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Language Proficiency in Children Aged 3–5 Years at PAUD Nusa Indah, Asparaga District, Gorontalo Regency

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ABSTRACT
This study aims to describe: 1) the language proficiency of children aged 3–5 years at the Nusa Indah Early Childhood Education (PAUD) center in Asparaga District, Gorontalo Regency; and 2) the factors influencing the language proficiency of children in this age group. The study employs a qualitative approach with a descriptive research design. Data were collected using both test and non-test instruments. Data analysis was conducted through data reduction, data presentation, and the drawing of conclusions and verification. The results indicate that: 1) the language proficiency of children aged 3–5 years at the Nusa Indah PAUD center develops gradually according to age. Regarding vocabulary, 3-year-olds have mastered approximately 900–980 words; 4-year-olds, 1,500–1,590 words; and 5-year-olds, 2,200–2,350 words. The children have mastered six word classes: nouns, verbs, adjectives, numerals, pronouns, and adverbs. The development of sentence structure progresses from 1–3-word sentences at age 3, to 3–5-word sentences at age 4, and finally to 5–6-word sentences and compound sentences by age 5. Although their pronunciation is still influenced by the Gorontalo-Manado dialect, the children are able to use language to express their needs, answer questions, interact with others, and recount their experiences. 2) Language proficiency is influenced by both internal and external factors. Internal factors include intelligence, personality, age, and the maturation of the speech organs (articulatory apparatus). External factors include the family environment, the school/PAUD environment, the broader social environment, and media. Verbal interaction with parents, teachers, and peers serves as the dominant factor.

Keywords: language proficiency, children, ages 3–5 years, PAUD

Penguasaan Bahasa Anak Usia 3-5 Tahun di PAUD Nusa Indah Kecamatan Asparaga Kabupaten Gorontalo

ABSTRAK
Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mendeskripsikan: 1) penguasaan bahasa anak usia 3-5 tahun di PAUD Nusa Indah Kecamatan Asparaga Kabupaten Gorontalo; 2) faktor-faktor yang memengaruhi penguasaan bahasa anak usia 3-5 tahun. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan jenis penelitian deskriptif. Data penelitian dikumpulkan menggunakan instrumen tes dan nontes. Analisis data dilakukan melalui tahap reduksi data, penyajian data, serta penarikan kesimpulan dan verifikasi. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa: 1) penguasaan bahasa anak usia 3-5 tahun di PAUD Nusa Indah berkembang secara bertahap sesuai usia. Pada aspek kosakata, anak usia 3 tahun menguasai sekitar 900-980 kata, usia 4 tahun 1.5001.590 kata, dan usia 5 tahun 2.200-2.350 kata. Anak telah menguasai enam kelas kata yaitu nomina, verba, adjektiva, numeralia, pronomina, dan adverbia. Perkembangan struktur kalimat bergerak dari kalimat 1-3 kata pada usia 3 tahun, 3-5 kata pada usia 4 tahun, hingga 5-6 kata dan kalimat majemuk pada usia 5 tahun. Meskipun pelafalan masih dipengaruhi dialek Gorontalo-Manado, anak telah mampu menggunakan bahasa untuk menyampaikan kebutuhan, menjawab pertanyaan, berinteraksi, dan menceritakan pengalaman; 2) penguasaan bahasa dipengaruhi oleh faktor internal dan eksternal. Faktor internal meliputi intelegensi, kepribadian, usia, dan kematangan alat artikulasi. Faktor eksternal meliputi lingkungan keluarga, lingkungan sekolah/PAUD, lingkungan sosial masyarakat, dan media. Interaksi verbal dengan orang tua, guru, dan teman sebaya menjadi faktor dominan.

Kata kunci: *penguasaan bahasa, anak, usia 3-5 tahun, PAUD*

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INTRODUCTION

Language is the main means of communication as well as the foundation for children's cognitive and social development. Santrock (2021:210) explains that language functions not only as a means of speech but also as a system of symbols that influence how children think and interact. At the age of toddlers at 05 years old, children are in the golden period of language acquisition. Kusumastuti et al. (2022:45) state that the age of 3-5 years is a phase of vocabulary surge, meaning the stage of vocabulary mastery can increase by about 9 words per day if given the right stimulation. Meanwhile, Evanson et al. (2023:123) emphasize that phonological, semantic, syntactic, and pragmatic development occurs simultaneously and is not linear, so delays in one aspect can affect others.

