

## The Development of Language Skills in the Aspects of Syntax, Semantics, and Pragmatics in Children Aged 5-6 Years

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### ABSTRACT

Children's language abilities are critical and require significant attention. Children with strong language skills can establish effective communication and social interactions within the community. Moreover, their language proficiency can also affect their academic achievements in school. This study aims to explore the profile and factors influencing the language development of children aged 5-6 years at Aisyiyah 5 Semanggi Kindergarten, Surakarta. The research employs a mixed-method approach using a convergent design, which combines different forms of data. Qualitative data collection methods include observation, documentation, and interviews, while quantitative data are gathered through three tests designed to measure syntax, semantics, and pragmatics skills. The study subjects consist of 20 children selected using purposive sampling. The results indicate that the syntax abilities of children aged 5-6 years at Aisyiyah 5 Semanggi Kindergarten are high, while their semantic and pragmatic abilities are very high. However, some respondents exhibit low to moderate abilities. These findings suggest that enhancing children's language skills can be achieved by improving

language stimulation through parental caregiving at home and by increasing the role of teachers in providing additional learning media during classroom activities.

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### **Introduction**

Early Childhood Education (ECE) aims to support the physical and mental development of children aged 0-6 years, preparing them for the next stage of education. This age range is critical for rapid growth and language development (Maghfiroh & Suryana, 2021). Language development in early childhood is vital because language serves as a tool for communication to express thoughts, feelings, and desires (Anggraini et al., 2019).

Children aged 5-6 years exhibit specific characteristics in their language development. They can articulate more than 2,500 words, cover various concepts, listen effectively, actively respond in conversations, and provide comments related to activities or observations (Pradita et al., 2024). However, language development varies among children. Some can express their ideas and desires in complete sentences, while others still use short phrases (Wahidah & Latipah, 2021).

Children may encounter difficulties in understanding and using words correctly, recognizing and constructing sentences, learning grammar, and honing verbal communication skills. These challenges can hinder their ability to interact with their environment, communicate with peers, and succeed academically. Language development delays

can stem from internal factors, such as genetic or neurological disorders, and external factors, such as environments with limited social interaction (Fauziah et al., 2023). Cognitive factors significantly influence children's language abilities; what they know affects their ability to speak and comprehend messages (Isna, 2019).

Language delays often accompany various disorders, such as unclear articulation (Jayanti, 2019). These delays impact children's daily lives, making social interaction challenging. Language development is influenced by the stimuli children receive from their surroundings. Gradual stimulation enables children to process cues from their parents, shaping their thinking, behavior, and speech (Astuti, 2022).

Language competence involves mastering three linguistic components: syntax, semantics, and phonology, later expanded to include pragmatics (Sari & Rasyimah, 2021). Language rules comprise five systems: phonetics, morphology, syntax, semantics, and pragmatics. Phonetics involves speech sounds, morphology deals with word formation and meaning, syntax focuses on word arrangement for meaning, semantics encompasses the understanding of word meanings, and pragmatics involves the appropriate use of language in various contexts (I. Lestari, 2021).

Syntax, semantics, and pragmatics are interrelated aspects of language development. Syntax and semantics emphasize language mastery, while pragmatics focuses on effective language use (Akhyar, 2019). These aspects play crucial roles in children's overall language

abilities. Syntax significantly influences reading comprehension (Suryani, 2023). Mastery of syntax and semantics enables children to use oral language with well-structured sentences through exposure to their linguistic environment, even without formal grammar instruction. Conversely, children with poor syntax and semantics may struggle to communicate effectively, as they cannot understand or express spoken messages (Azizah & Dewi, 2021). Pragmatic skills in children are reflected in their communication patterns, such as asking questions, requesting clarifications, and engaging in reciprocal responses with others (Hadi & Utami, 2019).

Based on this discussion, this research aims to investigate the development of language skills in preschool children aged 5-6 years. This age represents a crucial period for stimulating language abilities. The rapid mastery of foundational language tasks—vocabulary acquisition, word articulation, and sentence formation—occurs during early childhood (Ratnasari & Zubaidah, 2019).

### **Methods**

This study employs a mixed-method approach, combining quantitative and qualitative methods to provide diverse types of data. The integration of these methods addresses the strengths and weaknesses of each, leading to a more comprehensive understanding of the research problem. The study adopts The Convergent Design, which involves simultaneously collecting quantitative and qualitative data, analyzing them separately, and comparing the results to identify

similarities and differences (Cresswell & Cresswell, 2018).

