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Analysis of Characteristics and Intervention Strategies for Children with Delayed Communication at KB Fatimatuzzahra Sukabumi City

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ABSTRACT

Communication delay or limited verbal expression in early childhood is a significant developmental concern that can affect children's social interaction, emotional regulation, and future academic readiness. In early childhood education settings, teachers play a crucial role in identifying and addressing communication delays through daily interaction and pedagogical practices. However, empirical qualitative studies focusing on localized early childhood institutions in Indonesia remain limited, particularly those that explore children's characteristics and contextualized intervention strategies. This study aims to analyze the characteristics of children with delayed communication or minimal verbal expression and to examine the handling strategies implemented by educators at KB Fatimatuzzahra, Sukabumi City. This study employed a qualitative case study design. Data were collected through classroom observations, in-depth interviews with teachers and school administrators, and document analysis of children's developmental records. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis involving data reduction, coding, and theme development. The findings revealed distinctive characteristics among children with delayed communication, including limited vocabulary, reliance on non-verbal communication, reduced social interaction, and emotional expression through behavior. Intervention strategies applied by teachers included individualized communication stimulation, play-based interaction, collaboration with parents, and referral to professionals when necessary. The study contributes to a deeper understanding of communication delays in early childhood education contexts and highlights the importance of responsive, collaborative, and contextually grounded intervention strategies to support children's communication development.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Early Childhood Education (ECE) plays a fundamental role in shaping children's cognitive, social, emotional, and language development. Globally, ECE systems face complex challenges, including disparities in access to quality education, teacher preparedness, inclusive practices, and responsiveness to children's diverse developmental needs (Varadarajan et al., 2021). One of the critical developmental domains in early childhood is communication and language development, which serves as the foundation for social interaction, learning processes, and emotional expression. Delays in communication development during early childhood can have long-term implications if not identified and addressed appropriately (Purba & Astuti, 2020).

Communication delay, often characterized by limited verbal expression, delayed speech milestones, or minimal responsiveness to verbal interaction, is increasingly observed in early childhood settings. Internationally, researchers have highlighted that communication delay may be influenced by multiple factors, including neurological development, environmental stimulation, parenting practices, and socio-cultural contexts. In inclusive early childhood classrooms, teachers are frequently the first professionals to observe early signs of communication difficulties, making their role essential in early identification and intervention (Charney et al., 2021). Qualitative research is particularly valuable in early childhood education because it allows researchers to explore children's lived experiences, teacher perceptions, and contextual factors that shape educational practices. Unlike quantitative approaches that focus on measurable outcomes, qualitative studies emphasize meaning-making, interaction, and interpretation within real-life educational settings. Understanding how teachers perceive, interpret, and respond to communication delays provides nuanced insights that cannot be captured through standardized assessments alone (Koegel et al., 2020).

Several international qualitative studies have explored language development and communication challenges in early childhood contexts. These studies emphasize the importance of play-based learning, responsive teacher-child interaction, and family involvement in supporting communication development. However, much of the existing literature is situated in Western contexts, with limited exploration of early childhood institutions in developing countries, including Indonesia. Cultural norms, institutional resources, and teacher training backgrounds may significantly influence how communication delays are understood and addressed (Zainel et al., 2021). In Indonesia, early childhood education institutions such as Kelompok Bermain (KB) play a crucial role in providing foundational learning experiences for children aged three to four years. Despite their importance, empirical qualitative research focusing on children with communication delays in KB settings remains scarce. This gap highlights the need for context-specific studies that examine both the characteristics of children with communication delays and the intervention strategies implemented by teachers within their institutional and cultural contexts (Jullien, 2021).

Therefore, this study seeks to address this research gap by examining the characteristics and handling strategies for children with delayed communication or minimal verbal expression at KB Fatimatuzzahra, Sukabumi City. The guiding research questions are: (1) What are the observable characteristics of children with delayed communication at KB Fatimatuzzahra? and (2) How do teachers and the institution handle and support children with delayed communication in daily learning activities?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Early Childhood Education Context

Early Childhood Education (ECE) is grounded in the fundamental principles of child-centered learning, developmental appropriateness, and holistic development. These principles emphasize that young children learn most effectively when educational experiences are designed to respect their

individual needs, interests, and developmental stages. Child-centered learning positions children as active participants in the learning process rather than passive recipients of instruction. Within this approach, educators serve as facilitators who create supportive environments that encourage exploration, curiosity, and meaningful engagement (Iverson, 2021). Developmental appropriateness is another core principle of ECE, referring to educational practices that are aligned with children's cognitive, social, emotional, physical, and language development. Teaching strategies, learning materials, and classroom interactions must correspond to children's developmental readiness to ensure that learning experiences are neither too demanding nor insufficiently stimulating (Brodin & Renblad, 2020). Closely related to this principle is the concept of holistic development, which recognizes that all developmental domains are interconnected. Language and communication development, for instance, cannot be separated from social interaction, emotional regulation, and cognitive growth. A delay in one domain may influence progress in others, highlighting the importance of integrated and responsive educational practices (Huang et al., 2025).

ECE emphasizes learning through play, social interaction, and meaningful experiences. Play-based learning is widely acknowledged as the most effective pedagogical approach in early childhood education because it allows children to learn naturally through exploration and interaction. Through play, children experiment with language, negotiate roles, express emotions, and construct knowledge collaboratively. Social interaction, both with peers and adults, provides children with opportunities to develop communication skills in authentic contexts. Meaningful experiences that are relevant to children's everyday lives further enhance learning by connecting new knowledge to prior experiences and cultural backgrounds (Hyman et al., 2020).

Language and communication development are integral components of early childhood curricula. Communication skills enable children to express needs, ideas, and emotions, engage in social relationships, and participate actively in learning activities. Verbal and non-verbal communication skills support children's ability to ask questions, follow instructions, and interact with peers and teachers. In early childhood settings, communication development is fostered through storytelling, conversation, singing, role play, and daily routines. These activities provide rich linguistic input and opportunities for children to practice expressive and receptive language skills in natural and supportive environments (Lin et al., 2020).