Early childhood education (PAUD) becomes an initial stimulation environment outside the family. Permendikbudristek No. 5 of 2022:18 stipulates that the standard level of child development achievement (STPPA) for ages 3-5 years includes several skills: 1) repeating sentences of three to four words, 2) answering questions about what, who, and where, and 3) naming objects around them. Through activities such as storytelling, singing, and role-playing in PAUD, one is ready to enter the early literacy stage in elementary school.

Community reality shows that the language achievements of PAUD children are still diverse. The Kemendikbudristek Education Report Card (2023:27) notes that 34% of PAUD children in rural areas are still in the underdeveloped (BB) category in language aspects, caused by a lack of dialogue and interaction stimulation as well as non-contextual media dominance. Sari and Fauziah (2023:89) found that direct teacher corrections actually increase children's language anxiety, causing children to tend to remain silent. As a result, this language ability gap carries over to the elementary school level.

PAUD Nusa Indah in Karya Indah Village, Asparaga District, Gorontalo Regency has its own characteristics. Based on initial observations on August 12, 2024, most children use local Gorontalo vocabulary such as "bentol", "tapai", and "yato-yato" in daily life, while learning at school uses Indonesian with the Manado Gorontalo dialect. This condition creates a bilingual situation. According to Cummins (2021:78) through the Common Underlying Proficiency theory, the use of two languages does not become a barrier as long as the quality of both inputs is good. However, Krashen (2021:34) emphasizes that input must be easy to understand.

Observations of 10 children at PAUD Nusa Indah showed variations in abilities, ranging from six children still at stage one to two words such as "mau makan" and "mau itu"; three children were able to string together three words such as "Adik mau kue"; and one child had not yet given a verbal response when asked. In terms of phonology, seven out of ten children changed the sound /s/ to /c/ and /r/ to /l/, for example "cucu" for "milk" and "lata" for "rasa". During the Q&A activity, children also said "tat" for "cat" and "taya" for "saya". This variation shows that not all children have reached the STPPA standard. Barriers in phonology, vocabulary, and syntax aspects are not identified since early childhood education, so these gaps have the potential to continue into elementary school and affect reading and writing readiness, as emphasized by Wulandari (2023:113). Therefore, objective mapping is needed regarding language mastery in children aged 3-5 years at PAUD Nusa Indah, Asparaga subdistrict, Gorontalo regency. Ritonga and Siregar (2021:156) emphasize the importance of implementing stimulation or scaffolding in the proximal developmental zone (ZPD) so that children can develop from high dependency towards independence.

This study involves two research questions: 1) how is language mastery of children aged 3-5 years at PAUD Nusa Indah, Asparaga subdistrict, Gorontalo regency? 2) what factors influence the language mastery of children aged 3-5 years at PAUD Nusa Indah, Asparaga subdistrict, Gorontalo regency?

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Based on these findings, this study aims to describe: 1) the language mastery of children aged 3-5 years at PAUD Nusa Indah, Asparaga subdistrict, Gorontalo regency; 2) the factors influencing the language mastery of children aged 3-5 years at PAUD Nusa Indah, Asparaga subdistrict, Gorontalo regency.

The results of this study are expected to serve as a basis for teachers and parents in designing strategies for language acquisition support systems, Bruner (2021:112) that align with the local cultural context of Asparaga, so that children's language development can reach STPPA standards and support their readiness to enter the early literacy stage in elementary school.

METHOD

This research uses a qualitative method with a descriptive approach. The descriptive qualitative approach focuses on in-depth information extraction from field data by explaining the phenomenon of language mastery that occurs along with the underlying factors; this study does not aim to test hypotheses, but rather to obtain a complete picture of the level of language mastery in children aged 3-5 years. According to Sugiyono (2020:29), Abubakar (2021), Razak (2017), descriptive research is a method aimed at explaining or describing the research object based on the data collected. Descriptive research can be conducted through various techniques, such as observation, interviews, and documentation studies.

This type of research does not focus on cause-and-effect relationships but rather provides a broader space for researchers to understand and examine the research object in depth.

Research data were collected using test and non-test instruments. Data analysis was carried out through stages of data reduction, data presentation, as well as drawing conclusions and verification.

RESULTS

This section describes the research results according to the research focus, namely: (1) Language mastery of children aged 3-5 years at PAUD Nusa Indah, Asparaga District, Gorontalo Regency, (2) Factors influencing language mastery of children aged 3-5 years, and (3) The relevance of the research results to the Indonesian language learning outcomes of students at school. The three research results are presented as follows.