Quantitative research in this study focuses on observable phenomena, with data collection and analysis presented in numerical form (Sutisna, 2020). The tools used include the Northwestern Syntax Screening Test (NSST) to measure syntax skills, the Assessment of Semantic Skills by Kenneth G. Shipley to evaluate semantic abilities, and the Assessment of Pragmatic Skills by Kenneth G. Shipley to assess pragmatic competence. Data analysis was performed using SPSS version 21 with univariate analysis to describe the levels of syntax, semantics, and pragmatics abilities among participants.

Qualitative research explores phenomena in depth, examining specific cases due to the varying characteristics of the issues being studied (Sahir, 2022). Data were collected through observation, interviews, and documentation. Interviews were conducted with four teachers from Aisyiyah 5 Semanggi Kindergarten in Surakarta.

The study population includes all students enrolled at Aisyiyah 5 Semanggi Kindergarten. Sampling was conducted using purposive sampling, selecting participants based on specific criteria relevant to the research objectives. The study involved 20 children aged 5-6 years attending the kindergarten, located at Jalan Kyai Mojo RT 02 RW 05, Pasar Kliwon Subdistrict, Surakarta City, Central Java.

### **Results and Discussions**

In this section, the researcher first presents the quantitative data, including tables for each variable previously described. Below are the

results of SPSS 21.0 tests derived from the processed primary data:

**Table 1. Distribution of Respondents' Syntax Scores**

Syntax Scores	Categories	Frequence	Percentage
1-8	Very Low	0	0 %
9-16	Low	1	5 %
17-24	Moderate	7	35 %
25-32	High	12	60 %
32-40	Very High	0	0 %
<b>Total</b>		20	100 %

Based on Table 1, the syntax ability of respondents aged 5-6 years is distributed as follows: 5% have low ability, 35% have moderate ability, and 60% have high ability.

**Table 2. Overview of Syntax Scores Using NSST**

Syntax Score	Number of Samples	Maximum Score	Minimum Score
	20	32	12

From Table 2, it is concluded that among 20 respondents, the maximum NSST score is 32, while the minimum is 12.

**Table 3. Distribution of Respondents' Semantic Scores**

Semantic Score	Category	Frequency	Percentage
5-9	Very Low	1	5%
10-14	Low	1	5%
15-19	Moderate	6	30%
20-24	High	5	25%

25-29	Very High	7	35%
<b>Total</b>		20	<b>100%</b>

Based on Table 3, the semantic ability of respondents aged 5-6 years is categorized as follows: 5% have very low ability, 5% have low ability, 30% have moderate ability, 25% have high ability, and 35% have very high ability.

**Table 4. Overview of Respondents' Semantic Scores**

Semantic Score	Number of Samples	Maximum Score	Minimum Score
	20	26	5

From Table 4, it is concluded that among 20 respondents, the maximum semantic score is 26, while the minimum is 5.

**Table 5. Distribution of Respondents' Pragmatic Scores**

Pragmatic Score	Category	Frequency	Percentage
1-4	Very Low	0	0%
5-8	Low	2	10%
9-12	Moderate	2	10%
13-16	High	3	15%
17-20	Very High	13	65%
<b>Total</b>		20	<b>100%</b>

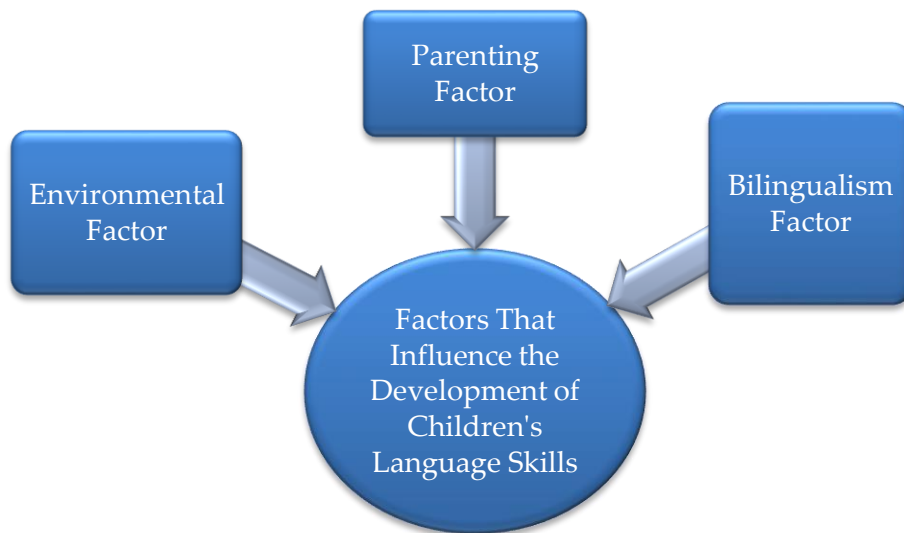
Based on Table 5, the pragmatic ability of respondents aged 5-6 years is distributed as follows: 10% have low ability, 10% have moderate ability, 15% have high ability, and 65% have very high ability.

