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Implementation of Eye Contact and Imitation to Enhance Expressive Language Development in 6-Year-Old Children

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ABSTRACT

Language serves as a fundamental cornerstone in early childhood development, enabling children to communicate their needs, emotions, and ideas spontaneously without external coercion. This study is driven by concerns regarding delayed expressive language development in young children who experience difficulties with attention, which may impede their interactive communication abilities. The primary objective of this research is to enhance the expressive language skills of a 6-year-old child through targeted interventions involving eye contact and imitation. The method used was experimental quantitative research with a Single Subject Research (A-B) design, in which expressive language development data were collected through observation and documentation referring to the Standard screening guide for Child Development Achievement Levels and Stimulation of Early Detection and Intervention of Growth and Development to evaluate the subject's language development, then analyzed descriptively simple and presented in graphical form. The findings indicate a significant improvement in expressive language development, with the percentage increasing from 31% to 74% following the implementation of the intervention. Therefore, it can be concluded that the use of eye contact and imitation interventions is effective in enhancing expressive language skills in 6-year-old children experiencing difficulties with attention.

1. Introduction

Providing optimal care from an early age is crucial for child development, as children exhibit diverse progress across physical, psychological, socio-emotional, linguistic, moral, ethical, and religious domains (Fatmawati et al., 2022) . Language ability is one of the components of the level in children aged 0-8 years, it needs to be considered because children are encouraged to interact with people around them. Parents should be aware of children's speech and language delays early on (Saputra, 2021) . Language development challenges, particularly delays or communication disorders, are critically important as they frequently impact children's academic performance. Moreover, difficulties in speech development often lead to broader social developmental issues, including challenges in

interacting with their environment and acquiring foundational skills such as spelling and reading essential competencies for successful school participation. (Budiarti et al., 2023) .

Parental engagement and environmental stimulation are crucial factors in vocabulary acquisition and language development, helping to prevent delays in children's linguistic progress (Ratih & Nuryani, 2020) . Language development is a critical component of early childhood, often referred to as the "golden age," as it serves as the primary medium for expressing messages, desires, and opinions, while also enabling children to comprehend the intentions of others. Language facilitates effective interaction, thereby promoting enhanced skill development through social engagement within their environment (Etnawati, 2022) therefore educational stimulation from schools, parents and the surrounding environment is very helpful in the growth and development of these children.

Language is linked to literacy, so good language skills will improve general literacy, and good language skills will inevitably lead to good language development. Finally, literacy means more than just language. Children's language development between the ages of 5 and 6 years includes abilities that include: answering difficult questions, naming objects that sound similar, having a good vocabulary, and knowing the language symbols to prepare for writing, reading, and counting, making simple sentences that have a complete structure, and others (Khoerunisa, 2025) . In the study of linguistics, we see that certain aspects make up verbal language, including aspects of phonetics, semantics, syntax, morphology, and pragmatics as described in the early childhood language development e-book (Kurniawan et al., 2020).

Language development which consists of 2 parts, namely receptive language and expressive language, receptive language is language skills in listening, while expressive language is the skill to express their ideas and express what children say (Husna & Eliza, 2021) , while the definition of expressive language according to (Hajar Nur Afian, 2023) is the child's ability to speak with that have meaning, and spoken language, intonation, and body movements can be used to support communication. The choice of that children use when speaking will make sense or have meaning when combined with facial expressions, body language, and audio intonation.

Therefore, expressive language is an important skill for children to be proficient in this development, as it is the skill they will show or communicate with those around them. However, not all children can develop these skills optimally, one of the obstacles faced in Kepanjen Delanggu kindergarten is children with expressive language development disorders that affect children's communication skills to express their ideas or emotions. Children with this disorder often experience difficulty focusing, delays in , difficulty in using vocabulary to compose structured sentences, it will also have an impact on children in the process of interacting with the surrounding environment. Without proper treatment, children with expression development disorders are at risk of experiencing limitations in social and emotional development (Ika et al., 2021) .

Various theories, such as Vygotsky's Proximal Zone theory and Skinner's behaviorism (Wardani et al.) , highlight the role of social interaction and environment in language acquisition. Behavior modification, based on the basic idea that learning is a reaction to a stimulus (Abidin, 2022) . Eye contact and imitation are key techniques in building interpersonal relationships and facilitating learning in children (Utoyo, 2024) . The model and approach encourages children's language and speech growth so that they can express their feelings, wishes, and grievances correctly and use appropriate words (Care et al., 2020) . Implementation involves focus training through eye contact and the use of imitation to teach speech (Ulumudin, 2020). Behavior modification aims to encourage adaptive behavior and prevent maladaptive behavior (Satriyawan & Ichsan, 2020), based on the stimulus-response principle.