The ECE context is shaped by multiple interrelated factors, including curriculum frameworks, teacher competencies, family involvement, and community values. Curriculum frameworks provide guidance on learning goals, developmental domains, and pedagogical approaches. In many countries, early childhood curricula emphasize inclusivity, play-based learning, and holistic development. However, the implementation of these frameworks largely depends on teachers' understanding, beliefs, and professional competencies. Teachers' knowledge of child development, communication strategies, and inclusive practices significantly influences how learning experiences are designed and delivered (Moore, 2020).

Teacher competencies play a central role in shaping the quality of early childhood education. Competent teachers are able to observe children's developmental progress, identify potential delays, and respond appropriately through differentiated instruction and supportive interaction. In the context of communication development, teachers are often the first to notice signs of delayed speech, limited verbal expression, or reliance on non-verbal communication. Their ability to interpret these signs accurately and respond sensitively is essential for early identification and intervention. Ongoing professional development is therefore critical to equip teachers with the knowledge and skills needed to support children with diverse communication needs (Schaeffer et al., 2023). Family involvement is another key factor influencing the ECE context. Children's language development is strongly affected by the quality and quantity of communication they experience at home. Families play a crucial role in providing language stimulation through conversation, storytelling, and shared activities. Effective

collaboration between educators and families allows for consistency in communication support across home and school environments. When teachers and parents share information and strategies, children are more likely to receive coherent and sustained support for their communication development (Blank et al., 2020).

Community values and cultural norms also shape early childhood education practices. Beliefs about child development, communication, and learning vary across cultures and influence how communication delays are perceived and addressed. In some contexts, limited verbal expression may be viewed as a temporary developmental phase, while in others it may raise immediate concern. Understanding these cultural perspectives is important for educators to provide culturally responsive and respectful support to children and families (Ford et al., 2021). In many early childhood settings, teachers are expected to create inclusive learning environments that accommodate children with diverse abilities and developmental trajectories. Inclusive education emphasizes the right of all children to participate fully in learning experiences regardless of developmental differences (Karltorp et al., 2020). This approach requires educators to recognize individual variations in communication development and adapt teaching strategies accordingly. Inclusive practices may involve modifying activities, using visual supports, modeling language, and providing additional opportunities for interaction.

Inclusive practices require educators to move beyond a one-size-fits-all approach and embrace flexibility in teaching and assessment. Children with communication delays may need more time to respond, alternative ways to express themselves, or individualized support during activities (Akemoglu et al., 2020). Teachers must be patient, attentive, and responsive to children's communication attempts, regardless of whether they are verbal or non-verbal. Such responsiveness helps build children's confidence and encourages further communication attempts. Contemporary ECE also faces challenges related to inclusivity and equity. Socio-economic disparities, limited access to professional support services, and variations in teacher training can affect the quality of communication support provided to children. Children with communication delays are particularly vulnerable to social exclusion, misunderstanding, and reduced participation in classroom activities if their needs are not adequately addressed (Bejarano-Martín et al., 2020). Difficulties in communication may lead to frustration, behavioral challenges, and reduced peer interaction, which can further hinder social and emotional development.

Equity in early childhood education requires that all children, including those with communication delays, receive appropriate support to achieve their developmental potential. This includes access to early identification, responsive teaching strategies, and collaboration with specialists when necessary. Teachers play a critical role in promoting equity by creating supportive classroom environments where all forms of communication are valued and respected (Curtin et al., 2021). Therefore, understanding how early childhood institutions respond to communication delays is essential for promoting equitable learning opportunities. Examining institutional practices, teacher strategies, and contextual challenges provides valuable insights into how inclusive communication support is implemented in real educational settings (Gleason & Ratner, 2022). Such understanding can inform teacher training, curriculum development, and policy decisions aimed at strengthening early childhood education systems.

In conclusion, early childhood education is a complex and dynamic field shaped by pedagogical principles, contextual factors, and societal expectations. Language and communication development are central to children's participation and learning, making early identification and support for communication delays a critical priority (Majid & Ahmad, 2020). By fostering inclusive, responsive, and contextually grounded practices, early childhood institutions can play a vital role in supporting children's communication development and promoting equitable educational outcomes for all learners.

2.2 Review of International Qualitative Studies

International qualitative studies have consistently highlighted the complexity of communication development in early childhood, emphasizing that language acquisition is not a linear or uniform process. Instead, communication development is shaped by a dynamic interaction of biological, social, cultural, and environmental factors (Kapp, 2023). Qualitative research has been particularly valuable in capturing this complexity, as it allows researchers to explore children's lived experiences, classroom interactions, and the meanings constructed through daily communication practices. Through in-depth observations and interviews, qualitative studies reveal how children actively negotiate meaning, adapt communication strategies, and respond to social cues within early learning environments.

Research across various international contexts has shown that children with delayed communication frequently rely on non-verbal cues, gestures, facial expressions, and behavior to express needs, emotions, and intentions. These alternative forms of communication are often used as compensatory strategies when verbal expression is limited or underdeveloped. For example, children may point, pull objects, use eye contact, or exhibit emotional behaviors such as crying or withdrawing to convey messages (Alfuraydan et al., 2020). Qualitative findings indicate that these behaviors should not be interpreted merely as deficits, but rather as meaningful attempts at communication that reflect children's agency and adaptive capacities.

Teachers' responsiveness and sensitivity have been identified as crucial factors in facilitating language stimulation and social interaction for children with delayed communication. International qualitative studies emphasize that responsive educators who attentively observe children's cues and respond promptly and appropriately can significantly enhance communication development (Chow et al., 2020). Teacher sensitivity involves recognizing subtle communication attempts, validating children's efforts, and expanding their expressions through modeling and scaffolding. When teachers respond positively to both verbal and non-verbal communication, children are more likely to feel understood, confident, and motivated to engage in further interaction. Several studies emphasize the effectiveness of play-based and interactional approaches in supporting communication development (Lord et al., 2020). Play provides a natural and meaningful context for language use, allowing children to experiment with sounds, words, and social roles without the pressure of formal instruction. Symbolic play, in particular, has been highlighted as a powerful medium for communication development, as it encourages children to use language to represent ideas, negotiate meanings, and engage in shared narratives. Through pretend play, children practice turn-taking, role negotiation, and conversational skills that are essential for social communication.

