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Trends and Research Gaps in Receptive Language Acquisition of Seven-Year-Olds Children with Speech Delay

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ABSTRACT

Receptive language development is a fundamental aspect of children's learning and communication processes, yet many seven-year-olds experience speech delay that impacts their academic and social abilities. Although numerous studies have been conducted, the direction and focus of research in this field remain fragmented and lack strong thematic consistency. This study aims to identify trends, main themes, and research gaps in scientific literature related to receptive language acquisition in seven-year-olds with speech delay through a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) and bibliometric analysis approach. Data were obtained from the Scopus database using specific keyword combinations following the PRISMA protocol, then analyzed using VOSviewer and NVivo software to generate thematic network visualizations and research gap word clouds. The analysis results indicate that publications fluctuated with a peak in 2021, dominated by contributions from the United States and institutions such as Boston University and the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Three main thematic clusters were identified, including early language development, diagnosis and intervention, and socio-linguistic context. Research gaps were found in the lack of studies specifically targeting seven-year-olds, limited longitudinal research, and insufficient exploration of technology-based interventions. This study concludes that there is a need for research focus on specific age groups, strengthening longitudinal methodologies, expanding cross-country collaboration, and integrating technology in interventions to improve the effectiveness of receptive language disorder treatment in children.

Keywords: receptive language acquisition, speech delay, seven-year-olds children, spech delay

Tren dan Kesenjangan Penelitian Pemerolehan Bahasa Reseptif pada Anak Usia Tujuh Tahun dengan Keterlambatan Berbicara

ABSTRAK

Perkembangan bahasa reseptif merupakan aspek fundamental dalam proses belajar dan komunikasi anak, namun masih banyak anak usia 7 tahun yang mengalami *speech delay* yang berdampak pada kemampuan akademik dan sosial mereka. Meskipun telah banyak studi dilakukan, arah dan fokus penelitian di bidang ini masih terfragmentasi dan belum menunjukkan konsistensi tematik yang kuat. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengidentifikasi tren, tema utama, dan kesenjangan penelitian dalam literatur ilmiah terkait pemerolehan bahasa reseptif pada anak usia 7 tahun dengan *speech delay* melalui pendekatan *Systematic Literature Review* (SLR) dan analisis bibliometrik. Data diperoleh dari database Scopus menggunakan kombinasi kata kunci spesifik dengan protokol PRISMA, kemudian dianalisis menggunakan perangkat lunak VOSviewer dan NVivo untuk menghasilkan visualisasi jaringan tematik dan *word cloud* kesenjangan penelitian. Hasil analisis menunjukkan bahwa publikasi mengalami fluktuasi dengan puncak pada tahun 2021, didominasi oleh kontribusi dari Amerika Serikat dan institusi seperti Boston University serta University of Wisconsin-Madison. Tiga klaster tematik utama teridentifikasi meliputi perkembangan bahasa dini, diagnosis dan intervensi, serta konteks sosial-linguistik. Kesenjangan penelitian ditemukan pada minimnya studi spesifik usia 7 tahun, terbatasnya penelitian longitudinal, dan kurangnya eksplorasi intervensi berbasis teknologi. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan perlunya fokus penelitian pada kelompok usia spesifik, penguatan metodologi longitudinal, perluasan kolaborasi antarnegara, dan integrasi teknologi dalam intervensi untuk meningkatkan efektivitas penanganan gangguan bahasa reseptif pada anak.

Kata kunci: pemerolehan bahasa reseptif, anak-usia tujuh tahun, pemerolehan bahasa

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INTRODUCTION

Language development is a fundamental aspect of child development, significantly influencing communication, learning, and social interactions. It is closely linked to a child's cognitive, social, and emotional well-being, serving as a foundation for successful outcomes later in life (Beitchman & Brownlie, 2005; Peixoto et al., 2025). Language impairment, if left untreated, can lead to impaired reading and verbal skills, behavioral problems, and poor psychosocial adjustment, ultimately affecting academic performance (Marisa, 2015; Yusuf, 2018). Early identification and intervention are crucial, as they can reduce the long-term impacts of language delays, such as social isolation, teasing, and academic failure (Bland, 1996). Research shows that children with high language skills are more socially accepted, exhibit fewer behavioral problems, and demonstrate better socio-emotional development (Pagare, 2023). In contrast, those with developmental language disorders (DLD) often face increased behavioral problems and are at risk of peer neglect, which can exacerbate psychosocial challenges (Pagare, 2023). The prevalence of speech and language delays in preschool-aged children is significant, with estimates ranging from 5-10%, highlighting the need for increased awareness and early intervention (Putra, 2024). Effective strategies for addressing language development challenges involve collaborative efforts among families, educators, and health professionals, emphasizing the importance of a holistic approach to prevention and intervention (Peixoto et al., 2025). By addressing language development issues early, children are more likely to reach their full potential academically and socially, underscoring the crucial role of language in overall child development (Putra, 2024) (Language Development, 2022).

