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Speech Delay and Its Affecting Factors (Case Study in a Child with Initial Aq)

Syamsuardi

Faculty of Education, State University of Makassar, South Sulawesi, Indonesia

Abstract

Any parent wishes an appropriate development for their children. One of the parents' great concerns is the children's speech development; they are worried if their children are late to speak. The children's speech development is influenced by physical and environmental factors. The causes of physical factors are related to the problem but the role of environmental factors is more complex because it involves the educational role of the family as a starting point of the children's ability to speak. The children's speech delay is viewed from environmental factors which are based on the role of parents in training the children's speech ability including insufficient time parents and children spent together, lack of understanding of developing children's potential, and parents' speaking style following the child's speech style. Speech delay in children will affect other aspects of their development if it is not properly handled.

Keywords: speech ability, parents and family environment

1. Introduction

As social beings, human requires a tool to interact with one another in their lives. The speech ability as part of a means of communication among people makes the speech development, particularly in children, a concern of every parent. Many parents are worried when they find out that their child who has entered the age of 2-3 years has constraints in terms of the ability to speak.

The child speech development delay could have been caused by the child's physical condition and environmental factors. Constraints due to physical factors, of course, can be handled by the medical treatment but delays in the ability to speak due to environmental factors become a different problem which usually arises in informal education. This is because the role of informal education, or commonly referred to as education in the family, is the first place where child learns to speak. Mistakes made by parents and family environment in training the child's speech will create a problem in the child's next speech development. Kahlmar (2008) argued that the environment with lots of speech expressions is a place which encourages children to speak and exemplify the use of emphasis, organization, and dialect to help children develop and improve their language skills. Meanwhile, Nilsen (2004) revealed that the ability to speak is the use of voice in expressing intentions to others in the form of words containing meaning to be understood by others.

In society, it is common to find various speech developments in different children. There are several children in the age of 2 years who have already been able to mention words clearly. Even there are children in the age of 3 years who have been able to speak clearly, sing a song, and even memorize the Al-Quran fluently. Yet, there were also children who have entered the age of 4 years, but are still difficult to mention of words or phrases.

Discussing about the factors that influence the development of the child, of course the causes cannot be generalized; it should be viewed from each individual so that the problem is more directed to a casuistic problem. Thus, the treatment for the children who experience speech delay can be given appropriately suitable with the cause of the problem.

According to Maria (2011), child's speech development can be divided into 4 (four) stages, namely the pre-lingual period (first year), early lingual period (1 to 2.6 years), differentiation period (2.6 to 5 years) and maturity period (5 years and above). The development in each period has its own characteristics so that the indicators of achievement of the child's speech ability can be properly matched with the development period of the child's age. The children's development during the pre-lingual period or also known as pre-verbal, is generally only expressed in the form of crying and pronouncing sound irregularly which seems to have no meaning. Yet for a baby, each of the sound produced has certain meaning associated with their needs. Babies in the age of 7-12 months are already able to mention one syllable (ma ... ma ... pa ... pa ... da ... da ...).

The early verbal period or also called as early lingual period is a period of speech development which occurs simultaneously with the transition period from infants to toddlers (under three years). The child's speaking ability is still very simple; this development is usually characterized by the condition where children could name only two words. In the differentiation period, the child is able use his speech as part of the interaction with other people. Moreover, in this period the child is already able to express his fantasies through the use of words or stories that usually appear spontaneously. The questioning ability of the child who is entering this period also emerges so that many parents find it difficult to answer the questions which sometimes do not make sense; the answers sometimes are beyond the knowledge of the parents.

Differentiation period especially at age 2.5 - 3.5 years has led to an increase in semantic development (able to understand the language); addition of vocabularies and accuracy of the use of these words have been clearly shown. In this development, children are able to be invited to communicate with well in terms of storytelling, discussion and listening to stories.

Language development of children aged 3-5 years, according Seefeldt & Wasik (2006), has increased very rapidly in terms of vocabulary mastery. At the age of three, children are able to master as much as 900-1000 words and it increases to 4000-6000 words at the age of four. At the age of five, children's vocabulary become as much as 5000-8000 words.

The measure of child's capability development can be conducted by observing the child's abilities when speaking and responding to some of the responses related to the use of communication in the environment around the child. Beaty (2013) measured the child's speech by looking at the response in the form of listening but not talking, giving one-word answers, giving responses in short phrases, doing the chanting, participating in the conversation, speaking in long sentences, asking questions and telling a story.