Storytelling and shared book reading are also widely recognized in qualitative research as effective strategies for enhancing language development. These activities expose children to rich vocabulary, narrative structures, and expressive language models. Guided interaction during storytelling allows teachers to ask open-ended questions, encourage prediction, and invite children to share their interpretations. Such interactional strategies support both receptive and expressive language development and foster deeper engagement with language (Constantino et al., 2020). Guided interaction and scaffolding are central components of effective communication support identified in international studies. Teachers who intentionally model language, repeat and expand children's utterances, and provide supportive prompts create opportunities for children to develop communication skills within their zone of proximal development. This approach aligns with sociocultural theories that view learning as a socially mediated process. Qualitative research demonstrates that when scaffolding is embedded in everyday classroom routines, children experience language learning as a natural and integrated part of their daily activities (McCarty & Frye, 2020).

In addition to classroom-based strategies, qualitative findings underscore the importance of collaboration between teachers and parents in supporting communication development. Consistent stimulation across home and school environments has been shown to enhance developmental outcomes for children with delayed communication. International studies highlight that effective communication between educators and families allows for shared understanding of children's needs, coordinated intervention strategies, and mutual support. When parents are informed about classroom practices and encouraged to engage in language-rich interactions at home, children benefit from continuity in communication support (Rosenfeld et al., 2022).

Despite these valuable contributions, previous studies often focus on structured early intervention programs or clinical settings, such as speech therapy centers or specialized educational services. While these studies provide important insights into targeted intervention strategies, they may not fully capture the realities of everyday communication practices in regular early childhood classrooms. Many children with communication delays spend the majority of their time in community-based early childhood institutions, where formal intervention resources may be limited (McArthur et al., 2022).

There is limited qualitative research that examines how communication delays are addressed within daily classroom routines, informal interactions, and natural play settings. Everyday practices such as greeting routines, snack time conversations, group activities, and free play offer rich opportunities for communication development (Pacia et al., 2022). However, these contexts are often overlooked in favor of more structured intervention models. Understanding how teachers integrate communication support into ordinary classroom activities is essential for developing practical and sustainable approaches to early intervention. Furthermore, there is a notable lack of research exploring how cultural values and institutional constraints influence teachers' approaches to handling communication delays (Brown et al., 2020). Cultural beliefs about child development, communication norms, and educational expectations shape how communication delays are perceived and addressed. In some cultural contexts, children are expected to be verbally expressive at an early age, while in others, quietness and non-verbal communication may be culturally accepted. These differences influence teachers' interpretations of communication behaviors and their decisions regarding intervention.

Institutional constraints, such as large class sizes, limited access to professional support, and restricted training opportunities, also affect teachers' capacity to support children with delayed communication. International qualitative studies conducted in well-resourced settings may not reflect the challenges faced by educators in under-resourced or community-based institutions (Ghaemmaghami et al., 2021). Teachers in such contexts often rely on experiential knowledge, peer collaboration, and intuitive strategies rather than formal intervention programs. Additionally, many international studies focus on the perspectives of researchers and specialists, with less attention given to teachers' lived experiences and reflective practices. Qualitative research that centers teachers' voices can provide valuable insights into the practical challenges, ethical considerations, and emotional labor involved in supporting children with communication delays. Teachers' narratives reveal how they balance curriculum demands, individual children's needs, and institutional expectations within constrained environments.

Another gap in the literature relates to the limited exploration of early childhood education settings in developing countries. Most international qualitative studies originate from Western or high-income contexts, where educational policies, teacher training systems, and support services differ significantly from those in developing nations. There is a need for context-specific research that examines how communication delays are understood and addressed within diverse socio-cultural and institutional settings. In response to these gaps, qualitative studies conducted in community-based early childhood institutions can make significant contributions to the field. By examining everyday

practices, teacher strategies, and contextual influences, such studies provide a more comprehensive understanding of communication development in real-world settings. They also offer practical insights that are directly relevant to educators working in similar contexts (Smith & Gropman, 2021).

In conclusion, international qualitative research has substantially advanced understanding of communication development and intervention strategies in early childhood. However, there remains a need for studies that move beyond structured programs and clinical perspectives to explore everyday practices in diverse educational contexts. Addressing this gap is essential for developing inclusive, culturally responsive, and contextually grounded approaches to supporting children with delayed communication in early childhood education (McCarthy & Guerin, 2022).

2.3 Conceptual or Theoretical Framework

This study is guided by a sociocultural theoretical framework, which conceptualizes language development as a socially mediated and culturally situated process. From this perspective, language acquisition does not occur in isolation within the child but emerges through active participation in social interactions. Children develop communication skills by engaging with more knowledgeable others, such as teachers, peers, and family members, who provide guidance, models, and feedback within meaningful social contexts. These interactions enable children to gradually internalize language forms and functions that are valued within their cultural and educational environments (Deng et al., 2020).

Sociocultural theory emphasizes that communication development is deeply embedded in cultural practices and social relationships. Language is viewed not only as a cognitive tool but also as a social and cultural resource that reflects shared meanings, norms, and values. In early childhood education settings, everyday routines, classroom discourse, and play activities serve as important cultural contexts in which children learn how to use language appropriately. Children's communication behaviors, including non-verbal expressions and emerging verbal attempts, are therefore understood as socially constructed responses shaped by their interactions and experiences (Magnússon et al., 2020). Key concepts informing this study include scaffolding, interaction, and the zone of proximal development (ZPD). Scaffolding refers to the intentional support provided by adults or more capable peers to assist children in accomplishing tasks that they cannot yet perform independently. In the context of communication development, scaffolding may involve modeling language, expanding children's utterances, using gestures or visual cues, and providing prompts that encourage verbal expression. As children's competence increases, this support is gradually reduced, allowing them to take greater control of their communication (Matta et al., 2020).