1. Vocabulary Mastery

Generally, children aged 3-5 years have mastered around 900 to 2500 words. At age 3, children's vocabulary is 900-1000 words. At age 4, children's vocabulary increases to 1500-1600 words because at that age children begin to learn on their own rules to pronounce words in complex sentences. Meanwhile, children aged 5 years have vocabulary of around 2100-2500 words. This condition is caused by children aged 3-5 years often interacting with people or objects around them in daily conversation. This can be seen in the data from the following six categories.

1.1 Noun Vocabulary

Nouns mastered by children aged 3-5 years include: vocabulary of school supplies, eating utensils, and toys. The table below contains 3–5 examples of vocabulary in the noun category.

Table 1
Vocabulary Profiency for the Category of Object Names

No.	Object Name Category	Vocabulary
1	School Supplies	1) *patu* (shoes)
		2) *butu* (book)
		3) *pintil* (pencil)
		4) *hom* (eraser)
		5) *badu toya* (school uniform)
2	Dining Utensils	1) *piying* (plates)
		2) *deyas* (glasses)
		3) *tendot* (spoonsk)
		4) *dapu* (forks)
3	Toys	1) *boya* (ball)
		2) *teyeyeng* (marbles)
		3) *lobot* (robot)
		4) *oto-oto* (toy car)
		5) *popi* (doll)

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The table shows that the children's mastery of nouns encompasses three categories: school supplies (5 words), eating utensils (4 words), and toys (10 words)—the latter being the most dominant. This aligns with the findings presented in the table, which indicate that children in the "basic" category tend to name toys, while those in the "developing" and "proficient" categories are able to name school supplies and eating utensils, albeit with pronunciations still influenced by the Gorontalo dialect.

1.2 Verbs (Action Words)

The verbs mastered by children aged 3–5 years include both transitive and intransitive verbs related to daily activities at school. This is illustrated in the following table (five words every verb category only)

Table 2
Verb Category

No.	Verb Category	Vocabulary
1	Transitive verb	1) *matan* (eat)
		2) *ninum* (drink)
		3) *tuyis* (write)
		4) *bata* (read)
		5) *main* (play)
2	Intransitive verb	1) *tidul* (sleep)
		2) *lali* (run)
		3) *nanis* (cry)
		4) *pigi* (go)
		5) *beyi* (buy)

Based on the table, five examples of verb mastery in early childhood are presented for each category. These verbs correspond to the categories shown in the table while children in the "developing" and "proficient" categories already use verbs related to learning.

1.3 Pronouns

Pronouns mastered by children aged 3–5 years include those referring to people, objects, or places. This is illustrated in the following table.

Table 3
Pronouns Category

No.	Pronoun Category	Vocabulary
1	First-person singular pronoun	1) *nunu* (I)
		2) *tita* (I)
2	Second-person singular pronoun	1) *tamu (*you)
		2) *ti (*terms of address for a girl)
		3) *te (*terms of address for a boy)
3	Third-person singular pronoun	1) *tia* (she/he)
		2) *doyang (*they)

1.4 Adjectives

Adjectives mastered by children aged 3–5 years cover qualities, states, characteristics, and colors. The table below presents only 5 vocabulary items for each category.

Table 4
Adjectives Category

No.	Adjective Category	Vocabulary
1	quality	1) *tantit* (beautiful)
		2) *anten* (handsome)
		3) *betal* (big)
		4) *dada* (good)
		5) *tedit* (spicy)
2	state	1) *anat* (hot)
		2) d*eyap* (dark)
		3) *lapal* (hungry)
		4) *tedih* (sad)
		5) *tenang* (happy)
3	characteristic	1) *mayas* (diligent)
		2) *besi* (clean)
		3) *tabal* (sabar)
		4) *tatut* (scared)
		5) *malah* (anry)

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4	colours	1) *mela* (read)
		2) *tunin* (yellow)
		3) *ido* (green)
		4) *bilu* (blue)
		5) *itam* (black)

1.5 Adverbs (Adverbial Vocabulary)

Adverbs mastered by children aged 3–5 years include terms denoting time, place, manner, and quantity. These can be seen in the following table.

Table 5
Adverbs Category

No.	Adverb Category	Vocabulary
1	Adverb of Time	1) *tebantal* (a moment)
		2) *beto* (tomorrow)
		3) *temayin* (yesterday)
2	Adverb of Place	1) *tini* (here)
		2) *tana* (over there)
		3) *titu* (there)
3	Adverbs of Manner	1) *dedini* (like this)
		2) *deditu* (like that)
		3) *badimana* (how)
4	Adverb of Quantity	1) *banat* (a lot/many)
		2) *teditit* (a little/few)

