

Play-Based Learning and Oral Communication of Preschool Children

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ABSTRACT

Oral communication is an essential component of preschool children's development and provides a foundation for learning, social interaction, and future academic achievement. Play-based learning provides young children with meaningful opportunities to communicate, interact with peers and teachers, practice vocabulary, and express their ideas in natural and engaging situations. The present study examined the role of play-based learning in developing the oral communication skills of preschool children, particularly receptive language, expressive language, vocabulary development, sentence structure and grammar, and conversational skills. A quantitative pre-experimental one-group pretest-posttest design was employed with 29 preschool children selected from preschools and daycare centres in Lahore, Pakistan. Data were collected through an observational checklist covering five dimensions of oral communication. The children participated in 20 play-based learning sessions, with each session lasting approximately 40 minutes over a period of about 1.5 months. Pre- and post-observation scores were compared using a paired-samples t-test. The findings showed significant improvement in receptive language, expressive language, vocabulary development, and sentence structure and grammar. Conversational skills also showed an increase in mean scores from pre- to post-observation. Overall, the study indicates that play-based learning provides a meaningful and engaging approach for supporting oral communication development among preschool children. The study recommends integrating purposeful play activities, storytelling, role play, peer interaction, and language-rich learning environments into preschool education. Future research should use larger samples, control or comparison groups, standardized assessment tools, and longer intervention periods.

Keywords: *Play-based learning, oral communication, preschool children, receptive language, expressive language, vocabulary development, conversational skills.*

INTRODUCTION

To succeed in the kindergarten phase, children should master or develop the basic learning domains at the nursery level. This study sheds light on the kind of curriculum children need to enhance the skills required in their early years of education. The curriculum has a vital role to play in achieving a better transition from nursery to kindergarten. A future study can be conducted delving deeper into the actual teaching-learning process being implemented by the teacher in class. It is equally if not more, important to know the strategies employed by the teachers, such as the conduct of play and Developmentally Appropriate Practices (DAP), to achieve enjoyable, productive, and meaningful

learning among children. Likewise, a study on assessing the materials, facilities, parental involvement, and supervision may also be conducted to achieve quality service in early childhood education programs such as those in the National Child Development Centers and kindergartens (Aquino, et, al., 2019).

The study was implemented in the sample classroom for seven weeks using the educational game method. Interesting and significant findings were obtained during this process, which revealed the effect of play-based learning environments on the four basic language skills (Asan, & Sezgin, 2020).

It was found that play-based learning settings are highly effective for the sustainability of education and considerably increase student motivation, especially in developing language skills such as speaking, writing, reading, and listening. In this study, it was observed that students educated in the game-based learning environment were much more confident in speaking and expressing themselves compared to students who received traditional education (Tekman, & Yeniasır, 2023).

For successful and lasting language learning, practicing the language plays an essential role in addition to internalizing grammar rules. Therefore, educational games are indispensable elements of language teaching, as they facilitate children's learning by doing, in a fun and contextualized way, while also providing an effective communication environment (Tekman, & Yeniasır, 2023).

It examined whether this narrative- and play-based activity, operating as a regular component of the preschool curriculum, can promote participating children's abilities in three key, interconnected dimensions of their school readiness: narrative and other oral-language skills, emergent literacy, and social competence (Whitehurst, & Lonigan, 2001).

Substantial bodies of research have established that young children's early mastery of the oral language abilities examined in this study, narrative skills and vocabulary, helps lay important foundations for their acquisition of literacy and long-term school success (Nicolopoulou, & et al., 2015).

The study showed that although the participants had a fair understanding of play-based pedagogy, they did not know how to operationalize their understanding of play-based pedagogy directed at oral communication. The participants gained expert knowledge of play pedagogies that require children to increase oral language use in interaction with each other, using vocabulary and phrases introduced by the teacher as scaffolding for their communication (Ekeh, & et, al., 2022).