Interaction is central to sociocultural theory and plays a critical role in language development. Through social interaction, children are exposed to linguistic input, conversational patterns, and pragmatic uses of language. Interactional exchanges allow children to practice turn-taking, negotiate meaning, and respond to communicative cues. In early childhood classrooms, interactions occur not only during structured learning activities but also through informal moments such as play, transitions, and daily routines. These interactions provide rich opportunities for communication development, particularly for children with delayed communication who benefit from repeated and meaningful exposure to language (Lipkin et al., 2020).

The concept of the zone of proximal development further explains how learning and development occur through social support. The ZPD represents the distance between what a child can do independently and what they can achieve with guidance. Teachers' intervention strategies within this study are understood as efforts to operate within children's ZPD by providing appropriate levels of support that challenge children while remaining achievable. By engaging children within their ZPD, teachers facilitate communication development that is both responsive and developmentally appropriate (Sapiets et al., 2021). Applying a sociocultural framework enables this study to interpret

children's communication behaviors and teachers' responses as dynamic and relational processes. Rather than viewing communication delays as fixed or isolated deficits within the child, this perspective recognizes them as part of an ongoing developmental process shaped by interaction, context, and support. Teachers' practices are thus understood not merely as instructional techniques but as relational actions that influence children's participation, confidence, and communicative growth (Nguyen et al., 2021).

Overall, the sociocultural framework provides a comprehensive lens for examining communication development in early childhood education. It underscores the importance of interaction, cultural context, and responsive teaching in supporting children with delayed communication. By adopting this framework, the study contributes to a more holistic and inclusive understanding of communication development that aligns with contemporary perspectives in early childhood education (Caselli et al., 2021).

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

This study employed a qualitative case study design to gain an in-depth understanding of communication delays within a specific early childhood education setting. The case study approach was chosen because it allows for a comprehensive exploration of a bounded system, capturing contextual details and participant perspectives. This design aligns with the study's aim to analyze characteristics and handling strategies in a naturalistic educational environment.

3.2 Participants and Research Context

The research was conducted at KB Fatimatuzzahra, an early childhood education institution located in Sukabumi City, Indonesia. Participants included four classroom teachers, one school principal, and three children identified by teachers as having delayed communication. Purposive sampling was used to select participants who were directly involved in the identification and handling of communication delays. The institution serves children from diverse socio-economic backgrounds, providing a relevant context for the study.

3.3 Data Collection Methods

Data were collected through multiple qualitative methods to ensure depth and credibility. Classroom observations were conducted over a three-month period to document children's communication behaviors and teacher-child interactions. In-depth interviews with teachers and the principal explored perceptions, experiences, and intervention strategies. Document analysis included developmental reports and anecdotal records. The researcher acted as a non-participant observer during classroom activities.

3.4 Data Analysis Techniques

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis. The process involved data familiarization, initial coding, categorization, and theme development. Codes were generated inductively from the data, allowing themes to emerge naturally. Triangulation across data sources and member checking with teachers were employed to enhance trustworthiness.

3.5 Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were carefully addressed throughout the study. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, including parental consent for child observation. Participants' identities

were protected through the use of pseudonyms. Participation was voluntary, and data were securely stored to maintain confidentiality.

4. FINDINGS

The analysis resulted in four main themes describing the characteristics and handling of children with delayed communication.

A. Limited Verbal Expression

Limited verbal expression is one of the most prominent characteristics observed in children with communication delays. This theme reflects not only the children's difficulties in producing spoken language, but also the broader impact of these difficulties on classroom participation, social interaction, and emotional development (Brown et al., 2020). The following section provides an in-depth discussion of limited verbal expression, expanded to offer a comprehensive academic explanation suitable for inclusion in a thesis or journal article. Children with communication delays demonstrated clear limitations in verbal expression, particularly in terms of restricted vocabulary and a low level of spontaneous speech. In classroom settings, these children rarely initiated verbal interactions with teachers or peers. Instead, they tended to remain silent unless directly prompted, indicating a lack of confidence or ability to independently use spoken language (Löytömäki et al., 2020). This pattern suggests that verbal communication was not yet an automatic or functional tool for these children in daily learning contexts. Restricted vocabulary further constrained the children's ability to convey ideas, needs, and emotions. Many children relied on a small set of familiar words that were repeated across different situations, regardless of context. As a result, their spoken language lacked variability and specificity, making it difficult for listeners to fully understand their intended meaning. Vocabulary limitations also reduced opportunities for children to engage in higher-level language tasks, such as describing experiences, asking questions, or expressing opinions (Dhondt et al., 2020).

Low levels of spontaneous speech were especially evident during group activities. While typically developing peers actively participated in discussions, storytelling, or question-and-answer sessions, children with communication delays often remained passive observers. This reduced verbal engagement limited their exposure to language modeling and peer interaction, both of which are essential for language development (Febriantini et al., 2021). Consequently, a cycle emerged in which limited verbal expression led to fewer communication opportunities, further reinforcing language delays. The limitations in verbal expression were also evident in the structure of the children's sentences. When responding to questions, children frequently used single-word answers such as "yes," "no," or the name of an object. These responses were functional at a basic level but lacked grammatical complexity and descriptive detail. Even when children attempted to form short sentences, their utterances were often incomplete, omitting key elements such as subjects, verbs, or connectors (Wilson et al., 2020). Fragmented sentence structure affected the clarity of communication. Teachers often needed to ask follow-up questions or rely on contextual cues to interpret the children's intended messages. In some cases, misunderstandings occurred because the verbal output did not adequately represent the child's internal understanding. This highlights the distinction between expressive competence and cognitive ability, as children may possess ideas or knowledge that they are unable to articulate verbally (Mössler et al., 2020).