Previous research has explored various methods to improve early childhood expressive language skills, such as the use of finger puppets in storytelling (Dimiyati et al., 2024) , audiovisual media (Alyakfi, 2023) , and read aloud activities (Ajat et al., 2024) . These studies demonstrate the effectiveness of media and activity-based interventions. However, research that specifically applies behavior modification techniques in the form of a combination of eye contact and imitation to overcome expressive language development disorders in preschool children is still limited.

Therefore, this study aims to improve expressive language development in a 6-year-old child at Pertiwi Kepanjen Delunggu Kindergarten who experiences the disorder through behavior modification, namely eye contact and imitation, as a basic model of therapy that can focus the child's attention and improve compliance and ability to imitate instructions (Athika Rani & Anggraika, 2023) . The purpose of this study was to examine the effectiveness of eye contact and imitation in improving expressive language development in 6-year-old children with children who experience expressive language development disorders as a basic model of therapy for children to be focused and teach children to obey, imitate, and follow instructions given by the interlocutor.

2. Methodology

This study uses a quantitative experimental approach with the form of *Single Subject Research* (SSR), namely with a single subject design that focuses on individual data as a research sample. Participants in Single Subject Research research are self-control subjects, control behavior before and after intervention, usually involve an individual, but can also consist of a smaller group, and each intervention results in one score on all measures. This study uses the A-B research design, where A is the baseline phase and B is the intervention phase, this design is carried out by repeating target measurements, at least in two conditions, namely baseline (A) and intervention (B). According to (Taufan et al., 2020) in the first stage called baseline, the child's initial proficiency in reading nouns, also known as beginning reading (A) baseline, before the provision of

intervention (B). In the second stage called intervention or treatment (B) is given through the application of eye contact and imitation.

Purposive sampling is a data collection technique used, the subjects in this study are individuals, namely children at Pertiwi Kepanjen Kindergarten aged 6 years who have characteristics, namely (1) six-year-old children who experience expressive language development disorders without being accompanied by other disorders (2) are not undergoing any therapy during the intervention applied. Data collection techniques through observation by collecting data using the help of screening guides, observation and documentation.

The screening guide refers to the achievement of child development which refers to the *Standard Level of Child Development Achievement* (Ministry of National Education RI, 2014) and *Stimulation Detection and Early Intervention of Growth and Development* to get a picture of child language development (Ministry of Health RI, 2022), as an assessment using a checklist instrument, namely a Likert scale, the scale is used to measure attitudes, opinions, and perceptions of a person or group of people about social phenomena.

This Likert scale has 4 answer choices, 4 = always, 3 = often, 2 = sometimes, 1 = never in each statement (Andriati et al., 2023) . This study uses data analysis within conditions and between conditions. The components of condition length, directional tendency, stability tendency, trace tendency, stability level and distance and rate of change are included in the in-condition analysis. While the data analysis between conditions includes the number of variables changed, changes in trends and their impact, changes in stability trends, and percentage overlap (Nini & Ndamung Maramba, 2022) .

Before starting the research, initial observations were made so that researchers could understand the actual conditions (Rudini, Moh & Melinda, 2020) and get an overview to assess the level of the subject's expressive language skills, including the ability to form sentences, use vocabulary and ability to communicate verbally. This initial data is a reference to prove the purpose of the intervention to be applied. The intervention applied in phase B was specifically designed to improve the subject's expressive language ability.

The intervention included the introduction of new vocabulary, speaking practice involving eye contact compliance and imitation. Each intervention session lasted for 60 minutes and was conducted for 4 consecutive days after the baseline phase was conducted. During this phase the researcher recorded the subject's progress through direct observation and documentation and used psychologist-validated instruments to assess changes in expressive language skills. The level of validity of measurement data is influenced by the ability and accuracy of experts in validating these instruments (Saifuddin, 2024) .

3. Result and Discussion

Results

This research was conducted at Pertiwi Kepanjen Delanggu Kindergarten using *Single Subject Research* (SSR) A-B design. The data collected was analyzed through visual and *graphic* data analysis (*Visual Analysis of Graphic Data*). In this case the presentation is to move the data into graphical form and then analyze based on the components of each data result in the baseline (A) and intervention (B) phases, the data obtained from the observation results are used to analyze the visual data.

The results of the study will show the improvement of expressive language development of six-year-old children through modification of eye contact and imitation, as well as data from observations of subjects in the conditions before and after intervention. The results of the study were collected for seven days, divided into 3 days (30 minutes duration per day) known as baseline i.e. without treatment, and the intervention was conducted for 4 days (60 minutes duration per day) using eye contact and imitation.