The sociodramatic play intervention implemented in the preschool classroom created a language-rich environment and offered many opportunities to develop oral language skills in children, particularly for children who communicate rarely in the classroom activities. The children's ability to respond in conversation develops from the beginning, while the ability to initiate a conversation takes more time and engagement in the play. The level of participation in the sociodramatic play intervention, children's interest in the imitative role, theme, and the level of facilitation given by the teacher have an influence on the development of oral language skills during the sociodramatic play intervention. Further, the intervention explained concrete pedagogical strategies for the teacher working with children in sociodramatic play to develop oral language skills. The intervention presented reliable evidence that children's sociodramatic play is both a medium and context for developing such playful context for the development of oral language skills in children. The conclusion drawn from this research will add more insight to preschool teachers as well as to parents to encourage sociodramatic play to nourish oral language development in children (Rajapaksha, 2016).

It is important to note, however, that reading aloud and storytelling are not the only methods that can be used to support communication. Further research needs to be conducted in this field, especially since many preschool children experience difficulties due to communication delays or disorders.

Finally, preschool teachers need support and in-service training on how to assist each child in the most effective way (Brodin, & Renblad, 2020).

Early childhood educators and students need credible support to include dramatic play to develop their students' cognitive skills in preschool settings. This study confirms and extends the understanding that through a variety of strategies and activities, play in dramatic play centers in preschools can support the development of oral language and literacy skills (Wright, 2016).

Exposing children to the use of puppets promotes the development of spoken interaction skills. When children focus their attention on puppets, they are unaware of the fact that they are actually practicing a foreign language. 'Puppet time' is an activity that, in this study, becomes a game and generates positive feelings; for this reason, learning is less stressful, it flows smoothly, and students are always willing to participate even when speaking in front of others (Toledo, & Hoit, 2016).

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study were to:

- To examine the impact of play-based learning on the oral communication of preschool children.

Research Hypothesis

There is an effect of play-based learning on the acquisition of oral communication skills among preschool children.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The concept of play-based learning has been attracting significant academic interest, as a suitable and practicable approach to fostering oral language skills in preschool-age children. The early years are viewed as a sensitive time to establish underlying language and interactional skills, and play can be a useful way to enable children to practice words, sentences and communication procedures in a low-stress environment (Paatsch et al., 2025).

Play-based learning has become a best practice in early childhood education around the world, and is being promoted due to its role as a good facilitator of oral language and communicative competence development for young children. The strategy is based on the motivation and interest of children, so that they have the opportunity to express themselves in an environment that suits them, enrich their vocabulary, and learn the pragmatic aspects of communication (Paatsch et al., 2025).

Modern studies prove that play-based pedagogies are not only about the establishment of a pleasing classroom: they offer the children the opportunities to listen actively, to think and to reply to others, which are all necessary to develop appropriate oral communication. Demonstrated the measurable increase in the preschoolers' ability to name, ask questions, listen, and employ nonverbal behaviors in group-based play (think-pair-share and collaborative games). This goes in line with sociocultural theory, which posits that learning builds on collective interactions (Sohail, & Aziz, 2024).

Experiences such as narrative play and storytelling in the learning environment also develop vocabulary, narrative, and confidence in speaking. Found that pre-schoolers who entered a structured storytelling/dramatic play setting had more complex narrative forms and richer vocabularies than children who entered a direct instruction setting only. These implications were seen in the daily peer discussion and also in group work with the support of adults (Alat, et al., 2022).

Notably, in the UK, mass interventions like Nuffield Early Language Intervention (NELI) were shown to significantly improve oral language development, as much as 7 or 8 months of development in a 20-week program. These gains were accounted for in spontaneous verbal exchanges, through the use of contextual vocabulary, and through the consistent language modelling that took place during play-based activities (Hulme et al., 2025).