From a linguistic perspective, these expressive difficulties may be associated with delays in syntactic development. The children's speech patterns reflected early developmental stages of language acquisition, where telegraphic speech or single-word utterances are common. However, when such patterns persist beyond the expected developmental period, they become indicative of a

communication delay that requires targeted intervention.Importantly, limited verbal expression did not necessarily indicate poor comprehension (Wahyuni, 2020). Several children demonstrated adequate receptive language skills, as evidenced by their ability to follow instructions, respond appropriately to routines, and understand contextual cues within the classroom. For example, children were often able to complete tasks correctly after receiving verbal instructions, even though they were unable to verbally explain what they were doing.This discrepancy between receptive and expressive language abilities is a well-documented phenomenon in children with communication delays. While receptive language involves understanding spoken input, expressive language requires the ability to formulate and produce spoken output (Şimşek & Erdoğan, 2021). The findings suggest that expressive language posed a greater challenge for the children than receptive processing, leading to an imbalance between what they understood and what they could express.Such a gap can have significant implications for assessment and intervention. If educators rely solely on verbal responses to evaluate understanding, they may underestimate the children's cognitive or conceptual abilities. Therefore, it is essential to incorporate alternative forms of assessment, such as observation, demonstration, or visual supports, to gain a more accurate picture of the children's comprehension (Kerns et al., 2021).

The limitations in verbal expression had a direct impact on the children's participation in classroom activities. Learning tasks that required verbal responses, such as answering questions, retelling stories, or participating in discussions, posed considerable challenges. As a result, children with communication delays were less visible in classroom interactions and were often perceived as disengaged or inattentive.Reduced participation not only affected academic learning but also influenced the children's social positioning within the classroom (Obiweluozo et al., 2021). Verbal communication plays a crucial role in forming peer relationships, negotiating play, and resolving conflicts. Children who struggled to express themselves verbally were at greater risk of social isolation or exclusion from group activities, as peers may have found it difficult to understand or interact with them.

Over time, repeated experiences of communication failure may negatively affect children's self-esteem and motivation to communicate. Some children appeared hesitant to attempt verbal expression, possibly due to fear of making mistakes or not being understood (Johnston, 2022). This emotional dimension underscores the importance of creating a supportive and responsive communication environment in the classroom.

As a consequence of limited verbal expression, miscommunication frequently occurred between the children and their surrounding environment. Teachers and peers sometimes misinterpreted the children's needs, intentions, or emotional states due to the absence of clear verbal explanations. For example, a child's silence might be interpreted as lack of understanding, while in reality the child may have understood but been unable to respond verbally (MacCormack et al., 2020). Miscommunication also increased the likelihood of frustration for both children and adults. When children were unable to convey their needs effectively, they sometimes resorted to non-verbal behaviors or emotional outbursts. These behaviors were often reactive responses to communication breakdowns rather than intentional misconduct. Without an understanding of the underlying communication difficulties, such behaviors could be misjudged as behavioral problems. Addressing miscommunication requires adults to adopt a more interpretive and empathetic approach (Iwamura, 2022). Teachers who took time to observe non-verbal cues, provide choices, or model appropriate language were better able to bridge communication gaps and support the children's expressive development.

Interview Transcript 1 (Teacher Interview – T1)

Interviewer : Can you describe how the child communicates verbally during classroom activities?

Teacher (T1) : The child understands most of the instructions I give, but when it comes to responding verbally, the responses are very limited. Usually, the child answers with just one word, such as "yes" or "no," or sometimes only mentions the name of an object.

Interviewer : Does the child ever initiate conversation with you or peers?

Teacher (T1) : Very rarely. Most of the time, the child waits until I ask a question. Even during free play, the child tends to stay quiet and observes rather than starting a conversation.

Interviewer : How does this affect participation in learning activities?

Teacher (T1) : It affects participation quite a lot. In activities that require verbal responses, the child often appears passive. I know the child understands, but because there is no verbal response, it may look like the child is not engaged.

These interview transcripts demonstrate that reliance on non-verbal communication is a consistent and functional strategy used by children with communication delays. The data also highlight the critical role of teacher sensitivity and responsive language modeling in supporting the transition from non-verbal to verbal communication.

B. Reliance on Non-Verbal Communication

Children with communication delays frequently relied on body movements and gestures as their primary means of interaction. Pointing at objects was one of the most common strategies observed, particularly when children wanted to request items, indicate preferences, or draw attention to something in their environment. Rather than verbalizing requests, children often used their hands or gaze to direct adults toward desired objects (Cano et al., 2021). Another frequently observed behavior was pulling or guiding the teacher's hand toward an object or location. This action functioned as a direct and efficient way to communicate needs without the use of spoken language. In addition, some children directly took objects they wanted, bypassing communicative exchange altogether. While effective in achieving immediate goals, this behavior reduced opportunities for reciprocal verbal interaction (Peleman et al., 2020). Facial expressions also played a significant role in non-verbal communication. Smiling, frowning, crying, or showing signs of distress were key indicators of children's emotional states. These expressions often served as the primary signals for adults to interpret children's feelings, particularly when verbal labeling of emotions was absent (Li, 2021).

Non-verbal communication served an adaptive and functional purpose for children with communication delays. Faced with limitations in expressive language, children developed alternative strategies to ensure their needs were met and to remain engaged with their surroundings. From a developmental perspective, this adaptability reflects children's inherent motivation to communicate, even when linguistic resources are limited (Kasirer et al., 2020). By using gestures, facial expressions, and physical actions, children were able to participate in daily routines and classroom activities. These non-verbal behaviors allowed them to interact with adults and peers, maintain a sense of agency, and reduce feelings of helplessness. In this sense, non-verbal communication should be understood as a strength rather than a deficit (Bamicha & Drigas, 2022).

