

# Language Development in Early Education

**Keywords:** *preschool, language development, kindergarten, early education*

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## **Abstract**

*This article aims to review some of the literature from the past 5 years on the development of language in pre-schoolers. Language is one of the fundamental acquisitions that the child makes in the preschool stage. The emotional and cognitive universe of the child is managed through language. Since language is one of the essential parameters of the early development of the child, the development of receptive language and expressive language is essential in the first two years of life. Children take their first critical steps toward learning to read and write very early in life. Children do not learn to read and write automatically, but careful planning and instruction are essential. The factors that influence the development of language in pre-schoolers are manifold. Among them, the capacity for emotional self-regulation is associated with high school and social successes. The parent-child interaction can help to acquire a rich linguistic background. Playing with adults has a decisive role in children's language development. Factors such as the quality of night sleep or the physical and mental well-being of*

*the mother are correlated with a faster acquisition of language skills. Book reading, storytelling, and picture books are tools and methods that educators and parents can successfully use in developing preschool language.*

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## **1. Introduction**

This article discusses the broad topic of language development in early education. The question that this review attempts to answer is under what parameters is language developing in children entering the preschool stage. Thus, the objective of the paper is to review a part of the literature of the last 5 years that talks about the factors that influence the development of language in pre-schoolers, with the intention to:

- To review the articles published around this topic
- Present an overview of the cognitive and language development
- To identify the essential factors that influence the development of language in pre-schoolers
- To present a summary of the empirical research around this topic.

To achieve this goal, we accessed Google Scholar and the EBSCO database and entered the following terms: *language, development, preschool*. The search was limited to date from January 2015 to October 2019. From the total of the articles found, we selected 20 articles on which we decided to focus. The criteria for selecting these articles offered by the databases were:

- a) To fall within the mentioned period (last five years)
- b) To match our theme (language development in preschool children)

- c) To highlight, through empirical research, the factors that influence the development of language and cognition in pre-schoolers.

We have grouped the selected articles into several categories:

1. Articles that address the link between language development in pre-schoolers and their **behaviour**.
2. Articles that take into account the development of children's language surprised in the **family environment** rather than in the school environment (influence of mother's well-being, child-parent interaction, reading books, the role of toys in language development, children's sleep and language development, etc.). Here, however, I have included a few articles on the development of the language of children under 3 years of age, although they are in the pre-preschool stage.
3. Articles referring to the development of children's language in the **formal educational environment (kindergartens)**

## **2. The development of language and behaviour in children**

### **Preschool children and language**

The years from birth to 5 years old are decisive for the development of the foundations of thought, behaviour and emotional well-being (Bakken, Brown & Downing, 2017). In this essential period, the child develops from the linguistic, cognitive, social, emotional and regulatory skills point of view, which will determine his efficiency in many areas, in adult life (Bakken, Brown & Downing, 2017). “Early childhood is a critical period of rapid brain growth and heightened neuroplasticity” because during this period children acquire the most effective language (Roberts et al., 2019).

Lately, there have been profound changes in early education, child development, psychology, language arts, literacy education, etc. Although society is experiencing rapid transformations from

many points of view, it is essential that disciplines such as child development, psychology, educational psychology, etc. to keep up with these modern changes so fast (Saracho, 2017).

In child development, preschool is the period between 3 and 6 years. This is one of the stages of intense psychic development in the life of the human being. The dominant activity of the preschool stage remains the game, but it begins to correlate with educational tasks. Language is one of the fundamental acquisitions the child makes at this stage.

Communication is the ability to talk to other people, to understand what they want to convey, to understand the experiences they share, is a social activity based on interaction; it involves sharing experiences, feelings, and activities and is decisive for a healthy life and quality of life (Brodin & Renblad, 2019). Communication is indispensable "for the development of the cognitive functions, processes and human competences, being a kind of fusion of the social and the individual in human existence" (Olărescu & Ponomari, 2017). The emotional and cognitive universe of the child is managed through language. From the educational program, communication refers to speech and language (Brodin & Renblad, 2019). Language is the main function through which the person realizes the communication. In the UK curriculum, oracy names speaking and listening skills, while literacy is the ability to read and write. On the other hand, language comprises receptive activities (listening & reading) and expressive activities (speaking & writing) (Brodin & Renblad, 2019). Thus, since language is one of the essential parameters of the early development of the child, the development of receptive language and expressive language is essential in the first two years of life (Göker, Eser & Yilmaz, 2019).