The results of the new studies also emphasize the importance of play-based learning in the multiracial and multilingual early childhood classroom. Playful pedagogy that engages children with different language backgrounds in play will result in improved participation, understanding and engagement of the child orally, and the facts support the argument that play is a culturally responsive pedagogy where scholars state that the responsive adult in the play process also enhances the child's linguistic environment, encourages the process of taking turns and provides the child with the opportunity to expand their ideas. The teacher-child and peer-group interactions provided by ENAL are vital in fostering narrative development, accurate expression, and active listening (Haile, & Ghirmai, 2024).

The qualitative research data show that the teacher who uses play-based learning centers and open-ended communication activities reports that students' interest is enhanced, they are ready to participate in group discussions, and oral communication is smoother. The strategies can be used by both shy and assertive speakers to bridge their own weaknesses in communication and competence (Heang, & et al., 2021).

The new research has revealed that children who take pleasure in structured and unstructured play activities exhibit enhanced verbalization, articulation, and eagerness to become part of and maintain conversation with peers and adults (HEI Schools, 2025).

Research carried out in the United Kingdom and Australia has demonstrated that play-based curricula can be used to develop verbal fluency, in addition to turn-taking in conversation, which is a fundamental aspect of oral competence. (Paatsch et al. 2024) provide illustrations of play-based learning centers such as role play, construction, drama, and others in which children can offer several opportunities to initiate, respond and extend talk, thereby developing pragmatic skills of listening, clarifying, and negotiating meaning. If a child is a developing language user or even a shy language user, it appears that such social interactions can be especially helpful for him or her.

Moreover, longitudinal research has identified the long-term effects of play-based interventions with regard to oral language outcomes. The results of the Nuffield Early Language Intervention (NELI) program in the UK showed that there were significant improvements in vocabulary of the spoken language, sentence structure, and narrative capacity of children following a guided play program over four to six months. These benefits were sustained at follow-up, highlighting the importance of a sustained environment with play (HEI Schools 2025).

For maximum communicative benefit in play, adults need to be involved and to scaffold. It has been revealed that when the teacher deliberately engages in conversation, with questions and the use of dialogic reading, as well as with role modeling in the expression of language, children not only learn grammatical constructions but conversational rules as well. Also, it fosters a good environment; children are not afraid to share with the teacher, ask questions, and settle their differences by talking (Taylor and Francis, 2025).

In recent years, qualitative research has also emphasized the use of play-based learning and professional development of teachers. Oral language teacher training programs where teachers learn to value the importance of play in oral communication have been shown to foster teachers' confidence and lead to greater planning for play activities that support language development (Walden University, 2023).

It has also been suggested that children with disabilities and those who are from disadvantaged groups have been identified as beneficiaries of play-based learning. With inclusive play practices, all learners can participate in play and obtain the practice of oral skills in a socially supportive environment (Taylor & Francis, 2025).

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed a one-group pretest-posttest design (a pre-experimental design) to examine the effect of play-based learning activities on the oral communication skills of preschool children. Observational checklist data were collected from the same group of participants before and after a structured play-based intervention, and paired-samples t-tests were used to determine the significance of change between pre- and post-intervention scores.

Sample and Sampling Technique

A total sample of 29 preschool-aged children was selected using a simple random technique. Children were selected from different pre-schools and day care centers of Lahore city. Children aged three to five years were included in the sample. Parents of children were informed, and parents gave consent regarding the participation of their children in this study. Researchers ensured the representation of the sample to investigate the effectiveness of play-based learning on spoken skills of children in their early years.

Data Collection

An observational checklist was formulated as a research instrument. This checklist was used to collect data from parents. The same checklist was used to collect data before and after the intervention. As parents observe the changes in spoken abilities of their child directly, they can provide authentic and primary data about the impact of play-based learning on spoken skills of children. An observational checklist collected data about spoken abilities that covered receptive language, expressive language, vocabulary development, sentence structure, grammar, and conversational skills.