However, while adaptive in the short term, heavy reliance on non-verbal strategies may become limiting over time. When children consistently achieve their goals without using spoken language, they may have fewer opportunities or incentives to practice verbal expression (He et al., 2020). This underscores the importance of balancing acceptance of non-verbal communication with intentional support for verbal development. Excessive reliance on non-verbal communication can inadvertently hinder the development of verbal language if not accompanied by appropriate stimulation. When adults respond immediately to gestures or actions without modeling verbal language, children may not be encouraged to attempt spoken communication. Over time, this pattern can reinforce non-verbal communication as the primary mode of interaction (Lengua et al., 2021). The challenge for educators lies in responding sensitively to non-verbal cues while simultaneously

promoting verbal expression. For example, when a child points to an object, the teacher can acknowledge the request while verbally labeling the object and modeling a simple sentence. This approach validates the child's communicative attempt while expanding linguistic input. Research in language development emphasizes the importance of responsive interaction, where adults follow the child's lead but enrich the interaction with language (Xu et al., 2022). In the context of communication delays, this means using non-verbal behaviors as entry points for verbal stimulation rather than as endpoints of communication.

In classroom settings, reliance on non-verbal communication significantly influenced teacher–child interaction. Teachers needed to be highly attentive to subtle cues such as eye gaze, body orientation, and changes in behavior. Accurate interpretation of these cues was essential to meet children's needs and prevent misunderstandings. Misinterpretation of non-verbal signals could lead to frustration for both the child and the teacher (Morgan et al., 2021). For instance, if a teacher failed to recognize a child's gesture as a request, the child might escalate the behavior by crying or becoming physically restless. Such situations highlight the communicative intent underlying behaviors that might otherwise be perceived as disruptive. Furthermore, reliance on non-verbal communication affected peer interaction. Peers may have difficulty understanding gestures or facial expressions, particularly in group play contexts. As a result, children with communication delays may experience challenges in initiating or sustaining peer relationships, emphasizing the need for adult facilitation and modelling (Operto et al., 2020).

Teachers played a critical role in interpreting and responding to non-verbal communication. High levels of sensitivity and observational skill were required to accurately understand children's intentions. Teachers who were attuned to non-verbal cues were better able to provide timely and appropriate responses, thereby supporting positive interaction. Responsiveness also involved translating non-verbal communication into verbal language (Reyes et al., 2020). By verbalizing what the child appeared to be communicating, teachers helped bridge the gap between action and language. For example, a teacher might say, "You are pointing to the ball because you want to play," thereby linking the gesture to verbal expression. This approach not only supported language development but also helped children feel understood and validated. When children experienced consistent and meaningful responses to their communicative attempts, they were more likely to remain engaged and motivated to interact. Non-verbal communication was closely tied to emotional expression (Hegde & Pomaville, 2021). When children were unable to express emotions verbally, they relied on facial expressions and physical behaviors to communicate feelings such as happiness, frustration, or distress. Teachers who recognized these signals were better equipped to provide emotional support and prevent escalation (Pastor-Cerezuela et al., 2020).

Failure to interpret non-verbal emotional cues could result in increased frustration for children. When emotional needs were unmet or misunderstood, children might resort to more intense behaviors as a form of communication. Understanding non-verbal communication as emotionally driven is therefore essential in supporting children's overall well-being (Zhao et al., 2022). The findings related to reliance on non-verbal communication have important implications for educational practice. Teachers should view non-verbal behaviors as meaningful communicative acts rather than behaviors to be eliminated. Professional development focused on interpreting non-verbal cues can enhance teachers' ability to support children with communication delays (Barokova & Tager-Flusberg, 2020). At the same time, instructional strategies should intentionally promote verbal language development. This includes modeling simple language, using visual supports alongside speech, and creating opportunities for children to practice verbal communication in low-pressure contexts. Collaboration with parents is also essential to ensure consistency between home and school environments. In conclusion, reliance on non-verbal communication represents both an adaptive strength and a developmental challenge for children with communication delays. While non-verbal strategies enable

children to interact with their environment and express their needs, excessive dependence on these strategies may limit opportunitie (Badran & ..., 2024).

Interview Transcript 1 (Teacher – T1)

Interviewer : Can you describe how the child usually communicates needs or requests during classroom activities?

Teacher (T1) : The child mostly uses non-verbal communication. For example, instead of saying what they want, the child usually points at objects or pulls my hand toward something. Verbal requests are very limited, especially during spontaneous activities.

Interviewer : In what situations does this happen most often?

Teacher (T1) : It happens frequently during free play or snack time. When the child wants a toy or food, they don't use words. They just show me through actions.

Interviewer : How do you interpret these behaviors?

Teacher (T1) : I see them as a way of communicating. The child wants to express something but doesn't yet have the language skills to do it verbally.

The interview data consistently indicate that children with communication delays rely heavily on non-verbal communication as a functional strategy. Gestures, facial expressions, and physical actions are used to compensate for limited verbal abilities. Teachers play a crucial role in interpreting these cues and transforming non-verbal communication into opportunities for verbal language development.

C. Emotional Expression through Behavior

Difficulties in verbal communication significantly influenced how children expressed their emotions in early childhood settings. When children were unable to verbalize internal emotional states such as anger, excitement, disappointment, or sadness, they frequently relied on observable physical behaviors as alternative communication channels (Bamicha & Drigas, 2022). These behaviors functioned as expressive tools, allowing children to externalize emotions that they could not yet articulate linguistically. In this sense, emotional behavior should be understood as meaningful communication rather than random or problematic actions (Bakola & Drigas, 2020). Behaviors such as shouting, crying, jumping, hitting surfaces, or throwing objects were commonly observed in emotionally charged situations. These situations included peer conflicts, transitions between activities, waiting turns, or moments when children's needs were not immediately met. Importantly, such behaviors were context-dependent and often predictable when viewed through a communicative lens (Reyes et al., 2020). Rather than indicating intentional defiance, these behaviors reflected children's attempts to manage overwhelming emotions without sufficient verbal resources.