The history of theories and fundamental scientific discoveries in the field of child development is diverse and complex. Over time, reforms in early education have determined several directions of research and we mention only a few: 1. Theories of development

associated with language, literacy, and cognition; 2. Children in early childhood settings; 3. The nature of language training and literacy (Saracho, 2017). The biggest changes have occurred in the area of language and literacy. In the following, we will consider an aspect related to the age at which the child should begin formal reading instruction. Initially, traditional conceptions (1930-1940) regarding child development argued that children under 6 should not begin formal reading instruction. Therefore, preschool educators did not work with any print material in the classroom, because it was considered that they should not put pressure on the children or frustrate them because they are not yet ready to read (Saracho, 2017). Only after the age of 6 and a half, the first preparations were made for children's literacy. But through the 1960s, it was found that little ones were ready to read earlier and that their previous theories were wrong. As Olivia N. Saracho shows in the study *Literacy and language: new developments in research, theory, and practice* (2017) citing Clay, no result "suggests that contact with printed language forms should be withheld from a five-year-old child on the ground that he is immature" (Clay, 1975, p. 24 next to Saracho, 2017).

Later, towards the 1990s, there were continued studies on the age at which children can learn to write and read; thus, the concept of "emergent literacy", proposed by Clay in the 1960s, was taken into consideration. From that moment on, the curricula provided that preschool children were to be prepared, through language education activities, to acquire the skills to read and to write.

Subsequently, the concept of emergent literacy was replaced by that of training for reading. Family and early education teachers were trained to contribute to finding strategies and activities that involve playing, writing, reading stories, and preparing children for formal literacy. Children should be encouraged and motivated to read and write for enjoyment, information, and communication. Saracho (2017) emphasizes: "Teaching practices must be appropriate, effective, and focus on the young children's

developmental attributes, culture, language, and specific learning needs. They need to learn through different, research-based teaching techniques that will support young children's language and literacy development.”

Following the research conducted by NAEYC (National Association of Education of Young Children) & IRA (International Reading Association, now the International Literacy Association, LRA), the following findings have been imposed:

- “Children take their first critical steps toward learning to read and write very early in life.
- Children do not become literate automatically; careful planning and instruction are essential.
- Ongoing assessment of children’s knowledge and skills helps teachers plan effective instruction.
- No one teaching method or approach is likely to be effective for all children, at all times.
- As children move from preschool into kindergarten and the primary grades, instruction focused on phonemic awareness, letter recognition, segmenting words into sounds, and decoding printed text will support later reading competence.
- Children who are learning English as a second language will become literate more easily if they have a strong foundation in their home language” (NAEYC & IRA, 2009 *apud* Saracho, 2017).

### **The link between Self-regulation and language in preschool children**

Preschool children who receive a quality early education have benefits such as more appropriate behaviours, better social interactions and emotional maturity (Bakken, Brown & Downing, 2017).

An important indicator of the assessment of psychic and cognitive development in preschool children is self-regulation. This is an umbrella term that specialists in child psychology use to designate the control and coordination by children of their own socio-emotional and physiological aspects, as well as their cognitive abilities (Skibbe, Montroy, Bowles & Morrison, 2018). Self-regulation begins to develop from birth and can be observed in children until entering preschool. As children move from home to preschool, it is advantageous for their integration and development to increase their levels of self-regulation (these are skills that can be observed and measured), to cope with learning tasks (Puranok, Boss & Wanless, 2018; Bohlmann, Maier & Palacios, 2015). Children who have high levels of self-regulation in certain stages of childhood are more likely to succeed socially and academically throughout their lives, both as children and as adults. Behavioral self-regulation is based on the ability of children to adjust their attention, working memory, and inhibitory control, to manage their behavior (Skibbe, Montroy, Bowles & Morrison, 2018). Self-regulation of emotions not only determines the building of favorable social relationships but is also a forecaster of early literacy (Sharkins, Leger & Ernest, 2017).

The authors mentioned, Lori E. Skibbe, Janelle J. Montroy, Ryan P., and Frederick J. Morrison, in their recent study (2018) entitled *Self-regulation and the development of literacy and language achievement from preschool through second-grade* addresses this issue of preschool self-regulation, noting that there is older research that shows that higher levels of behavioral self-regulation have been associated with higher levels of literacy achievement in preschool and elementary school. How could we explain this? For example, the attention, which is involved in the self-regulation mechanism, helps the child to follow the didactic instructions. Conversely, according to the studies, the children who have low levels of self-regulation present problematic behaviors and

difficulties with social relationships, which can have repercussions in the strategies of language development.