Speech delay, defined as a significant delay in the development of speech and language skills, often manifests as difficulties in expressive and receptive language, affecting a child's ability to follow instructions, understand conversation, and engage socially (Liang et al., 2023; Yokoyama, 2003). This condition can arise from a variety of factors, including idiopathic causes, hearing loss, or environmental influences such as neglect (Aminah & Ratnawati, 2022; McLaughlin, 2011). Early identification is crucial, as untreated speech delay can lead to long-term academic and social challenges, including learning disabilities and emotional difficulties (Liang et al., 2023(Abdukadirova & Makhkamova, 2024). Despite the prevalence of speech delay, which affects approximately 5% to 12% of children aged 2 to 5 years, many cases remain undetected in early childhood due to inadequate screening practices (Liang et al., 2023) (McLaughlin, 2011). Therefore, proactive monitoring and timely intervention are crucial to mitigate the adverse effects of speech delay on child development (Aminah & Ratnawati, 2022) (McLaughlin, 2011).

The importance of age seven in child development is underscored by its role as a critical transitional phase, particularly in cognitive and language development. This age marks a significant shift from preschool to primary education, marked by significant changes in children's cognitive abilities and metalinguistic skills. Research indicates that children around this age begin to demonstrate a more systematic and explicit understanding of language, shifting from intuitive forms of awareness to meta-level reflection (Melogno et al., 2022). Furthermore, the transition to primary school at age seven is often associated with emotional and intellectual challenges, necessitating supportive educational practices to facilitate these changes (Yeboah, 2002). The developmental shifts observed during this period align with Piagetian theory, emphasizing the importance of matching educational content to children's evolving cognitive abilities (Sameroff & McDonough, 1994). Overall, age seven serves as a pivotal point influencing future learning trajectories and educational outcomes (Lestari et al., 2023; Rieber, 1998).

The literature demonstrates the need for a more inclusive research approach (Fatmawati & Pratikno, 2024; Guo, 2022a). Bibliometric analy-

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sis highlights that while the field has evolved with new methodologies, the absence of a comprehensive bibliometric approach to the study of speech delay limits understanding of trends and knowledge gaps (Guo, 2022a; Solo et al., 2024). This suggests an urgent need for targeted research addressing these neglected areas to improve intervention strategies and outcomes for affected children.

Based on the background outlined, the following research questions can be formulated: (1) What are the trends in scientific publications related to receptive language acquisition in 7-year-old children with speech delay during the period 2014–2024? (2) What are the main themes that dominate scientific studies in the field of receptive language acquisition in children with speech delay? (3) How are the interrelationships between research topics in the field of receptive language acquisition in 7-year-old children with speech delay based on keyword network visualization? (4) What research gaps need to be prioritized as future directions for developing studies on receptive language acquisition in 7-year-old children with speech delay?

Based on the problems and gaps outlined, this study aims to present a mapping of the scientific literature on receptive language acquisition in 7-year-old children with speech delay through a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach and bibliometric analysis. Specifically, this study has four main objectives. First, to analyze global research trends related to receptive language disorders in children over the past decade. Second, to identify the main themes that dominate scientific studies in this field. Third, to reveal the interrelationships between research topics through keyword network visualization. Fourth, to identify research gaps that can guide future study development. Thus, this study is expected to contribute to strengthening the theoretical and practical foundations for developing more inclusive interventions and educational policies for children with language disorders.

This research is expected to provide both theoretical and practical benefits. Theoretically, this study contributes to enriching the body of knowledge in the field of child language development, particularly by systematically presenting a map of trends, key themes, and research gaps in receptive language acquisition in 7-year-old children with speech delay. Practically, the results of this study can serve as a reference for educational practitioners, language therapists, and clinicians in designing more targeted and evidence-based intervention programs. For future researchers, this study provides a map of gaps that can serve as a foundation for developing more comprehensive, longitudinal, and contextual studies in the field of receptive language disorders in children.