The inability to verbally express emotions frequently intensified children's frustration. When initial behavioral cues were misunderstood or ignored, children tended to repeat or escalate their actions in an effort to gain attention or clarify meaning (Vartiainen et al., 2020). For example, a child might begin by crying softly and later progress to shouting or throwing objects if the emotional message remained unacknowledged. This escalation highlights the transactional nature of communication, where children adapt their strategies based on adult responses. Teachers' understanding of the underlying emotional meaning of these behaviors was therefore crucial. Teachers who recognized behaviors as emotional communication were more likely to respond with empathy rather than punishment (Perry et al., 2020). By identifying emotional triggers—such as fatigue, communication breakdowns, or changes in routine—teachers were able to intervene more effectively. Such interventions included calming strategies, simplified language, and emotional validation, which collectively supported children's emotional regulation (Yığman et al., 2020).

A key strategy used by teachers was modeling simple emotional vocabulary. When teachers labeled emotions explicitly, children were gradually introduced to linguistic tools that supported

emotional expression. This approach helped bridge the gap between emotional experience and verbal communication. One teacher explained: "When the child is angry, throwing toys is common. After I help label the feeling by saying 'you are angry,' the child usually becomes calmer" (Teacher Interview, T3). This example illustrates how language modeling can directly influence emotional regulation. Beyond immediate classroom management, emotional expression through behavior has broader implications for children's social and emotional development (Barisnikov et al., 2021). Children who consistently rely on physical behaviors to express emotions may experience difficulties in peer relationships, as peers may misinterpret these behaviors as aggressive or disruptive. Without appropriate support, such misunderstandings can limit opportunities for positive social interaction and inclusion (Hajal & Paley, 2020).

Teachers in this study emphasized the importance of creating emotionally safe classroom environments where children felt understood and supported. By responding consistently and predictably to emotional behaviors, teachers helped children develop trust and emotional security. Over time, this sense of safety encouraged children to attempt verbal expression, even when their language skills were limited (Barisnikov et al., 2021). The gradual transition from behavioral to verbal emotional expression did not occur uniformly across children. Progress depended on individual differences, consistency of teacher responses, and opportunities for repeated exposure to emotional language. However, teachers noted that even small changes—such as using single emotion words—represented meaningful developmental progress (Zimmer-Gembeck et al., 2022).

Interview Transcript 1 (Teacher – T1)

Interviewer : How do children usually show emotions when they cannot express them verbally?

Teacher (T1) : Most of them show it through actions. If they are upset, they cry or throw things. If they are excited, they jump or run around. They don't really say how they feel.

In summary, emotional expression through behavior is a central feature of communication delays in early childhood. These behaviors represent meaningful attempts to communicate emotions in the absence of sufficient verbal skills. Teachers' ability to interpret, validate, and linguistically scaffold emotional experiences plays a critical role in supporting both emotional regulation and language development. Recognizing behavior as communication allows educators to respond more effectively and foster inclusive, emotionally supportive learning environments.

D. Teacher Intervention Strategies

Emotional expression through behavior emerged as a significant theme among children with communication delays. Difficulties in verbal communication substantially influenced how children expressed their emotions, leading them to rely on physical behaviors rather than spoken language. This theme highlights the close relationship between language development and emotional regulation (McConaughy & Whitcomb, 2022). The following section provides an expanded discussion of this theme, accompanied by qualitative interview transcripts, and is intended for use in a thesis, dissertation, or academic journal. Children with communication delays often experienced challenges in expressing emotions verbally. As a result, emotions such as anger, excitement, sadness, or disappointment were frequently conveyed through observable behaviors (Mallillin, 2022). Instead of using words to label or explain their feelings, children relied on physical actions to communicate their internal emotional states. These behaviors served as substitutes for verbal emotional expression. Behaviors such as shouting, crying, jumping, hitting objects, or throwing toys were commonly observed in classroom situations. These actions typically occurred during moments of heightened emotional demand, such as transitions between activities, conflicts with peers, or situations in which children were unable to communicate their needs effectively. Importantly, these behaviors should not

be viewed solely as disciplinary problems, but rather as meaningful attempts at emotional communication (Karjalainen et al., 2020).

From a developmental perspective, emotional expression through behavior reflects limited access to emotional vocabulary. When children lack the language to label emotions such as "angry," "sad," or "excited," they are more likely to express these feelings through physical means. This pattern is especially evident in children with communication delays, where expressive language difficulties restrict their ability to regulate emotions verbally. The inability to verbally express emotions often increased children's levels of frustration (Robinson, 2022). When children felt misunderstood or ignored, they tended to repeat or intensify their behaviors in an effort to gain attention or clarify their emotional message. For example, a child who was unable to verbally request help might begin by crying softly and later escalate to shouting or throwing objects if the initial behavior was not acknowledged. Such escalation reflects an attempt to make emotional needs visible rather than intentional misbehavior. Children used stronger behaviors when earlier, subtler cues failed to produce a response from adults or peers. This highlights the importance of early recognition and interpretation of emotional signals to prevent further escalation (Ansley et al., 2021).

Repeated experiences of frustration may negatively affect children's emotional well-being. Over time, children who are frequently misunderstood may develop heightened emotional sensitivity or reduced motivation to engage in communication attempts. Therefore, addressing emotional expression through behavior is not only a communication issue but also a matter of emotional support and inclusion. Teachers played a critical role in interpreting and responding to children's emotional behaviors (Kamei & Harriott, 2021). Understanding the underlying emotional meaning of a behavior required careful observation of context, triggers, and patterns. Teachers who were sensitive to these factors were better equipped to respond appropriately and support emotional regulation. By identifying emotional triggers—such as fatigue, changes in routine, or communication breakdowns—teachers could anticipate challenging situations and provide proactive support. For example, offering visual cues, simplified instructions, or additional time for transitions helped reduce emotional stress for children with communication delays (Bolourian et al., 2022).