But the study takes into account a broader perspective, showing how trajectories of self-regulation development (early, intermediate, late) can predict the way literacy and language skills develop from preschool through second grade. To carry out this study, 351 children were studied, who were evaluated twice a year for up to four years to check on indicators of decoding, reading comprehension, phonological awareness, and vocabulary. The results showed that children who had earlier self-regulation skills had higher language and literacy skills throughout preschool to second grades. Specifically, previous self-regulation trajectories were „associated with both higher levels and earlier development of both decoding and reading comprehension, but not faster development“. Children with early self-regulating trajectories had higher levels of vocabulary than children with intermediate trajectories; however, this result did not differ from the rate or timing of vocabulary development.

The findings of the study entitled *Self-regulation and the development of literacy and language achievement from preschool through second grade* (Skibbe et al., 2018) shows that kindergarten mechanisms for early self-regulation of children should be encouraged, as they are a forecaster of learning activities of language education and, implicitly, of language development (in addition to the implicit emotional, educational and social benefits). Educators could thus work with children who have poor behavioural or school outcomes through the use of small therapeutic playgroups. Another observation is worth noting: activities that have more interruptions (greater transitions between activities) decrease the ability of children to achieve self-regulation, while children in better-organized classes have better results. Thus, the encouragement of children's behavioural self-regulation depends on educators. The researchers, according to the authors of the article, should consider not only the matter of

the level of preparation of children for school but also that of the preparation of teachers to deal with self-regulation abilities that children have when they get to school.

We mention two more studies on the same subject; in *the Relationship between self-regulation and early writing: Domain-specific or task-dependent?* (Cynthia S. Puranik, Emily Boss, Shannon Wanless, 2018), starting from the finding that research claims that self-regulation plays an important role in early academic skills, such as math and reading, but less so in writing, the authors have proposed to investigate the connection between self-regulation and writing in preschool children. Following the experiments, the results recorded a significant link between self-regulation and early writing, with the mention that there are differences in degrees of the writing aspects to which they refer. Thus, the relationship between self-regulation and early writing depends on the specific type of task used to measure a certain ability.

In another recent study, *Examining the Effects of Poverty, Maternal Depression, and Children's Self-Regulation Abilities on the Development of Language and Cognition in Early Childhood: An Early Head Start Perspective* (2017), authors Sharkins, Leger and Ernest draw an alarm signal: cognition and socio-emotional development also influence language development. Socio-emotional development contributes directly and significantly to the development of children's language and indirectly to the development of their cognition. Educators working with young children have the task of helping them to control their emotions. From birth to 3 years of age, emotional self-regulation is an essential component of behaviour. It is up to parents and educators to teach children what emotions are; they must be identified and differentiated so that later they can manage them properly (not to take the toys of their colleagues, not to answer before being asked, etc.). Therefore, studies converge in this

direction: as children grow, their capacity for emotional self-regulation is associated with high school and social successes.

### **3. Development of children's language in the family environment, through non-formal education**

The child is a social being and needs the help of the adult to fulfill his/her needs. The interactions are decisive for the child, right from birth (Brodin & Renblad, 2019). The lack of communication with the adult negatively influences the rhythm and level of his psychic development. Specialists such as John Bowlby, Rene Spitz, Anna Freud have emphasized the importance of the mother's relationship with my child so that he or she will have a normal cognitive-linguistic development (Olărescu & Ponomari, 2017).

#### **The role of the parent-child interaction in the development of the child's language**

The parent-child interaction is decisive for the development of language in the first years of life. (Christakis et al., 2019). By interacting with adults, children come into contact with a larger linguistic background and thus learn new words, enhancing their language skills. The role of the adult is to facilitate and expand the use of new words that contribute to language development. (Wasik & Jacobi-Vessels, 2016). Only the fact that there are people around the family does not guarantee positive interactions and stimulation of children's language (Eun Chang, 2017), but there is a need for increased attention to the child's needs to develop their language. The communication experiences in the environment in which a child is raised are decisive: a family in which few words are spoken and they are spoken incorrectly, without an elaborate vocabulary, will be a poor environment for the child, for speech acquisition. It is estimated that there is a gap of 32 million words heard up to the age of four, between a child raised in a language-rich environment and another child in a language-deficient environment. These gaps

are even more visible at the time of formal training for reading acquisition (Whorrall & Cabell, 2015).

Unfortunately, an obstacle to a deep connection between parent and child is represented by the technological means that parents use, which take up a long time. These devices are used to the detriment of the interaction with their children (and this is not related to the socio-economic status of the parent), and the adverse effects are also seen in the children's language (Christakis et al., 2019). Most children acquire communication skills (pointing, gesturing) and language skills (saying words, following directions) through interaction with their parents and caregivers. However, not everyone succeeds, due to genetic, environmental, neurological factors, etc., and in this case, we are talking about language impairment, that is, as the authors of this article mention, „persistent difficulty in the acquisition or use of written or spoken language that is substantially below age expectations” (Roberts et al., 2019).

