development affects cognitive development.
2. Describe the role of language develop in psychosocial development of preschool children.
3. What is the difference between language and literacy? Explain the difference with vivid examples.

## 7.0 References/Further Reading

Benson, H.S. (2008). *Emergent Writing: Developing Writing Skills in the Early Childhood Classroom*. Best Practices PBS Teachers (Online).  
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