METHODS

This study used a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach combined with bibliometric analysis to identify, evaluate, and synthesize scientific publications related to receptive language acquisition in 7-year-old children with speech delay. The SLR approach was chosen because it allowed researchers to systematically map the research landscape, exploring trends, key focus areas, and research gaps in this field. The research protocol adhered to the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) guidelines, which cover the stages of article identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion.

The research instrument used was a PRISMA-based data extraction form, which included article identification (title, author(s), year of publication, country, and institutional affiliation), keywords, and key findings from each article meeting the inclusion criteria. The extracted data were then analyzed using VOSviewer software to generate a keyword network visualization (co-occurrence map) and NVivo for content analysis in the form of a word cloud of research gaps.

The research data were obtained from the Scopus database, known for its extensive coverage and high credibility in multidisciplinary scientific publications. The search process used a combination of keywords with the following

Boolean operators: ("receptive language" OR "language comprehension" OR "language acquisition") AND ("speech delay" OR "language delay" OR "speech disorder" OR "language impairment") AND ("children" OR "child" OR "pediatric") AND (intervention OR diagnosis OR development OR assessment). This search strategy was designed to comprehensively capture publications relevant to the topic of receptive language disorders in children.

The inclusion criteria used in article selection included: (1) articles published in reputable journals indexed by Scopus, (2) articles in English, (3) publications between 2014 and 2024, and (4) articles relevant to keywords related to children, language disorders, intervention, or communication development. Meanwhile, the exclusion criteria included: (1) articles in the form of editorials, opinion pieces, or short reports, (2) multiple or duplicate publications, and (3) studies that did not explicitly mention the topic of receptive language disorders in their abstracts. Articles meeting the selection criteria were then exported in CSV format for further analysis.

Bibliometric analysis was conducted using two main software tools: VOSviewer and NVivo. VOSviewer was used to map keyword networks and inter-topic relationships in the form of co-occurrence maps, providing an overview of the main thematic clusters in the analyzed literature. This software allows for visualization of interrelationships between concepts and identification of dominant themes in the research. In addition, NVivo was used to conduct content analysis and generate word clouds from the abstracts of the reviewed articles to identify research gaps frequently mentioned explicitly by the authors. The combination of these two analytical tools allows for complementary qualitative and quantitative approaches to gain a comprehensive understanding of the research landscape in the field of receptive language acquisition in children with speech delays.

RESULTS

Based on the selection process using the PRISMA protocol, several articles met the inclusion criteria for further analysis. The results of the bibliometric analysis are presented in several aspects, including the distribution of publications by year, contributions by country, institution, and author, as well as thematic cluster mapping and identification of research gaps.

Publication Trends

An analysis of the distribution of scientific publications related to receptive language acquisition in children with speech delays over the past decade (2014-2024) shows fluctuations in the number of publications from year to year. Publication trends can be seen in Figure 1.

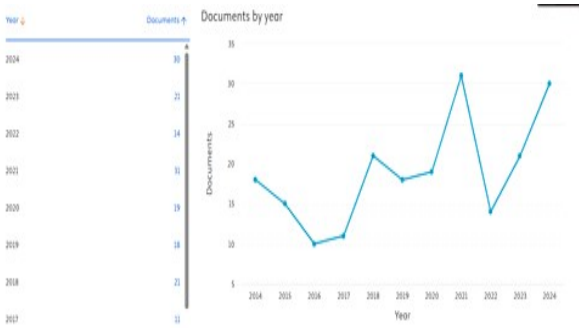

Figure 1
Trends in Scientific Publications 2014-2024

Figure 1 shows that the number of publications experienced significant dynamics throughout the observation period. The lowest point occurred in 2016 with only 10 published papers, while a significant increase occurred in 2021, reaching a peak of 31 papers during that period. After a sharp decline in 2022 with 14 papers, there was a surge again in 2024 with 30 papers. This trend indicates increasing academic interest and attention in the topic of receptive language acquisition in children with speech delays in recent years.

Distribution by Country, Institution, and Author

Analysis of contributions by country, institution, and author provides an overview of centers of scientific productivity in this field. The distribution of publications by country, institution, and author is presented in Figures 1, 2, and 3.