In the article *Assessment of a Parent-Child Interaction for Language Development in Children* (2019), authors Dimitri A. Christakis, Sarah J. Lowry, Georgia Goldberg, Heather Violette, and Michelle M. Garrison begin a study to see if they can determine whether the use of technology by parents, which leads to a decrease in parent-child interaction and, implicitly, to neglect of language development, could be oriented towards increasing parent-child interaction, with the corresponding effects. Therefore, the study was applied to infants between the ages of 2 and 18 months, aiming at enriching the linguistic means. The findings of the study underlined that the smartphone applications included in the intervention could enrich the linguistic environment of children from early childhood. (Christakis et al., 2019).

In the *Association of Parent Training With Child Language Development study. A Systematic Review and Meta-analysis* (2019), the connection between parent training and language

development in young children, who have a certain risk for language impairment is addressed. Thus, training parents to implement strategies to help children in language development is vital, as 2 out of 5 children under 5 years have language learning difficulties. (Roberts et al., 2019). The conclusions of the mentioned researchers show that there is a positive association between parent training and child language and communication skills. Therefore, parent training should play an essential role in the intervention and preventive programs, to enhance communication and language outcomes in children at risk of language delay.

### **The role of games in the development of language in children**

Even in children who do not have a language delay, the importance of the contribution of adults to language development, especially vocabulary, is essential. One way in which the contribution of adults in developing children's language can be exploited is to play with their children (Wasik & Jacobi-Vessels, 2016). The game is a very important activity for the development of young children. Through playing games, they explore the world, develop knowledge and accumulate experiences. During the game, they use their imagination and creativity, having to solve problems. The game occupies most of their activities and the game can be „a critical social activity with children playing together and learning how to get along with other children and learning about sharing and negotiating social contracts" (Wasik & Jacobi-Vessels, 2016). In their study, *Word Play: Scaffolding Language Development Through Child-Directed Play* (2016), Barbara A. Wasik and Jill L. Jacobi-Vessels discuss strategies that adults can use while playing with children, so to contribute to the formation of the language of the little ones during play, but in a game run by the children themselves.

There are different types of games; the most widespread distinction is that between free play (the child plays alone or with other children, without the intervention of any adult) and scaffold

play (led by children but under the supervision of an adult) (Wasik & Jacobi-Vessels, 2016). The scaffold play allows adults to increase the linguistic development of children through play activity. Scaffold play is also different from the structured game (which is a specific activity, such as a puzzle, playing a board game, etc.). While the play has specific rules and objectives, in scaffold play the adult has specific learning objectives, which he tries to meet with the child, but the child is actively involved, leading the game. By asking questions, adults can create opportunities for children to talk about their actions and ideas during the game, but without interfering with the organization of their game. Both free play and scaffold play are suitable activities for children's development (Wasik & Jacobi-Vessels, 2016).

The benefits of free play are manifold, contributing to children's learning, self-regulation, and motivation. But playing with adults around him is especially useful for the development of the child and especially the language. Adults can thus use „research-based strategies such as asking questions that invite extended responses and inquiry, provide meaningful feedback and effectively use wait time” (Wasik & Jacobi-Vessels, 2016). They create the opportunity for solid interaction between children and adults, by asking questions, answering them, etc.

Barbara A. Wasik and Jill L. Jacobi-Vessels state that some studies say that when children play alone or with their children, they are limited to activities and concepts they already know, which are familiar to them; In contrast, adults who engage in children's play can encourage them to form a richer language, but without the adult taking over the game, instead of the child. There is a distinction between the role of adults in children's play and the impact that adults can have on children's identity and motivation for learning (Wasik & Jacobi-Vessels, 2016).

Playing with toys also creates contexts that are appropriate for language learning. Studies show that a child who manipulates (= handles, touches) toys of different shapes, sizes and colors is

required to find and use the appropriate terms, which can be a language challenge for him (Verdine et al., 2019). When toys have only one form, children useless language. Also, Verdine et al. (2019) note that parents tend to use more spatial language with boys than with girls.