Data were collected before providing the intervention to check the baseline of children regarding spoken skills; then the intervention was provided in the form of play-based learning activities specifically designed to facilitate spoken abilities of young children at preschool age. Intervention was provided through 20 sessions; each of the session was of 40 minutes per day over a 1.5 Month duration. The basic purpose of play-based learning sessions was to develop spoken abilities in preschoolers through play and fun-based activities.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using SPSS; inferential statistical techniques were applied to analyze the statistical difference between pre- and post-observational data. A paired-sample t-test was applied to find out the difference between pre and post-observational scores; this difference determined the effectiveness of play-based learning activities on the spoken skills of preschool-age children.

RESULTS

Table 1: Demographic Variables

Demographic Variables	Value	Frequency	Percent
Age	3	10	34.5
	4	10	34.5
	5	9	31
Gender	Male	12	41.4
	Female	17	58.6
Siblings	1	7	24.1
	2	10	34.5
	3	7	24.1
	4	5	17.3
Status of Mother	Housewife	3	10.3
	Working Mother	26	89.7

This table provides information about demographic variables of the participants. 34.5% of the children were in the 3- and 4-year age group, while 31% of the children were in the 5-year age group. 41.4% were boys and 58.36% were girls. 24.1% of children had one sibling, 34.5% had two siblings, 24.1% had three siblings, and 17.2% of children had four siblings. 89.7% were working mothers, while 10.3% were housewives.

Table 2: Pre-Test and Post-Test Comparisons

Statement	Group	N	M	SD	t	p
Receptive Language (Understanding)	Pre-Observation	29	2.10	.419	-9.18	.001
	Post- Observation	29	3.82	.788		
Expressive Language (Speaking)	Pre- Observation	29	2.16	.646	-6.01	.001
	Post- Observation	29	3.42	1.00		
Vocabulary Development	Pre- Observation	29	2.22	.390	-6.02	.001
	Post- Observation	29	3.33	1.01		
Sentence Structure and Grammar	Pre- Observation	29	2.30	.511	-2.14	.040
	Post- Observation	29	3.22	2.35		
Conversational Skills	Pre- Observation	29	2.02	.465	1.679	.001
	Post- Observation	29	3.20	.914		

Table 2 presents the comparison between the pre-observation and post-observation scores of preschool children in five oral communication skills following the play-based learning intervention. A paired-samples t-test was used to determine whether there were significant differences between the pre- and post-observation scores.

The results show that receptive language (understanding) improved from a pre-observation mean of 2.10 (SD = .419) to a post-observation mean of 3.82 (SD= .788). The difference was statistically significant ($t = -9.18$, $p = .001$), indicating a significant improvement in children's understanding skills.

Similarly, expressive language (speaking) increased from $M = 2.16$ (SD= .646) before the intervention to $M = 3.42$ (SD= 1.00) after the intervention. This difference was statistically significant ($t = -6.01$, $p = .001$), showing improvement in children's speaking abilities.

For vocabulary development, the mean increased from 2.22 (SD= .390) to 3.33 (SD= 1.01). The paired-samples t-test showed a statistically significant difference ($t = -6.02$, $p = .001$), indicating significant improvement in children's vocabulary.

The mean score for sentence structure and grammar increased from 2.30 (SD= .511) to 3.22 (SD= 2.35). The difference was statistically significant, ($t = -2.14$, $p = .040$), indicating that play-based learning was associated with improvement in sentence structure and grammar.

Finally, conversational skills increased from a pre-observation mean of 2.02 (SD= .465) to 3.20 (SD= .914). The reported result was ($t = 1.679$, $p = .001$), indicating a statistically significant difference.

Overall, the table indicates that all five oral communication domains showed higher mean scores after the play-based learning intervention. The findings suggest that play-based learning was associated with improvements in children's understanding, speaking, vocabulary, sentence structure and grammar, and conversational skills.