In this case, prominent changes in children are very important because good communication skills will affect language development as well as social and emotional aspects in children. Good interaction with their social environment can help with broader social development. The approach or behavior modification during therapy sessions using eye contact and imitation is an important foundation of success in the interventions that have been implemented. Table 1 shows the results of the research evaluation.

Table 1. Subject Evaluation Results

Phase	Implementation Date	Value
Baseline	February 19, 2025	31
	February 20, 2025	36
	February 21, 2025	34
	February 22, 2025	70
	February 24, 2025	68
Intervention	February 25, 2025	72
	February 26, 2025	74

The data in table 1 is then assumed into the form of a graphical presentation in figure 1 according to the results of the baseline and intervention data that has been applied to the subject for 7 consecutive days at Pertiwi Kepanjen Delanggu Kindergarten. Analysis in conditions and between conditions is carried out to prove the truth of the results of data presentation and analyze the data that has been collected to understand the impact of certain treatments (Manikmaya & Prahmana, 2021).

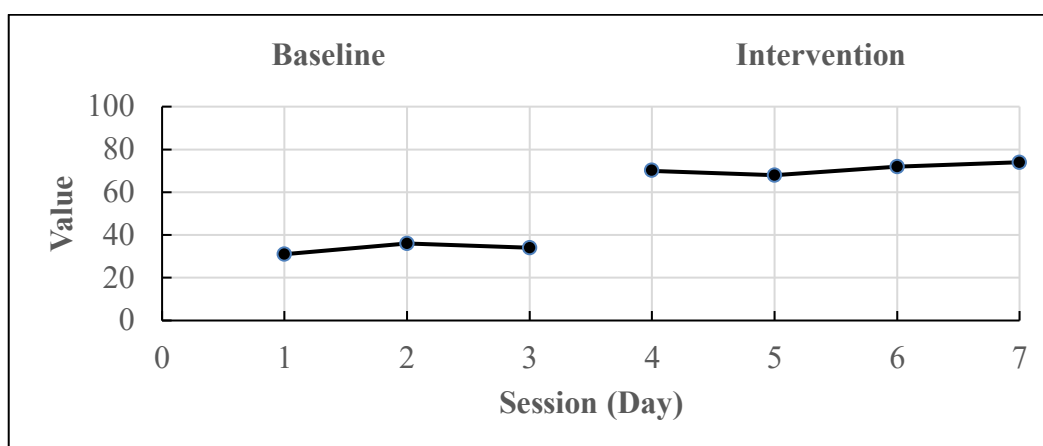


Figure 1. Expressive Language Development

The following are the results of the analysis in conditions and analysis between conditions. In-Condition Analysis

Table 2. Results of Visual Analysis in Expressive Language Development Condition

Conditions	Baseline (A)	Intervention (B)
Condition Length	3	4
Directional Tendency		
Stability Trend	Stable (100%)	Stable (100%)
Trace Tendency		
Stability Level and Direction	(=) <u>Stable</u> 31-36	(=) <u>Stable</u> 68-74
Level Change	<u>34-31</u> (+3)	<u>74-70</u> (+4)

The data shows that the tendency of the line direction towards the subject's expressive language development increases from the initial session to the last session. In the baseline phase, the stability tendency is 100%, which means that the intervention can be used. In this second phase, namely intervention (B), has a stability tendency level of 100%, the change in trace from one data to another has increased. As shown by the calculation of the level of stability level and direction, the baseline phase (A) experienced an increase of (+3) and the intervention phase (B) experienced an increase of (+4). Inter-Condition Analysis.

The number of variables that changed from baseline (A) to intervention (B) conditions in this study was 1 (one), namely expressive language development. The data line from the baseline phase (A) to the intervention phase (B) shows a directional trend with an increase in positive signs (+), which means good.

Table 3. Results of Inter-Condition Visual Analysis of Expressive Language Development

Condition Comparison	Baseline (A): Intervention ((B)
Number of variables changed	1
Changes in directional trends and their effects	
Change in Stability Trend	(=) Stable to Stable
Level Change	(34-70)
	(+36)
Overlap percentage	0%

The data shows a comparison between changes in stability in the baseline phase (A) and intervention phase (B), the results are stable to stable, and the change in data level from baseline (A) to intervention (B) is (+) 36 which means an increase. Based on the calculation results, it was found that there was no overlapping data at all between the baseline (A) and intervention (B) phases. Therefore, the effect of intervention (B) on baseline (A) can still be trusted because the amount of overlapping data does not exceed 90% (Indra, 2021).