**Table 6. Overview of Respondents' Pragmatic Scores**

Pragmatic Score	Number of Samples	Maximum Score	Minimum Score
	20	20	6

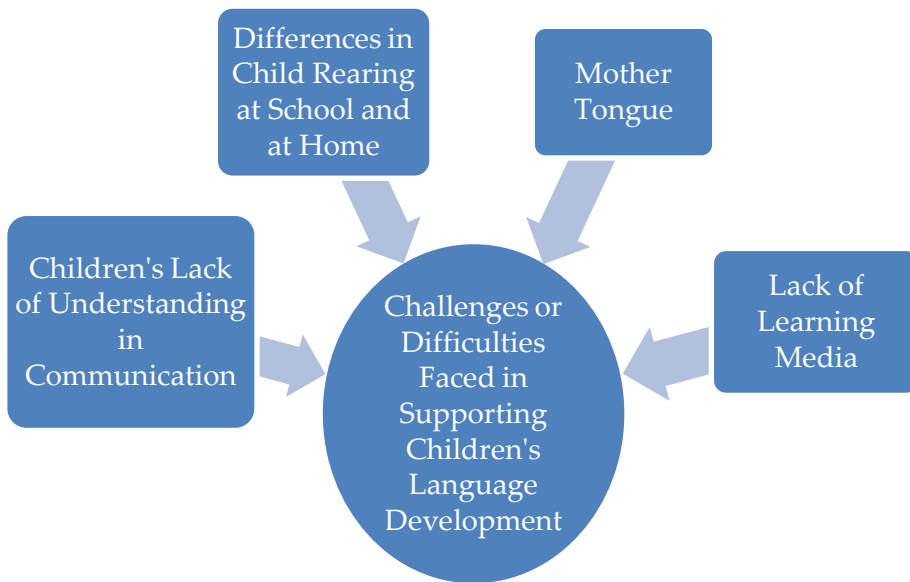
From Table 6, it is concluded that among 20 respondents, the maximum pragmatic score is 20, while the minimum is 6.

Furthermore, for qualitative result, the researchers conducted interviews with four teachers at Aisyiyah 5 Semanggi Kindergarten in Surakarta from November 28 to December 2, 2024. The findings from these interviews are illustrated in the following diagram:

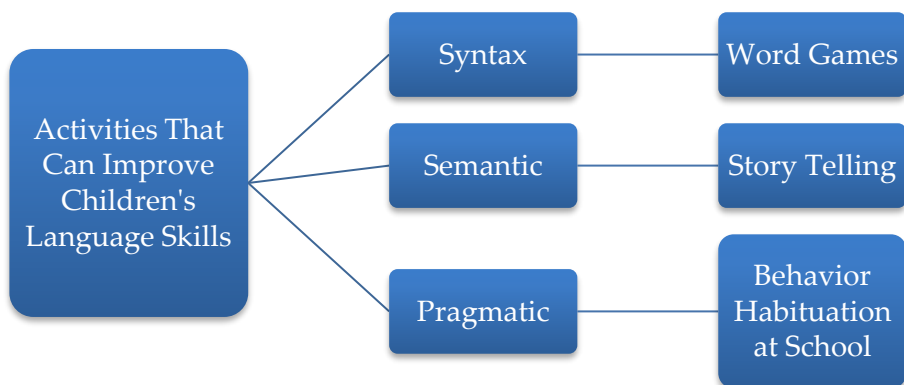


**Figure 1. Factors that Influencing the Development of Children's Language Abilities**





**Figure 2. Challenges or Difficulties in Supporting Children's Language Development**



**Figure 3. Activities to Enhance Children's Language Abilities**

Based on the figure above, the interview results indicate that in enhancing children's language abilities, several factors, challenges, and supporting activities were identified, as provided by teachers at TK

Aisyiyah 5 Semanggi Surakarta. Factors influencing the development of children's language skills include environmental factors, parenting styles, and bilingualism. Teachers at the kindergarten face challenges or difficulties in supporting the development of children's language skills, including children's limited understanding of communication, differences in child-rearing practices at school and at home, the influence of the mother tongue, and a lack of learning media. Activities conducted to support the development of language skills include word games to improve children's syntactic abilities, storytelling to enhance their semantic skills, and the habituation of positive behaviors at school. The improvement in children's articulation reflects the growth of their speech organs.

