



**ORIGINAL RESEARCH PAPER**

**Linguistics**

**VOCABULARY IN TYPICALLY DEVELOPING MALAYALAM SPEAKING CHILDREN**

**KEY WORDS:** Vocabulary, Expressive Vocabulary, Vocabulary development, Lexicon

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<b>ABSTRACT</b>	<b>BACKGROUND:</b> Words are our tools to communicate with others as well as to explore and analyze the world around us. A vocabulary usually grows and evolves with age, and serves as a useful and fundamental tool for communication and acquiring knowledge. Vocabulary also plays an important role in academic performance. Hence, sketching the development of vocabulary among typically developing children was important
	<b>PURPOSE:</b> The present study aimed at assessing the expressive vocabulary in typically developing children in the age range of 3-5 years.
	<b>METHODS:</b> The study included 180 typically developing children in the age range of 3-5 years. A cross-sectional research design was used to study the vocabulary development. The vocabulary was assessed using 50 picturable words which include nouns and verbs.
	<b>RESULTS:</b> The results of the study indicated that the vocabulary of children increases with age and the increase in vocabulary across age was statistically significant.
	<b>CONCLUSION:</b> The present study on vocabulary development has shown that there is a positive influence of age on vocabulary.

**INTRODUCTION**

The development of semantic categories appears to reflect the interaction between a child's vocabulary and level of cognitive development. This suggests that vocabulary occupies a central place in language and is crucial in language assessment. Vocabulary refers to the total or partial stock of words that an individual or language has. Vocabulary includes the words we must know to communicate effectively and it is the most important component in language ability. An age-appropriately developed vocabulary helps the child in effective communication, improved comprehension, and also for successful academics. A vocabulary usually grows and evolves with age, and serves as a useful and fundamental tool for communication and acquiring knowledge.

The vocabulary or lexicon of a language encompasses stock words in that language which is at disposal of the speaker or writer. Vocabulary developments begin when a parent responds to the sounds a baby makes and, naturally, parents are the child's first vocabulary teacher. Children develop a variety of types of vocabulary knowledge in a developmental sequence. The speed of vocabulary acquisition is more dependent upon the linguistic opportunities that a child is provided with, their potential to understand the speech provided by these opportunities, and their capacity to generalize and reproduce the words. As the child grows older the quantum of vocabulary increases and the existing vocabulary is made more precise in many aspects.

Vocabulary knowledge has an uncompromised role in language development and mastery (Lee, Pandian, Rethinasamy, & Tan, 2019). It is an indicator of verbal and listening abilities. The acquisition of words is the beginning of oral communication between the developing child and the world around them (Bastos, Ramos, & Marques, 2004). The first words are acquired at approximately one year of age and then there will be a sudden increase in vocabulary called an explosion of vocabulary/vocabulary spurt (Vidor & DCGM,

2008). The literature suggests that children, by the age of 4 years, acquire an average vocabulary of 5,000 words whereas, by the age of 8 years, it will be around 10,000 words. Proficiency in oral language provides children with a vital tool for thought. Without fluent and structured oral language, children will find it very difficult to think. Milton (2013) reported that there is a strong link between vocabulary size and performance in all the key skills including reading, writing, speaking, and listening.

Vocabulary growth is sensitive in the second year of life and continues to increase during the early childhood and elementary education. Though many researchers have estimated the difference in vocabulary with age, limited information is available about the exact course of vocabulary development. Hence the present study aimed at assessing the vocabulary among typically developing Malayalam speaking children in the age range of 3-5 years.

**METHOD**

The present study was designed to assess the vocabulary in typically developing Malayalam Speaking Children in the age range of 3-5 years.

**Participants:** The study included 180 typically developing Malayalam speaking children from pre-primary and first standard falling in the age range of 3-5 years. The participants were selected randomly from Government Malayalam medium schools and Anganwadies from Palakkad district, Kerala, India. All the participants had Malayalam as their mother tongue and medium of communication/instruction at home and school. All the participants had normal hearing sensitivity and visual acuity with a normal motor, speech language, and cognitive skills. The participants were further divided into three groups with 60 children in each group.

**Research design:** A cross-sectional research design was used to assess the vocabulary in the present study.

Procedure: The vocabulary was assessed using 50 discriminable and unambiguous picturable words. The colour pictures of the stimuli in postcard size were presented using a laptop monitor. The testing was carried out in a quiet room in the school. Each stimulus was presented for a maximum duration of one minute and the participants were instructed to look at the pictures carefully and name the pictures presented one by one. The responses were recorded on a scoring sheet by the researcher and each correct response was given a score of one.

Statistical analysis: The data obtained were subjected to descriptive statistical analysis to obtain the mean scores and standard deviation. Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was carried out to find out the effect of age on vocabulary.

**RESULTS**

The performance on vocabulary was assessed as the total number of correct words named. The mean and standard variation (SD) values for each age group were presented in table 1

**Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation (SD) across age**

Age Group	Mean	Standard Deviation
> 3 - < 4	37.82	4.71
> 4 - < 5	41.92	4.47
> 5 - < 6	46.35	3.05

As given in table 1, an increase in mean values for vocabulary was observed with an increase in age. That is the mean vocabulary score for > 3 - < 4-year-old children was 37.82 (SD=4.71) which increased to 41.92(SD=4.47) for > 4 - < 5 years and > 5 - < 6-year-old children showed the highest mean vocabulary of 46.35 with less variability of scores, ie standard deviation was 3.05. One way ANOVA was carried out to understand the significance of variation across age. The analysis of variance indicated that the difference in vocabulary across the age groups was statistically significant,  $F(2,177) = 63.728, p > 0.05$ .

**DISCUSSION**

The findings of the present study concluded that the performance of 3-5 year old typically developing Malayalam speaking children on vocabulary assessment was influenced by age. That is, the results of the study indicated that there is an increase in vocabulary with age. The findings of the study were found to be similar to the reports of the earlier studies (Moretti, Kuroishi & Mandrá, 2017; Costa & Avila, 2010; Ferracini, Capovilla, Dias, & Capovilla, 2006).

Moretti, Kuroishi, and Mandrá (2017) reported in their study on 3-5.11 year old typically developing children that emissive and receptive vocabulary increases with age. Ferracini, Capovilla, Dias, & Capovilla, (2006) assessed receptive and expressive vocabulary as a function of age among 3-5-year-old children, and the results identified that the increase in both receptive and expressive vocabulary with age were statistically significant. However, Medeiros, Valença, Guimarães, & Costa, (2013) reported that the children of Maceió present a similar lexical development, independent of gender or age group, with a difference only among the schools tested. The advanced vocabulary with age can be attributed to their expanded cognitive skills to learn new words and their ability to organize the information obtained through social and physical interaction with adults and from different situations (Borges & Saloma, 2003)

**CONCLUSION**

The present study on vocabulary development has shown that there is a positive influence of age on vocabulary. The vocabulary was assessed using 50 coloured pictures. The study analyzed vocabulary using simple and short tasks that can be applied to assess the vocabulary in the clinical population. It may be used as a therapeutic tool as vocabulary

size is directly related to communication, social and occupational functioning, learning, and academic performance. Future research is recommended for an extended age group by elaborating on the test material. Further research on the clinical population is also warranted. The present study has not addressed gender as a variable in vocabulary development and hence, the influence on gender on vocabulary can also be addressed.

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