In their study, *Effects of geometric toy design on parent-child interactions and spatial language* (2019), Verdine et al. They presented an experiment involving 60 parents with 3-year-olds, while the little ones played with toys of various geometric shapes. It has been observed how the language varies according to the geometric shapes of the toys. Also, the study aimed to differentiate between the effects of tangible toys and those presented on a tablet, with a touch screen. The results led to the following conclusions: although the children could hear more names due to the application, they still used more general words and a richer spatial language for toys with different geometric shapes, which they touched. Therefore, the design of toys (shape, size, color) influences the spatial language used by children. Instead, applications and other electronic devices for children discourage parent-child dialogue. Toys and materials that can be touched and held by children require the use of a richer spatial language and, therefore, a more consistent dialogue between the child and the parent; toys of different shapes, colors and sizes can encourage the comparison of toys and the discovery of their features. This explains why many children do not understand the differences and traits of geometric shapes only when they are learning them at school, probably because they do not encounter toys and objects of various shapes (Verdine et al., 2019).

### **The role of sleep in the development of language in preschool children**

Studies say that speech delay is estimated to be between 1 and 32% in children aged 3-16, due to biological and environmental causes (Alvarez, Saez & Borges, 2016). The first years of life contain

substantial changes in the development of the human brain. The acquisition and development of language in the preschool phase also depend, (besides factors such as parent-child interaction, handling of toys of various shapes and colours, playing with adults, etc., see above), and the duration and quality of sleep (Alvarez, Saez & Borges, 2016). Human beings are sensitive to the duration of the sleep interval because adequate night sleep is necessary for humans to be efficient in the daytime range. Even more, children, because they are subject to growth processes, need a well-organized and quality night sleep. Studies show that the development of language is particularly vulnerable to the organization of the sleep-wake state: firstly, insufficient sleep can hinder the process of memory involved in early language learning; Secondly, sleep, through its complex role for the human body, can influence the organization of vital systems, such as those involved in learning (Alvarez, Saez & Borges, 2016). Therefore, the proper functioning of the sleep-wake cycles determines the efficiency of the regulation of attention and language processes during social interaction, which allows it to acquire a complex language.

Since the 1980s, sleep disorders have greatly increased in children and adolescents due to the rapid development of technological means. This fact has an impact on learning skills and memory, especially in children.

In the study *Influencia de los hábitos de sueño en el desarrollo del lenguaje en preescolares* (2016), Ileana Valdivia Alvarez, Zenaida Maria Saez, and Gisela Abadal identified the risk factors associated with sleep-related habits, which may determine the primary language delay at preschool. The experiment from the base of the study consisted of the participation of 73 children between the ages of 2 and 5, who asked for specialized help to remedy the language delay; this study group was compared with a control group made up of healthy children. The period of the experiment was 2010-2014. The results of the experiment led to the following conclusions: the respective children recorded a small

number of hours asleep at night, frequent night awakening, less team play habits, used to watch TV before falling asleep, there were many electronic devices in the child's room, frequent nocturnal enuresis, and feelings of fear. In conclusion, the risk factors for language delay in children are a period of nocturnal sleep less than 10 hours, more than 2 hours of frequent night awakening, the habit of watching TV before sleep, the presence of TV in the child's room, as well as the habit of the child to move to the parents' bed at night (Alvarez, Saez & Borges, 2016).

Given this situation, which is not to be overlooked, it is the parents' responsibility to establish and strengthen healthy sleep habits. Otherwise, the repercussions can be encountered at the level of psycho-somatic, cognitive-linguistic development, etc., stopping the development of the memory processes involved in early language learning. The medical recommendations establish a number of 10.5 -18 hours of sleep in new-borns and 12-14 hours in children up to 3 years (Alvarez, Saez & Borges, 2016)

„The connection between the brain and sleep is vital, as the wake-sleep states have a great influence on the central nervous system: insufficient sleep consolidation in the first two years of life can be a risk factor in language learning, through genetic and environmental influences. It is necessary to establish adequate sleep habits, routines that facilitate the sleep-wake transition, according to the American Association of Pediatrics (AAP), which proposes to regulate activities that are performed in the hours provided for sleep, for a healthy sleep and the development of children in the preschool stage” (our translation) (Alvarez, Saez & Borges, 2016).

### **The role of reading, storytelling and picture books in the development of pre-school language**

As we have seen so far, the factors involved in the development of language in children are multiple. Another factor that the studies took into consideration and subjected to research is reading,

respectively picture books for children. Studies such as *Parents' early book reading to children: Relation to children's later language and literacy outcomes controlling for other parent language input* (Demir-Lira, Applebaum, Goldin-Meadow & Levine, 2018) show that parent-child book reading interactions lead to positive results of subsequent literacy: "the quantity of parent book reading predicts important child language and literacy outcomes, controlling for parent language input outside the book reading context, the child's contribution to book reading interactions, overall child talk, and parent socioeconomic background." Also, the present study has shown that parents use, during book reading, a more complex and syntactically diverse vocabulary than parent's language outside of the book reading context (Demir-Lira, Applebaum, Goldin-Meadow & Levine, 2018).