The acquisition of syntax in children always starts with smaller elements and progresses to larger ones, such as mastering words, phrases, and then sentences (Lestari et al., 2023). Syntactic skills are particularly important for early childhood. Children with strong syntactic abilities find it easier to communicate with peers and adults, thereby boosting their confidence in interactions and fostering positive social relationships. Children who understand language structures, including vocabulary, word use, and grammar, tend to develop better language skills. Frequent verbal interactions, such as conversations with adults and peers, are also crucial for language acquisition (Al-Rasyid & Siagian, 2023).

Good syntactic skills enable children to express their feelings and

emotions more clearly and effectively, helping them reduce difficulties in self-expression. Speech events are psychological phenomena that occur within individuals and are influenced by the speaker's linguistic abilities in specific situations. Language serves as a psychological expression tool for children during the process of language acquisition and usage (Azmiati & Nuryani, 2021). Moreover, reading comprehension is essential in children's learning processes at school, as it requires mastery of basic syntactic rules. A strong grasp of grammar in terms of listening and context allows children to understand and interpret meanings when statements are presented in written form (Sabilla et al., 2023).

Based on tests conducted on 20 respondents using the Northwestern Syntax Screening Test (NSST), results showed that the syntactic abilities of 5–6-year-old children at TK Aisyiyah 5 Semanggi Surakarta had a maximum NSST score of 32 and a minimum score of 13. Among the respondents, 5% had low syntactic abilities, 35% had moderate abilities, and 60% had high abilities.

The researcher employed the Northwestern Syntax Screening Test (NSST), developed by Laura L. Lee, to assess the receptive syntactic abilities of children aged 3 to 8 years (Widyantari & Nugroho, 2024). The test required respondents to point to images corresponding to sentences provided by the researcher. The results revealed that respondents struggled with items 13, 14, 19, and 20. Item 13 involved interrogative words such as "who" and "what," item 14 consisted of interrogative

sentences or questions, item 19 included demonstrative pronouns like "this" and "that," and item 20 assessed objects of verbs and prepositions. This aligns with the observation that 5–6-year-old children often face challenges in using temporal pronouns and phonological processes (Hayati & Na'imah, 2022).

Some respondents were confused by the images and failed to understand the researcher's instructions, with one respondent scoring low due to unfamiliarity with the researcher's language. This respondent primarily used their regional language, Madurese. The influence of bilingualism was evident not only in regional language diction but also in syntax, as seen in interferences like the use of another language's structure in sentences, including words, phrases, or clauses, particularly in regional speech influenced by Indonesian (Hidayati et al., 2022). Syntactic skills in early childhood can be improved using learning media such as flashcards. Flashcards help children recognize shapes, distinguish letters, and practice arranging them into words, enabling them to construct sentences effectively (Anzhalni et al., 2022).

Semantic acquisition pertains to the branch of linguistics that studies how language is used in speech. It involves the listener understanding the speaker's intent, facilitating smooth communication (Puspitasari et al., 2024). Semantic skills also allow children to better understand texts in later years, as a richer vocabulary helps them recognize and identify written words more efficiently (Ramsook et al., 2020). When children read storybooks at school, they gain new

vocabulary. These new words, accompanied by illustrations, help shape children's thought processes in reading (Setiawati et al., 2024). The development of semantic abilities also enhances symbolic thinking in early childhood, enabling children to form more complex and creative symbolic representations. Understanding word meanings helps children use alternative words to represent the intended object (Aisyah, 2021).

Semantic skills can be enhanced through various learning media, such as storybooks and storytelling activities. Storybooks not only provide inspiration, knowledge, and positive behavior but also serve as effective tools for fostering children's intelligence. Children can build interactive communication by using the new vocabulary they learn from these books. This exposure improves their language development, allowing them to retell stories based on what they've heard. Storytelling activities enhance children's comprehension of vocabulary and concepts in the stories, sparking their interest in reading more books (Pakpahan et al., 2024; Eliza et al., 2023; Fajarrini & Diana, 2024).