2. Mastery of Parts of Speech

Children aged 3–5 years have mastered approximately 900–2,500 words. At age 3, a child's vocabulary consists of 900–1,000 words. By age 4, this increases to 1,500–1,600 words, as children at this stage begin to learn, on their own, the rules for arranging words into complex sentences. Meanwhile, 5-year-olds possess a vocabulary of about 2,100–2,500 words. Research findings indicate that children aged 3–5 frequently use nouns, verbs, adjectives, numerals, pronouns, and adverbs, as they regularly interact with the people and objects around them in daily conversation. This is described as follows:

2.1 Mastery of Nouns

Nouns mastered by children aged 3–5 years include items such as school supplies, tableware, and toys. This is evident in the following examples of spoken language:

1) *"Au ain boya nen yato-yato nen teman"*
   (I want to play with a ball and *lato-lato* [clackers] with my friends)
2) *"Itu obot betal, nunu tuka"*
   (That is a big robot; I like it)
3) *"Nunu pate badu toya nen patu"*
   (I am wearing a uniform and shoes)
4) *"Ibu, tuyis butu ini?"*
   (Mom, should this be written in the book?)
5) *"Atan pate tendot"*
   (Eat using a spoon)
6) "*Ninum pate deyas"*
   (Drink using a glass)

In utterances (1) and (2), we find the category of toys: *boya* (ball), *yato-yato* (lato-lato), and *obot* (robot). The use of nouns denoting "toys" is predominant among children in the 3-year-old "foundational" category—such as Azwa Aghnia Pou and Adifa Pratiwi Musa—as toys are the objects most closely associated with a child's world. In utterances (3) and (4), terms for school supplies appear, specifically *badu toya* (uniform), *patu* (shoes), and *butu* (books). This mastery begins to emerge in children in the 4-year-old "developing" category, such as Kayla Saputri Yunus, who have become familiar with functional objects found in a school environment. Utterances (5) and (6) contain terms for tableware, namely *tedot* (spoon), *deyas* (glass), and *piying* (plate). These nouns for tableware are linked to the verbs for basic needs—*matan* (to eat) and *ninum* (to drink)—which children typically master by the age of 3. Overall, the speech data demonstrate that the acquisition of nouns progresses from concrete objects frequently used in play toward functional objects encountered in a school setting.

2.2 Verb Mastery

The verbs mastered by children aged 3–5 years include both transitive and intransitive verbs related to daily activities at school. This is evident in the following spoken utterances:

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1) "Aus au ninum"
(Thirsty, want to drink)
2) "Ibu ain bayok bayok?"
(Teacher, can I play?) (Teacher, can I play with the blocks?)
3) "Datu ain lali-lali"
(Fell down because of running around)
4) "Pidi beyi kue i tatin"
(Going to buy a snack at the canteen)

The utterances in (1) through (4) demonstrate a command of verbs consistent with the verb category table. In utterances (1) and (2), transitive verbs are present—specifically *ninum* ("drink") and *bayok* ("play with blocks"). These transitive verbs require an object and relate to basic needs and play activities. This level of mastery is typical for children in the "foundational" category (age 3), such as Azwa Aghnia Pou and Arasya Umar, who use verbs like "eat," "play," and "drink" within 1–3 word sentences. In utterances (3) and (4), intransitive verbs appear—such as *lali-lali* ("running around") and *padi* ("go")—along with *beyi* ("buy"), which functions here as an activity verb. The mastery of intransitive verbs begins to emerge in children in the "developing" category (age 4), such as Fahri Syahreza, who uses verbs related to learning—*bata* ("read"), *tuyis* ("write"), *dambal* ("draw")—as well as activity verbs like *pigi* ("go") and *lali* ("run"). The acquisition of verbs evolves from those expressing basic needs and play at age 3 toward more complex activity and learning-related verbs by ages 4–5. Pronunciation remains influenced by the child's developing speech organs, which are not yet fully mature—as seen in words like *ninum*, *bayok pigi*, and *beyi*

2.3 Mastery of Pronouns

Pronouns—or terms used to refer to people, objects, or places—acquired by children aged 3–4 are illustrated in the following utterances:

1) "Nunu au ain uar teyas"
(I want to play outside) class)
2) *"Atan ama-ama, tamu tuka esim?"*
(Let's eat together—do you like ice cream?)
3) *"Waw, dambal ti Nisa dada e"*
(Wow, Nisa's drawing is really good!)
4) "*Doyang ain boya ti yapanan"*
(They are playing soccer on the field.)