In the article - review *Shared Picture Book reading Interventions for Child Language Development: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis* (2019), researchers Nicholas Dowdall, Lynne Murray, Leila Hartford, G.J. Melendez - Torres, Frances Gardner, and Peter J. Cooper follow the impact of dialogic book-sharing interventions on the language development of young children.

Children's picture books help children with language development. Books with pictures, in that they represent the essential features of an object or action repeatedly, facilitate the acquisition of the represented notions. The acquisition is also encouraged by the fact that, unlike the occasional presentation of phenomena in real life (actions, emotions, etc.), these images can be reviewed by the child whenever he wishes. Images also provide the opportunity for more complex conceptual elaboration, such as reflecting on the meaning of actions and their causes, and the intentions and perspectives of the characters (Murray, 2014 *apud* Dowdall et al., 2019). Other studies have shown that, compared to other activities, such as games or mealtime, presenting books allows mothers to sort objects more frequently, which again helps children.

Despite the benefits of picture books, there are certain impediments to using this educational medium: access to such books and material is sometimes expensive, and this is not to be neglected, as long as studies show that reading frequency in picture books is a strong predictor of language development. Another disadvantage is that parents do not always use the best techniques to encourage the development of language in children, in the book-sharing context (Dowdall et al., 2019). Therefore, some aspects condition the benefits of such means (children's picture books): the quality of the interaction, asking open-ended questions, providing encouragement and praise for child participation. “Finally, interactive book-sharing facilitates caregiver engagement in a talk, where the discussion extends beyond the content or pictures in the book to concepts that are novel and unfamiliar to the child.” In conclusion, the research result shows that “shared reading interventions targeted at parents have a small positive effect on both the expressive and receptive language of children” (Dowdall et al., 2019).

Taking note that speech and communication are considered as basic benchmarks in the development of the preschool child, here are the objectives pursued by the teachers in the development of the language in preschoolers, as they are formulated, for example, in Swedish education (Brodin & Renblad, 2019).

- “to be able to differentiate shades of meaning in concepts
- to develop the ability to listen, reflect and express their views
- to develop their use of spoken language, vocabulary and concepts, ask questions, and argue and communicate with others,
- to develop an interest in written language, understand symbols, pictures, texts, and different media

- to develop their creative abilities” (Lpfö, 1998/rev. 2010 *apud* Brodin & Renblad, 2019).

In the preschool stage, many children have language and speech disorders, needing support. That is why, in the study *Improvement of preschool children's speech and language skills* (2019), authors Jane Brodin & Karin Renblad aim to find out whether and how reading aloud and storytelling can contribute to developing of communication skills in preschoolers when many researchers claim that these are very effective tools for developing language in children. Thus, researchers (Ziolkowski & Goldstein, 2008, coauthor of Brodin & Renblad, 2019) show that those children who are late in language development can recover the literacy deficit if they receive help. Also, children whose parents encourage children's reading activities gain greater phonological sensitivity and develop their vocabulary faster than children with whom there is no interest and support in language development.

Reading aloud is a benchmark for the development of language in children is a critical factor in reading and subsequent academic achievement (Lennox, 2013 beside Brodin & Renblad, 2019). Pedagogical competence is very important, as well as the ability to select books or the quality of the interactions that concern the books. The role of the teacher is thus important for literacy learning.

The findings of this study confirm that reading aloud and storytelling can indeed be effective ways to stimulate communication in children. But the role of the teacher is essential: he must know how to select materials and books and how to carry out reading activities for children. Furthermore, reading aloud must be followed by other activities, such as discussion of what is read, content and images, etc. Otherwise, children's vocabulary will not necessarily improve (Brodin & Renblad, 2019).