Based on the preliminary observation conducted, it is found that the speech development of a child with initials Aq (6 years) is very low. This child is actually in the period where he already has sufficient vocabularies, the ability of mentioning words correctly, the ability of understanding language, and the ability of producing long sentences, but it is still not achieved yet. Therefore, it is become important to study about the causes of the speech delay happened to Aq in order to find proper treatment to solve the problems.

2. Research Methods

Based on the problem analysis in this study, the researcher employed qualitative research method in the form of case study. Qualitative methods can be used to find and understand what is hidden behind the unknown phenomena. In addition, Qualitative methods can provide more details about the complex phenomenon that is difficult to express by quantitative methods (Strauss & Juliet, 1990).

The reason of selecting this approach is a fact that each child has different characteristics so that in-depth and comprehensive study is required for this case. The subject in this study was 1 (one) child. The data obtained will be analyzed by using Milles and Huberman interactive model; the data will be organized in the form of categories and further be elaborated in the form of units. The next step, the significant data were analyzed, summarized and written in research reports.

The testing of data validity in this study was performed by using three (3) techniques, namely the extension of the participation, the extension of observation and triangulation of sources.

3. Research Findings

3.1 Aq's Speech Ability

The data found through observations in this study indicate that Aq's speech development is very low compared to normal child's development. It can be shown by the mastery of vocabulary, pronunciation and ability to produce expression that cannot be done properly. In interaction with other people, Aq's could only mention two-word phrases; this is very much different from what his peers can do at the age of 6 (six) years.

In communicating with others, Aq was only accustomed to saying the word "oeiii", as well as when asking for something to do with the words "oeiiii oeiii open nini ". The condition indicates that Aq's ability to understand basically has been developed but is hampered in the ability to mention what is in his mind.

Understanding the condition shown by Aq, it can be concluded that his speaking ability is at the level of being able to provide one-word answers, to respond a short phrase and to ask a quick question; but he has not been able to do the chanting, cannot participate in the conversation, has not been able to speak in long sentences and has not been able to tell story.

3.2 Factors Affecting Speech Delay

In conducting the study on factors that affect children's ability to speak, the emergence of some issues from two (2) factors, physical and environmental factors, needs to be considered. Based on the results of observations and interviews, the data obtained were:

3.2.1 Physical Factor

Playing activity done by Aq is not different from what other children do. Based on the observations conducted, Aq's health condition is just the same as the condition of normal child. His physical appearance is also good, with a bit above average weight and height of normal child. In addition, he was born through normal birth process.

Basically, the physical condition of Aq does not show any abnormalities or disorder in both the hearing and the structure of the mouth and tongue. It is based on observations made to know Aq's ability to listen when called upon by using a small sound frequency. In addition, the structure of the mouth, tongue and teeth do not

have problems to support his speaking ability.

3.2.2 *Environmental Factors*

When discussing the second factor, namely the environmental factor, it is necessary to identify the environment that gives a great influence in the development of Aq's speech ability. This research focused on family environment, school environment and community environment. These three environments play important roles in supporting the development of the child's speech, and the family became the dominating factor in a child's ability to communicate.

3.2.2.1 *Family environment*

3.2.2.1.1 *The first 2 years of nurture was entrusted to a babysitter*

Aq is the third child of a couple whose working background is civil servant. These conditions require the parents to entrust Aq to a caregiver (babysitter). The caregiver began nurturing Aq when Aq is 1 (one) month to two (2) years old.

The babysitter who took care of Aq for the first two years was a relative of Aq's parents coming from an isolated region outside of the town. Instead of having nurturing education background, she only graduated from a primary school and is known as an introvert girl.

The frequency of parents involvement during this first two years was considered very less due to working demands, so that the child spent more time with the babysitter with a ratio of 2 : 1 or as many as ten (10) hours with the babysitter and 5 (five) hours along with his parents.

3.2.2.1.2 *Lack of understanding on nurturing child*

Parents and caregiver should pay attention to the importance of developing the child's potential. Lack of understanding possessed by a caregiver will have an impact on children development which will not run optimally. Viewing the educational background of Aq's caregiver, it can be said that the caregiver did not have fundamental understanding in terms of child care. Without education and training, the caregiver was directly trusted to care for the child. Besides that, as a girl who has no experience as a parent, the Aq's caregiver's orientation is merely to soothe the child, attempting no crying and no fuss, without caring for the aspects of child development.