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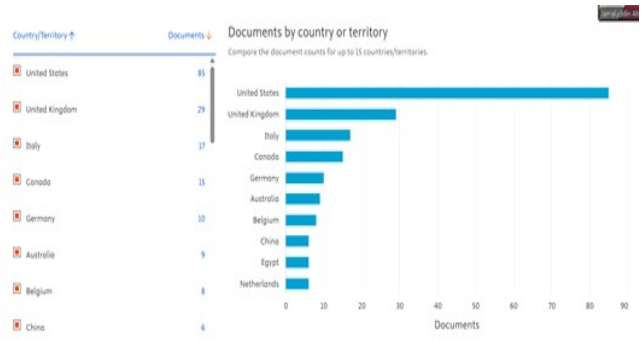

Figure 2
Distribution of Publications by Country

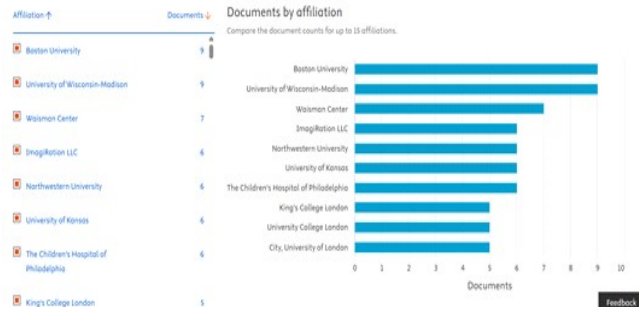

Figure 3
Distribution of Publications by Institution

Figure 4
Distribution of Publications by Author

Based on Figures 2, 3, and 4, it can be identified that the United States has the most published documents, with a total of 85 documents, far surpassing other countries such as the United Kingdom (29 documents) and Italy (17 documents). Institutionally, Boston University and the University of Wisconsin-Madison are the most productive institutions, contributing 9 documents each. Based on authors, A. Vyshedskiy has the most contributions, with 6 documents, followed by K.C. Hustad and M.Y. Roberts, with 5 documents each. This data indicates that the United States dominates scientific contributions, both in terms of countries, institutions, and individual researchers.

Thematic Research Clusters

Keyword network mapping was conducted using VOSviewer to identify key themes and interrelationships between topics in the analyzed literature. A visualization of keyword co-occurrence is presented in Figure 5.

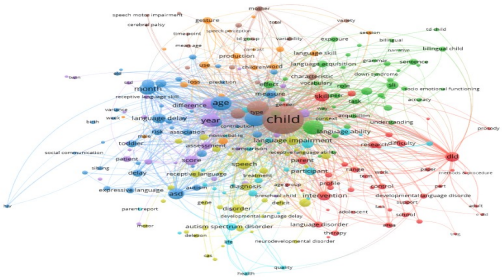

Figure 5
Visualizing Keyword Co-occurrence Using VOSviewer

Figure 4 displays a visualization of keyword co-occurrence, grouping related terms into several colored thematic clusters. Central keywords such as "child," "language impairment," and "age" indicate the primary focus of research on childhood language disorders. Each color represents a specific thematic cluster with the following characteristics. The blue cluster addresses the theme of early language development, encompassing the terms "language delay," "toddler," and "expressive language." The red cluster emphasizes the terms "developmental language disorder" (DLD), "intervention," and "language disorder," highlighting the

diagnosis and treatment of language disorders. The green cluster encompasses the themes of "language acquisition," "bilingual child," and "sentence," addressing aspects of language development within a social and linguistic context. This visualization identifies several key themes in the literature, including early language development, developmental language disorder (DLD), intervention, and the role of environmental and social factors in children's language development.

Research Gaps

Research gaps were identified through abstract content analysis using NVivo to generate word clouds depicting areas requiring further research. The results of the research gap analysis are presented in Figure 5.

Figure 5
Research Gaps Word Cloud

Figure 6 shows a word cloud representing research gaps based on sentence analysis in publication abstracts. Words such as "little," "known," "language," "children," "intervention," "understudied," and "development" appear prominently in the visualization. This finding highlights areas frequently cited as underexplored or in need of further research, including language development in children, early intervention, and associations with conditions such as autism or hearing loss.