## **The mental and emotional health of the mother and the development of the child's language**

When we talk about the process of education or about developing a child's ability, the factors that contribute to the increase, improvement or stagnation of the process are numerous. The child does not grow up alone, however keen he may be for one skill or another. He needs interaction with adults and those of his age. Within the non-formal education, within the family, the child's relationship with his parents or caregivers plays a fundamental role in all his growth and successes, for any acquired or increased ability, as well as for the possible delays in his development. The attitude and behavior of the caregiver are essential for the harmonious development of the child. Some unfavorable conditions for its development, such as maternal depression or emotional neglect, negatively affect the child's emotional self-regulation and control of his/her dispositions (Sharkins, Leger & Ernest, 2017). The researches carried out around the relationship between the maternal factor and the development of language in the young child are numerous; thus, in a recent article, *The Relationship between Preschool Children's Language Development and Their Mother's Depression and Anxiety Symptoms: A Cross-Sectional Study* (2019), researchers Zeynep Göker, Havva Eser and Arzu Yilmaz, hypothesizing that mothers of 12-75 months old children that were late in language development have more symptoms of depression and anxiety than mothers of children with normal language development, shows that the mother's depression symptoms hurt their children's development. In such situations, the recommendation is that the mothers of children with language delay should undergo a psychiatric evaluation to detect any symptoms of depression. Fortunately, according to the same study, it was shown that the mother's anxiety symptoms did not affect the development of children's language (Göker, Eser & Yilmaz, 2019).

Sometimes, the mother needs help from family, friends, and community to manage the stress caused by the role of mother (especially if the mother also has a job), to increase her competence in raising the child and to give the child an environment more favorable to his/her development. Social assistance is defined as “the social resources that a person perceives to be available or that is provided to them by nonprofessionals in the context of both formal support groups and informal helping relationships. Social support, which can take a range of forms: instrumental, emotional, informational, companionate and esteem support, can be formal (professional) or informal (family)” (Eun Chang, 2017). When parents are supported and have consistent emotional and psychological resources, 'they are more likely to be stimulating in their parenting, which may, in turn, predict better language development for the child' (Eun Chang, 2017). *Pathways from mothers' early social support to children's language development at age 3* is the title of a study by Young Eun Chang in 2015 and published in 2017, on the relationships between mothers' early social support, maternal psychological well-being, the home learning environment and children's language skills at age of 3, in Korean families. Following this study, the findings show that "social support cannot only positive effects on the home learning environment, but can also indirectly enhance the home environment through its positive effect on maternal psychological well-being. The findings also empirically confirm the social support framework proposed by other researchers, who suggested there would be multiple pathways from the mother's social support to children's development” (Eun Chang, 2017). However, a strong link between social support and the language competence (receptive and expressive) of the child has not been confirmed, despite previous studies. This study, conducted with children between the ages of 1 and 3, confirms only a weak link between social support and expressive vocabulary, but no significant connection with receptive

language skills. On the other hand, we should note two aspects, as mentioned limits of the study: social assistance granted to mothers is a contextual factor and it is not obligatory to be constant throughout this period; and this study only takes into account the experiment done with the help of Korean mothers (Eun Chang, 2017).

Regarding the family environment and its influence on children's language development, it has been found that factors associated with poverty, including family income and parental education level, can adversely affect children's language and cognitive development; instead, it has an impact on the results of the children throughout their school life. Also, environmental factors such as the social-emotional well-being of the mother and children influence the early development of the child (Sharkins, Leger & Ernest, 2017). Research shows that those children who are economically disadvantaged have deficiencies in their ability to read because they have limited access to home educational resources such as books, educational games, toys, or outdoor educational experiences, such as visits to zoos or museums, etc. (Bakken, Brown & Downing, 2017). In these cases, limiting access to literature determines the limitations of other types. However, although the economic shortcomings of the family may impact on early childhood development through appropriate interventions (see The Opportunity Project (TOP) Early Learning Centers, "a charitable project in a Midwestern US state that only operates through public / private partnerships", Bakken, Brown & Downing, 2017) can help poor families by providing preschoolers with learning opportunities; the researches carried out regarding the above-mentioned project showed that it had long-term benefits: after 5 years, the children who benefited from this program had educational, social and emotional success (Bakken, Brown & Downing, 2017). Studies of this kind show that the earlier the mind, the health and the emotions of the children intervene, the greater the long-term benefits; and the gain is very valuable: appropriate

behaviours, establishing effective relationships, positive social interaction, emotional maturity (Bakken, Brown & Downing, 2017).

#### **4. Development of children's language in the formal educational environment (kindergartens)**

In the formal educational environment, the educator has an overwhelming role in the learning experiences of the preschoolers. For example, according to empirical research, teachers' years of experience are related to children's English writing skills, because teacher preparation has a positive effect on children's outcomes while learning English and one more language (Ramirez, Ferron & Lopez, 2018). Other studies point out that „candidates who dared to opt for primary education seem to be better prepared than the candidates who have opted for preschool education” (Spătăreanu, 2015) and therefore need to invest more in teaching staff (Spătăreanu, 2017). Being an educator of preschoolers is a huge challenge because the stakes are enormous. A study conducted in Romania shows the main dilemmas of youth who finish college and are preparing to enter primary and pre-school education as teachers or educators (Spătăreanu, 2019).