At the age of 5–6 years, children begin to master pragmatic skills such as indirect requests, the use of demonstrative pronouns, repeated speech, and the ability to tell and describe objects or images (Fatin et al., 2022). Based on tests conducted on 20 respondents, it was found that the pragmatic abilities of 5–6-year-old children at TK Aisyiyah 5 Semanggi Surakarta had a maximum score of 20 and a minimum score of 6. Respondents demonstrated good eye contact, turn-taking, and turn-

taking abilities, though some had difficulty with role-playing activities and making requests. One respondent struggled with instructions due to bilingualism, consistent with observations that bilingual children often face challenges in understanding new concepts in a different language.

Pragmatic skills can be enhanced through learning media such as animated videos. Engaging videos captivate children's attention and improve their listening skills. During language learning, children pass through a listening stage before they can articulate language effectively. Active listening helps children understand, process, and respond to information they receive (Munar & Suyadi, 2021; Annisa, 2020). Listening skills enable children to concentrate, clarify doubts, answer questions, and appreciate what they hear (Wulandari et al., 2019). Videos can also improve role-playing skills, as children imitate roles from animated educational videos. They express themselves through verbal communication, asking and answering questions (Priono et al., 2024).

From the analysis and the highest percentages observed, it was evident that respondents exhibited high syntactic skills and very high semantic and pragmatic skills. However, all three aspects still require improvement to achieve optimal development. These linguistic aspects are crucial for children's language and communication skills. Syntax, for instance, plays a significant role in literacy skills at school. Children with low literacy levels often have poor reading skills (Aziza & Sutanto,

2024). In terms of semantics and pragmatics, children with precise vocabulary are better equipped to express their needs effectively (Hidayati et al., 2024).

Interview results revealed several factors influencing language skills, challenges faced in supporting language development, and activities to enhance children's linguistic abilities. Factors influencing language skills include environmental factors, parenting styles, and bilingualism. A child's language acquisition, particularly vocabulary, is shaped by the educational and family environments. Interaction and imitation within these environments stimulate children's linguistic abilities (Romdon & Setyaningsih, 2023). Mother tongue also significantly affects language acquisition. Regional languages, as the first language for many, often influence the way individuals use Indonesian, including vocabulary and grammar (Julianti & Siagian, 2023).

Within families, language development is also influenced by parents' roles in providing linguistic stimulation. Parenting styles shape a child's personality and communication patterns. A positive family environment encourages good communication, while a strained relationship may lead to language disorders such as stuttering or the inability to express thoughts effectively (Brantasari, 2022).

Challenges identified in the interviews include limited learning media, mother tongue interference, children's limited communication comprehension, and differences in child-rearing practices between

school and home. Activities to enhance language skills include word games to improve syntax, storytelling for semantic development using media like videos or storybooks, and fostering good habits such as greeting and polite speech for pragmatic development (Utami & Sagala, 2023).

From the above, it is evident that the development of children's language skills—syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic—is essential for early education. Teachers must understand these aspects, as they significantly impact children's communication abilities and academic achievements. Low academic performance is often linked to poor language comprehension. Academic failure is associated with linguistic abilities, in addition to general cognitive abilities. Reading and writing processes are directly influenced by language components such as phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, and pragmatics (Pratomo & Purnaningrum, 2020).

### **Conclusion**

The description of syntactic abilities at TK Aisyiyah 5 Semanggi Surakarta shows that 5% of children have low syntactic abilities, 35% have moderate abilities, and 60% have high abilities. Syntax is an important aspect of language development in children. Syntactic skills need to be improved, as children learn language structures from people in their environment to demonstrate correct grammar when speaking.

The description of semantic abilities indicates that 5% of children have very low abilities, 5% have low abilities, 30% have moderate



abilities, 25% have high abilities, and 35% have very high abilities. The description of pragmatic abilities shows that 10% of children have low abilities, 10% have moderate abilities, 15% have high abilities, and 65% have very high abilities.

From the three aspects of language studied, it can be concluded that the respondents' syntactic abilities are high, while their pragmatic and semantic abilities are very high. However, all three aspects still need to be enhanced through activities and learning media that can further support the development of children's language skills.

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