DISCUSSION

Play-based learning is increasingly recognized as an appropriate approach for supporting oral communication development during the preschool years. Early childhood is an important period for developing language, interaction, vocabulary, listening, and speaking abilities. Through play, children can use language in meaningful and natural situations rather than learning communication skills only through formal instruction. Play provides opportunities for children to talk, listen, ask questions, respond to others, express ideas, and participate in social interactions. Therefore, play-based learning can provide a supportive context for the development of oral communication skills among preschool children (Ekeh et al., 2022; Paatsch et al., 2025).

An important feature of play-based learning is that it creates a language-rich environment. During different play activities, children are exposed to new words, expressions, sentences, and conversational patterns. They can practice language repeatedly while interacting with teachers and peers. This repeated and meaningful use of language can support vocabulary development as well as children's ability to understand and express ideas. Nicolopoulou et al. (2015) highlighted the value of narrative and play-based activities for promoting children's oral language, vocabulary, emergent literacy, and social competence.

Dramatic and sociodramatic play is particularly relevant to oral communication because it encourages children to take different roles and communicate within imaginary situations. Children may act as teachers, parents, doctors, shopkeepers, or other characters and consequently need to use language to explain, negotiate, ask questions, and respond to their peers. Rajapaksha (2016) emphasized that sociodramatic play can create a language-rich environment and provide opportunities for children to participate in conversations. Such activities can be especially valuable for children who communicate less frequently during ordinary classroom activities.

Storytelling and narrative play are also important components of play-based learning. These activities allow children to listen to stories, describe events, use new vocabulary, construct sentences, and communicate their own ideas. Narrative activities can also help children organize their thoughts and develop confidence in speaking. Previous research has shown that narrative and play-based activities can support oral language and vocabulary development in preschool children (Nicolopoulou et al., 2015). The literature reviewed in the present article also indicates that storytelling and dramatic play can provide children with richer opportunities for language use than approaches based only on direct instruction.

Peer interaction is another important element of play-based learning. When children play together, they naturally need to communicate with one another. They learn to take turns, respond to questions,

maintain conversations, clarify their meaning, and negotiate with peers. These experiences are important because oral communication is not limited to vocabulary and grammar; it also involves the appropriate social use of language. Play-based environments can therefore support both language development and the pragmatic aspects of communication (Ekeh et al., 2022; Haile & Ghirmai, 2024).

The teacher's role is also important in making play an effective context for oral communication. Teachers can support children's language development by asking open-ended questions, introducing new vocabulary, modelling appropriate sentences, encouraging turn-taking, and extending children's responses. Adult scaffolding can help children move beyond simple responses toward more complex communication. Research discussed in the present article emphasizes that teacher-child and peer interactions can support narrative development, accurate expression, and active listening (Haile & Ghirmai, 2024).

Another important advantage of play-based learning is its motivating and low-stress nature. Some preschool children may hesitate to speak when they feel that they are being formally assessed or directly instructed. Play can reduce this pressure by making communication part of an enjoyable activity. Puppet play, for example, can encourage children to participate in spoken interaction while they are focused on the playful activity rather than on the act of speaking itself (Toledo & Hoit, 2016).

Play-based learning is also important for developing communication confidence and participation. Children who are shy or less verbally active may receive more opportunities to communicate when activities are organized around collaborative play. Group play, role play, construction activities, and storytelling can encourage children to initiate and maintain interactions with peers and adults. Previous research has indicated that children participating in structured and unstructured play can demonstrate greater verbalization, articulation, and willingness to participate in conversations (HEI Schools, 2025).

The importance of play-based learning is particularly relevant to inclusive preschool education. Children have different levels of language ability, confidence, and communication needs. A flexible play-based environment can provide multiple ways for children to participate and communicate according to their developmental level. Inclusive play can therefore provide socially supportive opportunities for children, including children with disabilities or those who experience difficulties in communication (Taylor & Francis, 2025).