Studies show that children with lower levels of language development tend to stay the same even when they grow older. For example, Melby-Lervag et al. (2012) shows that children with poorer vocabulary at 4 years old are registered with lower levels of language proficiency and at the age of 5, 6 and 7 years and that they also have a higher risk of having difficulty (Melby-Lervag et al., 2012 *apud*, 2018). Encouraging the development of preschoolers' oral language is crucial for the subsequent acquisition of the ability to read. Educators should be careful not to miss out on opportunities to engage children in different types of conversations through which they learn to express themselves (rich vocabulary, closed and open questions, the use of cognitively stimulating discussion topics). Educators can consider not only the formal activities of language development (conversation,

memorizing, storytelling) but also the informal ones, which children choose and lead. Thus, an article signed by the authors J. Whorrall and S.Q. Cabell and titled *Supporting Children's Oral Language Development in the Preschool Classroom* (2015) argues that, during children's activities in the various centers of interest, the educator can build dialogues with the little ones, asking questions and waiting for answers. With such prerequisites, reading will be learned faster.

The educator can use any seemingly insignificant opportunity to develop the child's language, by interacting with each child individually; During mealtime, during the preparation for sleep or during unstructured activities, the child may be asked about what he likes, what he senses, what he feels. He may be asked to tell or describe something. Any other moments at kindergarten can become occasions of non-formal conversation between the child and the educator. Unfortunately, there are often obstacles such as too many children one group or in one class of students and, as the studies show, the teacher is prevented from giving each child an active role in the teaching process (Spătăreanu, 2017).

We note, briefly, some useful observations in improving the educator's contribution to the development of preschooler's language:

- The elaborated vocabulary also supports the development of the language. The educator can carefully introduce a new word, explaining it by synonyms or antonyms; but the educator must make sure it has been understood by the children.
- Both the number of words known by children how children know these new words is important; the brain organizes words into an interconnected cognitive network.
- Children should have control over the topics in the conversation; In this way, there is a certain diversity and

lexical complexity, through wider statements and more varied words.

- Repeating words in different contexts favors the development of language.
- Cognitive stimulating conversations cause the child to use explanations, expositions, sharing ideas and opinions (Whorrall & Cabell, 2015).

*Improving the Odds: Identifying Language Activities that Support the Language Development of Preschoolers with Poorer Vocabulary Skills*, by Aste M. Hagen is another study published in 2018, which attempts to determine which language activities involve preschoolers in Norway. Specifically, this study aims to analyze educators' practices regarding preschoolers' language and to find out what kind of preschoolers' language education activities are a predictor of language comprehension. Therefore, following the 71 interviews, 6 categories of language activities were identified:

a) Daily reading of a book by the teacher (here, the time has varied).

b) Stimulating language in everyday situations (unstructured play, meals, dressing, etc.) - some preschoolers said that it is more important for them to do so than during structured and teacher-led activities. One educator said that „we don't have any structured language activities; we believe it is more important to stimulate language all the time, every day.”

c) Small playgroup with adult support. One educator said that „most language stimulation happens during play”.

d) Regular use of language games.

e) Vocabulary training.

f) School preparation groups. The educators pursued teaching social skills, pre-mathematical skills, phonological skills, and language comprehension. Also, extracurricular activities were

taken into consideration: visits to the library, to the theater, etc. (Hagen, 2018).

The results showed that after one year, preschoolers who were read to daily had a better understanding of the language than those who were not read to daily. Daily reading is an independent predictor of preschool children's language comprehension because it offers preschoolers the opportunity to be exposed to rich language and to encounter words with contextual meaning in stories. Some studies mentioned by the author of the study in question state that both the quality of a book and how the book is read influences language and literacy more than book reading *per se*, although this study did not take into account the quality of the books read.

In conclusion, the study finds the empiric importance of daily reading in kindergarten, to develop the language skills of preschoolers. Of the 71 classrooms taken into account for the investigation, only 20 implemented this activity daily. The author of this study states that, despite the challenging task of pursuing several aspects of children's development simultaneously, the categorical recommendation is for preschoolers to be exposed to reading activity daily for at least 10-20 minutes (Hagen, 2018).

## **5. Conclusions**

Both parents and educators and, in general, all the people involved in the development of the child should attach major importance to the development of the child's language in the preschool stage. Stimulating language in everyday situations, at home and in kindergarten, in familiar or new contexts, informal or non-formal learning situations lays the foundations for subsequent reading and writing skills. The development of language in the preschool stage is a predictive factor for later school skills.

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