Discussion

In the baseline phase, the subject shows limited understanding and difficulty in forming simple sentences and often has difficulty conveying ideas or feelings verbally. This is in line with the characteristics of early childhood experiencing impaired expressive language development, where often have difficulty expressing and expressing what they want to convey and convey in the form of sentences or verbally (Hasiana, 2020). After implementing the intervention for 4 days, namely with eye contact and imitation treatment, the subject's expressive language skills increased as seen in the analyzed intervention phase data.

Modification of eye contact and imitation has a relevant influence on the results of expressive language skills in children at Pertiwi Kepanjen Delunggu Kindergarten, it can be shown that after being given the intervention of eye contact and imitation there is a significant increase from 31% in the *baseline* phase to 74% in the intervention phase indicating that this technique is effective in facilitating expressive language development in research subjects.

This finding answers the initial research question regarding the effectiveness of eye contact and imitation as an intervention to improve expressive language skills in children with expressive language development disorders. This improvement can be interpreted through the lens of Albert Bandura's social learning theory (Wahyuni & Fitriani, 2022), which emphasizes the role of observation and imitation in the learning process, including language acquisition. In the context of this intervention, eye contact is likely to play a role in increasing the subject's focus of attention on the model (researcher), thereby maximizing opportunities for observation and imitation of appropriate language behaviors. In addition, the concept of *joint attention* (Gusti Agung Ayu Amritashanti & Hartanti, 2023) becomes relevant, where interaction through eye contact and imitation creates a

joint focus of attention on an object or action, which is shown to facilitate language comprehension and speech production in young , including those with language development disorders.

The observed improvement in expressive language skills was not limited to word pronunciation, but also included other extensions of knowledge such as the ability to tell a more structured story and the ability to continue a narrative (Riani, 2021). This suggests that eye contact and imitation interventions not only stimulate narrow linguistic aspects, but also contribute to broader cognitive development that supports language skills. The effectiveness of eye contact in improving focus and receptivity to learning in children with developmental disabilities is also supported by research (Srimardayeti, 2022) , which is in line with the findings of this study. Furthermore, (Ulumudin, 2020) identifies eye contact and imitation as a basic therapy to coordinate visual attention and facilitate more interactive communication in children.

The findings of this study are consistent with research (Arsini et al., 2023) which used an ABA approach with SSR design to improve expressive and receptive language skills in children with developmental disabilities. The significant increase in scores after the intervention suggests that the structured and intensive approach, which may involve elements of eye contact and imitation, was effective in facilitating communication. This is also in line with the constructivism theory by Piaget (Suryana et al., 2022) , which emphasizes the role of environmental interaction and information processing in children's language development. Eye contact and imitation interventions can be viewed as a way to facilitate interaction and provide structured information so as to support the construction process of language comprehension in subjects.

In contrast, research (Van Eecke et al., 2022) highlights the importance of language comprehension in children's linguistic development. Although this research does not directly address eye contact and imitation, the implication is that an effective intervention should ensure that the child not only imitates, but also understands the meaning of the language being learned. In the context of this study, the intervention was designed to introduce new vocabulary and practice its use in an interactive context, which is expected to contribute to comprehension beyond mere imitation.

This research is also in line with the views of (Habibatullah et al., 2021) which emphasizes the role of imitation as one of the main ways early childhood learns language. Language stimulation provided through eye contact and imitation interventions provides a clear model for subjects to imitate, which in turn can enrich their vocabulary and expressive language skills. The improvements observed in the subjects of this study indicate that the intervention has successfully facilitated the achievement of several levels of language development expected in 6-year-old children (Prastiwi et al., 2024) , including the ability to construct simple sentences, answer questions, and refer to known words.

4. Conclusion

This study was conducted in two phases over a period of seven days, comprising a 3-day baseline phase (A) with sessions lasting 30 minutes per day, followed by a 4-day intervention phase (B) with sessions lasting 60 minutes per day. The intervention involved techniques of eye contact modification and imitation. Overall, the findings provide empirical evidence supporting the effectiveness of these interventions in enhancing expressive language development in 6-year-old children with expressive language disorders. Specifically, the intervention improved the child's attentional focus, facilitated learning through imitation, and fostered interactive communication that promotes language comprehension.

This study emphasizes the importance of early intervention to address language difficulties in children. Delayed intervention may result in challenges not only in language acquisition but also in cognitive and social development. Additionally, active involvement of parents and school personnel is essential to ensure consistent support across home and educational settings, fostering an environment conducive to language growth. Moreover, further research employing more comprehensive methodologies and larger sample sizes is necessary to validate the effectiveness of the interventions used and to identify factors influencing language development in children with similar disorders. Consequently, the findings of this study can inform the design of more effective and sustainable intervention programs aimed at supporting children with language development disorders, enabling them to achieve their full communicative potential.

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