Some efforts usually done by the Aq caregivers in order to calm the child down, no crying, is spending more time to sleep and continuously providing bottle milk to make the child calm. In terms of providing stimulus for the child's speech development, the caregiver admitted that she did not pay attention to it due to ignorance of the potential of the child during the first year.

3.2.2.1.3 *The parents' speaking style following the child's speech style*

The way of Aq's parents treating their child is the same as what other parents usually do toward their children, such as playing, joking, and communicating each other. But there are several habits that are inherited from generation to generation and still often found performed by parents in providing training to communicate with their children. As what Aq's parents did in their communication with their children, the parents did not acting as a good speaker to be imitated by their child, but they do imitate their child's speech. This, of course, will encourage children to produce words in inappropriate way.

3.2.2.2 *School environment*

Aq's participation in school learning began at the age of 3 years at a children daycare. Based on the interviews, initially before joining the class, Aq's speech was still considered to be very poor because commonly in every interaction, Aq used more sign language and could say only one word. After learning in the children daycare for 1 year, Aq started showing speech that was able to say two or three words. Entering the age of 4 years, Aq then went to learn in kindergarten and was regarded as one of the children who liked to disturbed his friends at the time of learning. However, no serious treatment made by the school in addressing the Aq's problem, usually the teacher just spontaneously took Aq out of the class and allowed him to play freely outside the classroom with the intention of making Aq no longer interfere his friends at the time of learning.

3.2.2.3 *Community environment*

Living conditions becomes one of the aspects that influence the development of the child's ability to communicate. This is because communication becomes a tool of interaction in the community. However, the environmental conditions of the communities where Aq lives could not support his interactions with others, especially with peers due to the lack of interaction in the environment around his house. When entering the age of 4 years, after participating learning in kindergarten, Aq grew up in the place where his mother worked until going home after work. This made Aq loose opportunity to play with his peers at the age of 4-5 years. Also, Aq could not interact with the people around his house.

4. Discussion

The development of children's language ability is the result of processing the input obtained from the environment: family environment, peers, or community. The development of children's language can be achieved properly if the children enter its development by practicing things that will occur through life

experience.

Aq's condition, related to his language development especially the ability to speak, is basically not influenced by physical factors. Based on the data obtained, Aq's physical development could be categorized in good condition. Moreover, Aq's motor development had developed so well that it can be said that the speech problem was not coming from his internal side but his environmental factors, either family, school, or community. This is in line with Chomsky's opinion (in Susanto: 2011) which stated that every child has natural language ability so early development period is an important phase to develop children's language. If children are not trained to practice and experience language before puberty, they will not be able to use good language structure throughout their life.

Aq's speech ability was very much different from normal children in general. Until the age of 6 years, he was only capable to mention three to four words. Meanwhile, Hurlock (1978) revealed that the ability of the child at the age of five years can be seen from some activities; the child is able to use the word descriptions; the child know the words' opposites; the child can speak clearly unless there is a problem in pronunciation; the child can follow three instructions at the same time; the child understands the concept of time and can repeat a sentence containing nine words. Compared to the theory, Aq still could not achieve the indicators; he was not able to use word descriptions, could not speak clearly, was not able to follow three instructions and had not been able to repeat the whole nine-word sentence. However, Aq has demonstrated the ability to understand the other person and understand the concept of time such as morning, noon, and night.

The lack of environmental role in training Aq's speech ability was a major cause of Aq's not optimal language development. Lack of stimulus in listening to the sounds of language Aq experienced during his first year was to be one reason for the lack of vocabulary possessed. In fact, Syaodih (2001) stated that the aspects of language development begin with the imitation of sound as well as touching.

5. Conclusion

Language development is an important factor in the interaction with the society so that the problems experienced by children, particularly in their speech ability, will affect the other developmental aspects. Aq's inability to speak well was caused by the environmental factors that did not provide the opportunity for Aq to explore his speech toward the environment in his first year. The role of parents in teaching children to communicate was hindered by the lack of time parents and children spent together. In addition, lack of support from the community and schools that do not provide early treatment efforts can also be the case.

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