DISCUSSION

The results of the bibliometric analysis indicate that the trend of scientific publications related to receptive language acquisition in children with speech delays fluctuated during the period 2014-2024, with a low point in 2016 and a peak in 2021. This pattern of increasing publications aligns with findings (Guo, 2022b), which analyzed publications from 1900 to 2021 and identified an increasing focus on autism spectrum disorder, bilingualism, and intervention strategies in child language research. The significant increase in 2021 may be attributed to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on children's language development, as confirmed by Kyvrakidou et al. (2025), who found a significant increase in abnormal language development profiles in preschool children in Greece post-pandemic. Rodríguez et al. (2025) also documented the broader neuropsychological impacts of COVID-19, including delays in language and social skills due to isolation and educational disruptions during the pandemic. The surge in publications in 2024 indicates the scientific community's response to the urgency of addressing the pandemic's impact on children's language development. This trend also reflects a shift in research approaches toward greater interdisciplinary approaches, as Hu et al. (2024) noted that language disorder research now integrates insights from linguistics, psychology, and neuroscience. Overall, these publication trends underscore the urgent need for targeted interventions and support systems to address the pandemic's detrimental impact on children's language development. The findings of this study indicate that the United States dominates publication productivity with 85 papers, followed by the United Kingdom with 29 papers and Italy with 17 papers. While the most productive institutions are Boston University and the University of Wisconsin-Madison with 9 papers each. This dominant pattern reflects the North-South research divide identified in various previous studies. Kidd & Garcia (2022) in their systematic review revealed that the majority of the existing literature still skews English and other Indo-European languages, thus limiting the applicability of findings to diverse linguistic and cultural contexts, particularly in developing countries.

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Scheidecker et al. (2023) also emphasized similar limitations in the geographic representation of child language disorder research. The importance of including underrepresented populations was demonstrated by Garcia et al. (2023) through research in urban communities in the Philippines, which highlighted the challenges and adaptations necessary for effective data collection in such settings. Furthermore, Bornstein & Hendricks (2012), based on data from over 100,000 children in sixteen developing countries, found that language comprehension often outpaces language production, with socioeconomic factors influencing language development outcomes. These findings strengthen the argument (Foushee & Srinivasan, 2023) that generalizing findings from predominantly Euro-American contexts potentially overlooks critical cultural and environmental factors in shaping language acquisition in diverse settings. Therefore, efforts are needed to increase research capacity in developing countries so that research findings can be more representative and applicable globally.

Mapping thematic clusters through VOSviewer co-occurrence visualization identified three main interrelated theme groups: the early language development cluster, the diagnosis and intervention cluster, and the socio-linguistic context cluster. These findings can be understood through the theoretical frameworks of language development proposed by Vygotsky, Piaget, and Chomsky, which provide different but complementary perspectives on understanding children's language acquisition. Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development concept emphasizes the importance of social interaction and scaffolding in language learning, which aligns with the emergence of the green cluster in this study, which highlights the role of social and linguistic contexts such as "language acquisition," "bilingual child," and "sentence" (Dastpak et al., 2017; Khawaji, 2024). Meanwhile, Piaget's stages of cognitive development indicate that language acquisition is linked to cognitive growth, where children must reach certain cognitive milestones before mastering language skills (Hulit & Howard, 1992). This perspective is relevant to the blue cluster that focuses on early language development such as "language delay," "toddler," and "expressive language." On the other hand, Chomsky's concept of the Language Acquisition Device states that children are innately equipped to learn language, a view that contrasts with the behaviorist perspective that emphasizes environmental reinforcement (Dastpak et al., 2017). Recent research on Developmental Language Disorder (DLD) and effective language interventions, as reflected in the red cluster of this study, supports the significance of this theoretical framework by demonstrating that structured and interactive environments can enhance language development, consistent with Vygotsky's and Piaget's theories (Brook & Brook, 2014; Nawaz et al., 2024). Overall, this integration of classical theories with contemporary research confirms the multifaceted nature of language acquisition, involving both cognitive and social factors simultaneously.

A research gap analysis using NVivo word clouds revealed several areas requiring further exploration, marked by the predominant occurrence of words such as "little," "known," "understudied," and "development." These findings confirm the existing research gaps related to specific age groups, longitudinal studies, and technology-based interventions. The importance of focusing on the 7-year-old age group is underscored by Piaget's and Erikson's developmental theories, which highlight this age as a critical transitional phase in cognitive and social development (McKean et al., 2017). While the need for early intervention is widely recognized, existing research is still dominated by studies of younger children, leaving a gap in research specifically targeting 7-year-olds (Kim & Hong, 2008; Hee-Ran, 2009). Longitudinal studies such as those by McKean et al. (2017) have demonstrated the significance of early life factors and language skills at ages 2 and 4 in predicting language outcomes at age 7, but such studies are still limited. Furthermore, although digital technology has demonstrated potential in enhancing language development in early

childhood, its application to school-age children, particularly those with speech delays, remains underexplored (Abisheva & Mirza, 2024). Previous research consistently recommends the need for longitudinal research to better understand the progression and outcomes of interventions for language delays, emphasizing the potential benefits of integrating technology-based solutions (Joffe, 2008; MacWhinney, 2022). Addressing these gaps could lead to more effective interventions and better support for children with speech delays, ultimately improving their literacy, social skills, and overall quality of life (MacWhinney, 2022; Kaiser & Roberts, 2011).