Overall, the literature indicates that play-based learning is closely connected with the development of oral communication because it combines language practice, social interaction, motivation, vocabulary exposure, storytelling, role play, turn-taking, and teacher scaffolding within meaningful learning experiences. These characteristics make play-based learning particularly suitable for preschool children, for whom learning through active participation and interaction is highly important. The present study is therefore relevant because it focuses specifically on oral communication within a play-based learning context and examines important dimensions of children's communication, including understanding, speaking, vocabulary, sentence structure, grammar, and conversational skills.

FINDINGS

The findings of the study were based on the comparison of pre-observation and post-observation scores of preschool children's oral communication skills following the play-based learning intervention.

- **Receptive Language (Understanding):** The findings showed a clear improvement in children's receptive language skills after the intervention. Children demonstrated better understanding and comprehension of language.

- **Expressive Language (Speaking):** The findings indicated improvement in children's expressive language skills. After the intervention, children showed a better ability to express their thoughts, ideas, and needs through speech.
- **Vocabulary Development:** The findings revealed improvement in children's vocabulary development. Children demonstrated an increased ability to understand and use a wider range of words after the intervention.
- **Sentence Structure and Grammar:** The findings showed improvement in children's sentence structure and grammar. Children became better able to construct sentences and use language with improved grammatical accuracy.
- **Conversational Skills:** The findings indicated improvement in children's conversational skills. Children demonstrated better participation in conversations, including responding to others, expressing ideas, and maintaining interactions.

Overall, the findings showed that preschool children's scores increased across all five dimensions of oral communication after the play-based learning intervention. The findings indicate positive changes in receptive language, expressive language, vocabulary development, sentence structure and grammar, and conversational skills. The uploaded article reports these improvements as evidence supporting the use of play-based learning to promote oral communication among preschool children.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that play-based learning is a valuable approach for promoting oral communication among preschool children. The findings indicated that children demonstrated improvement across the major areas of oral communication, including receptive language, expressive language, vocabulary development, sentence structure and grammar, and conversational skills after participation in play-based learning activities.

Play-based learning provides children with meaningful opportunities to listen, speak, learn new vocabulary, construct sentences, express ideas, and interact with peers and teachers. Through activities such as storytelling, role play, group play, and interactive communication, children can practice language in natural and engaging situations. These experiences can contribute to greater participation and confidence in oral communication.

The study therefore highlights the importance of incorporating structured and purposeful play-based activities into preschool classrooms. Teachers should provide language-rich play environments and use questioning, modelling, encouragement, and peer interaction to support children's communication development.

However, the findings should be interpreted within the study's limitations, particularly the small sample size and the one-group pretest-posttest design without a control group. Future studies should use larger sample sizes, comparison groups, standardized assessment tools, and longer intervention periods to provide stronger evidence of the effectiveness of play-based learning in developing preschool children's oral communication skills.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings and conclusions, the following recommendations are made.

1. Preschool teachers should incorporate play-based learning activities into daily classroom teaching to support children's oral communication development.

2. Storytelling, role play, puppet play, and dramatic play should be regularly used to provide children with opportunities to listen and communicate.
3. Teachers should create a language-rich play environment where children can freely express their ideas, needs, feelings, and experiences.
4. Peer interaction and group play should be encouraged because they provide children with opportunities to practice turn-taking, listening, speaking, and conversation.
5. Teachers should use open-ended questions, language modelling, and positive encouragement during play to extend children's vocabulary and sentence development.
6. Preschool institutions should provide appropriate play materials and resources, including puppets, storybooks, pictures, blocks, role-play materials, and other interactive resources.
7. Parents and caregivers should be encouraged to use play-based language activities at home, such as storytelling, pretend play, picture discussion, and conversational games.
8. Teacher training programmes should include play-based strategies for developing oral communication skills so that teachers can effectively integrate purposeful play into preschool classrooms.
9. Preschool programmes should provide sufficient time for interactive play, rather than relying primarily on teacher-directed and worksheet-based activities.
10. Future researchers should conduct studies with larger samples, control/comparison groups, standardized assessment tools, and longer intervention periods to provide stronger evidence regarding the effectiveness of play-based learning for children's oral communication development.

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