2.4 Mastery of Adverbs

Adverbs mastered by children aged 3–5 years include those denoting time, place, manner, and quantity. This is evident in the following spoken utterances:

1) "Dipa tolan tuti tanan sebental bis ain aa"
(Diva, let's wash our hands for a moment after playing, okay?)
2) "Dudu situ nunu"
(I want to sit over there.)
3) "Tuyis ulup A bedini, E beditu"
(Writing the letter A like this, and the letter B like that.)
4) "Patan inta seditit?"
(Fatan, can I have a little bit?)

2.5 Mastery of Numerals

The numerals mastered by children aged 3–5 years include those used to express the quantity, sequence, or measurement of an object or event. This is evident in the following spoken utterances:

1) *Ibu nunu apal tatu tampe tepulu".*"
(Mother, I have memorized the numbers one through ten.)
2) *"Mata taya tua, tanan tua, mulu tatu, dali tepulu"*
(I have two eyes, two hands, one mouth, and ten fingers.)
3) *"Tita uan nunu tua libu"*
(I have two thousand [rupiah] left.)
4) *"Inan ada bana ti teyas"*
(There are many toys in the classroom.)

DISCUSSION

Language acquisition at the Nusa Indah Early Childhood Education (PAUD) center develops gradually according to age; as Santrock (2021:196) asserts, the 3–5 age range is a critical period in the human developmental cycle. Three-year-old children (A1–A5) fall into the foundational category. The prevalence of nouns referring to toys

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is expected, given that a child's world remains centered on concrete objects. This finding is supported by Papalia and Martorell (2021:295), who note that children in the preoperational stage learn through symbols representing the objects they frequently play with. Regarding verbs, these children primarily use terms related to basic needs. According to Dardjowidjojo (2020:89), three-year-olds are in a "telegraphic" transitional phase, producing 3–4 word utterances while omitting function words; Tarigan (2021:56) adds that children at this age generally still rely on simple 2–3 word sentences.

Four-year-old children (B1–B6) fall into the developing category and utilize six different parts of speech. In terms of nouns, their vocabulary expands to include functional objects related to school—a progression consistent with Bruner's (2021:112, 120) theory of scaffolding. Regarding verbs, there is a shift toward terms associated with learning. Dardjowidjojo (2020:92) states that four-year-olds are capable of constructing 4–6 word sentences and have begun to incorporate function words. The use of 3–5 word sentence structures reflects syntactic and pragmatic development, aligning with Vygotsky's (2021:78) concept of the zone of proximal development.

Five-year-old children (C1–C3) fall into the proficient category. The mastery of adverbs of manner and time aligns with the observations of Dardjowidjojo (2020:95), who notes that five-year-old children are capable of using complex sentences—consisting of 5–8 words—that incorporate conjunctions such as *karena* (because), *kalau* (if), and *supaya* (so that). This is also consistent with Malabar (2022:45), who states that children at this age begin to use language in accordance with its social functions. Furthermore, Yuliani Nurani (2023:82) mentions that five-year-olds are able to adapt their language variety to suit specific situations and maintain a topic of conversation.

These findings expand upon previous research. In contrast to Lestari (2022), which focused solely on phonology, this study examines vocabulary and six word classes, in addition to clausal phrases (CP). Unlike Wijaya and Herwanto (2023), who analyzed relationships quantitatively, this study describes how various factors manifest within actual speech. Moreover, while Raharjo and Darmuki (2024) focused exclusively on three-year-olds, this study covers the age range of 3, 4, and 5 years, thereby revealing a gradual developmental progression.

CONCLUSION

Language Acquisition in Children Aged 3–5 Years. Language acquisition in children encompasses two primary aspects: the mastery of vocabulary and the mastery of parts of speech. Children have acquired six major parts of speech: nouns, verbs, pronouns, adjectives, adverbs, and numerals. This mastery develops gradually, in line with the child's age and developmental stage.

Language Ability in 3-Year-Olds

Children aged 3 fall into the "foundational" (basic) category. Their vocabulary and use of parts of speech are primarily focused on essential terms. The verbs they have acquired relate to basic needs and physical activities, while their grasp of adjectives is limited to fundamental qualities.

At this stage, the pronunciation of 3-year-olds is often influenced by the Gorontalo-Manado dialect, and their speech organs are not yet fully developed. Regarding numerals, some 3-year-olds may only know the numbers 1–5, while others are already proficient in counting from 1 to 10. Language is primarily used to satisfy personal needs, express desires, and label objects in their environment using the vocabulary they have acquired.

Language Ability in 4-Year-Olds. Children aged 4 fall into the "developing" category. By this age, their vocabulary and use of parts of speech have expanded to include all six categories in a more varied manner. In terms of vocabulary and parts of speech, they now utilize all six categories; for instance, their use of nouns has expanded to include terms related to school supplies.

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