These research findings emphasize the multidimensional nature of language disorders and underscore the need for an interdisciplinary approach to understanding and addressing receptive language acquisition in children with speech delays. The WHO's International Classification of Functioning, Disability, and Health (ICF) framework serves as an important reference, offering a holistic perspective by integrating biological, psychological, and social factors that influence language development (Washington, 2007). Practically, family-based interventions have demonstrated their effectiveness, emphasizing the role of the child's environment and parental involvement in developing language skills (Feldman, 2019). The urgency of this intervention is further reinforced by literature showing that approximately 10% of children experience significant challenges in language acquisition, which can negatively impact their literacy, social skills, and overall development (MacWhinney, 2022; "Language Development," 2022). This situation demands collaboration between clinicians, educators, and policymakers to ensure equitable access to resources and tailored interventions to individual needs, thereby improving outcomes for children with developmental language disorders (Mayer-Crittenden et al., 2013). Thus, the theoretical and practical implications of this study suggest that handling receptive language disorders in children cannot be done partially by one discipline alone, but requires synergy between various parties with a comprehensive and contextual approach.

Although this study successfully maps the research landscape on receptive language acquisition in 7-year-old children with speech delay, several methodological limitations warrant attention, including database bias, bibliometric limitations, and subjective interpretation. Database bias stems from the predominance of English-language publications, which can lead to unequal visibility and accessibility of research, particularly for non-English-language studies. Bibliometric analysis often overlooks qualitative nuances, potentially leading to misinterpretation of the data, as emphasized by Lim & Kumar (2023) regarding the need for a sensemaking approach that transitions analysis from mere description to more informative insights. Furthermore, limitations of bibliometric indicators, such as their inability to capture the full spectrum of impact and the diversity of research, necessitate careful interpretation of the results to avoid misleading conclusions. Collectively, these factors underscore the importance of a comprehensive and critical approach to bibliometric studies in the field of childhood language disorders. Therefore, the findings of this study should be interpreted as an overview of the research landscape rather than as a definitive assessment of the quality or significance of individual studies. They require validation through further studies using a more in-depth qualitative approach.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the bibliometric analysis and Systematic Literature Review (SLR) of scientific publications related to receptive language acquisition in 7-year-old children with speech delay, this study successfully answered the stated objectives. First, the trend of scientific publications in this field showed fluctuations during the 2014-2024 period, with a peak in 2021 and a surge in 2024. This indicates increasing academic attention to the topic of receptive language disorders in children, particularly in response to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic

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on children's language development. Second, publication productivity is still dominated by developed countries, particularly the United States, the United Kingdom, and Italy, with institutions such as Boston University and the University of Wisconsin-Madison as major contributors. This reflects the North-South research gap and has implications for the limited generalizability of research findings to developing country contexts with diverse linguistic and cultural characteristics. Third, thematic cluster mapping identified three main interrelated themes: early language development, diagnosis and intervention, and socio-linguistic context, which are consistent with the theoretical frameworks of language development from Vygotsky, Piaget, and Chomsky and emphasize the multidimensional nature of language disorders that require an interdisciplinary approach. Fourth, identified research gaps include the lack of studies specifically targeting the 7-year-old population as a critical transition phase, limited longitudinal research tracking children's language development over time, and a lack of exploration of technology-based interventions for school-age children with speech delays.

This study recommends several directions for future research to address the identified gaps. First, more focused research on specific age groups, particularly 7-year-olds, is needed to understand the dynamics of receptive language acquisition during the transition to primary education. Second, strengthening longitudinal methodologies is crucial for monitoring the long-term effectiveness of interventions and their impact on children's language development, literacy, and social skills. Third, expanding collaboration between countries should be encouraged to gain a global perspective while enriching local contexts in developing more representative intervention strategies. Fourth, integrating technology such as language therapy apps, artificial intelligence-based communication platforms, and other interactive media can be an innovative approach to supporting the language learning process for children with speech delays. Fifth, increasing research capacity in developing countries needs to be a priority so that research findings can be more applicable and relevant to the needs of communities across various socio-cultural contexts. Through these efforts, it is hoped that more effective interventions can be developed to improve the literacy, social skills, and overall quality of life of children with receptive language disorders.

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