Teachers also supported emotional regulation by modeling simple emotional vocabulary. When teachers labeled emotions verbally, such as saying, "You are angry because you cannot have the toy," children were gradually exposed to the language needed to express feelings. This modeling helped bridge the gap between emotional experience and verbal expression. In classroom settings, emotional expression through behavior affected both learning and social interaction (Brophy-Herb et al., 2024). Children who expressed emotions behaviorally were sometimes perceived as disruptive, which could lead to exclusion from activities if the underlying communication difficulty was not recognized. This underscores the importance of viewing behavior through a communicative lens. Creating an emotionally supportive classroom environment was essential. Teachers who validated children's feelings while guiding them toward appropriate expression contributed to a sense of safety and belonging. Over time, such an environment encouraged children to attempt verbal expression, even when language skills were limited (Mitchell & Sutherland, 2020).

Interview Transcript 1 (Teacher – T1)

Interviewer : How do children with communication delays usually express emotions in your classroom?

Teacher (T1) : Most of them show their emotions through behavior. If they are angry, they might shout or throw toys. If they are excited, they jump or clap. They rarely use words to explain how they feel.

In conclusion, emotional expression through behavior is a key characteristic of children with communication delays. These behaviors serve as alternative forms of emotional communication when

verbal expression is limited. Understanding the emotional meaning behind behavior allows teachers to respond with empathy, reduce frustration, and support the development of emotional vocabulary. Through sensitive interpretation and consistent modeling of emotional language, teachers can help children gradually transition from behavioral expression to more regulated and verbal forms of emotional communication.

5. DISCUSSION

The findings of this study highlight that communication delays in early childhood are complex, multifaceted phenomena shaped by both individual child characteristics and broader contextual factors. Rather than presenting as a single deficit, communication delays manifested through a combination of limited verbal expression, reliance on non-verbal communication, emotional expression through behavior, and the need for targeted teacher intervention strategies (Jullien, 2021). These dimensions interacted dynamically within daily classroom contexts, reinforcing the understanding that communication development cannot be separated from social interaction, emotional regulation, and environmental support. This aligns with contemporary perspectives in early childhood education that view language development as an embedded and socially mediated process rather than a purely cognitive skill. The characteristics identified in this study are consistent with international qualitative research that emphasizes children's reliance on non-verbal communication when verbal language is not yet accessible (Akemoglu et al., 2020). Studies conducted in various cultural contexts have reported similar patterns, where gestures, facial expressions, and behaviors serve as primary communication tools for children with delayed language development. The present findings support this body of literature by demonstrating that non-verbal communication is not merely compensatory but functional and intentional (Karltorp et al., 2020). Children actively used available resources to maintain interaction and express needs, reinforcing the notion that communication delays should be understood in terms of difference and adaptation rather than absence of communicative intent (Varadarajan et al., 2021).

Behavioral expressions of emotion emerged as another salient feature of communication delays, further underscoring the close relationship between language and emotional regulation. International research has consistently shown that children with limited expressive language often rely on physical behaviors to communicate emotional states. The present study confirms this relationship within the observed early childhood education (ECE) settings, where behaviors such as crying, shouting, or throwing objects functioned as emotional messages rather than acts of defiance (Hentges et al., 2021). This perspective challenges deficit-based interpretations of behavior and emphasizes the importance of understanding emotional expression as a form of communication shaped by linguistic constraints. Teachers' strategies observed in this study reflect key sociocultural principles of learning, particularly the role of scaffolding through interaction, play, and guided participation. Drawing implicitly on sociocultural theory, teachers positioned themselves as responsive partners who mediated children's communication experiences (Pi & Ha, 2021). Through modeling language, expanding children's utterances, and embedding communication practice within play-based activities, teachers created meaningful opportunities for language use. These practices align with Vygotskian principles, where learning occurs within social interaction and children's development is supported through sensitive adult guidance within their zone of proximal development (Magnússon et al., 2020).

Play-based communication activities were especially significant in supporting children with communication delays. Play provided a low-pressure, meaningful context in which children could experiment with language, gestures, and social interaction without fear of failure. The findings suggest that play functioned as both a pedagogical strategy and a relational space, enabling teachers to observe children's communicative intentions and respond appropriately (Huang et al., 2025). This reinforces

existing literature that positions play as a central medium for language development in early childhood, particularly for children who experience difficulties with formal or structured verbal tasks.

A key contribution of this study lies in its contextual focus on a community-based Indonesian ECE setting. While much of the existing literature on communication delays is derived from Western contexts, this study extends understanding by highlighting how cultural values shape educational practice. Values such as patience, care, empathy, and collaboration were evident in teachers' responses to children with communication delays (Modjtahedi et al., 2021). Rather than emphasizing performance or correction, teachers prioritized emotional comfort and relational trust, creating a supportive environment conducive to gradual language development. These findings illustrate how cultural norms influence not only teaching strategies but also interpretations of children's behavior and communication.

Collaboration emerged as a culturally and practically significant aspect of teacher practice. Teachers emphasized close communication with parents and, where possible, engagement with health professionals to support children's development. This collaborative approach reflects collectivist cultural orientations common in Indonesian communities, where child development is viewed as a shared responsibility (Papoudi et al., 2021). The findings suggest that effective early intervention is strengthened when educators, families, and professionals work together, sharing observations, strategies, and expectations to ensure consistency across home and school environments. Teacher awareness and reflective practice were identified as crucial factors in supporting children with communication delays. Teachers who demonstrated an understanding of the communicative intent behind children's behaviors were more likely to respond empathetically and constructively. Reflective practice allowed teachers to reconsider initial interpretations of behavior, shifting from disciplinary responses to communicative and supportive strategies(Biel et al., 2020). This highlights the importance of professional reflection in early childhood education, where teachers' beliefs and interpretations directly shape children's learning experiences and emotional well-being. From a practical perspective, the findings underscore the need for ongoing teacher training in communication development and inclusive practices. While teachers demonstrated intuitive and experience-based strategies, systematic professional development could enhance their ability to identify communication delays early and apply evidence-based interventions. Training programs should focus on understanding language development, interpreting non-verbal communication, supporting emotional regulation, and collaborating effectively with families and specialists. Strengthening teachers' competencies in these areas is essential for ensuring inclusive and responsive early childhood education (Schaeffer et al., 2023).

At the policy level, the study highlights the importance of strengthening collaboration between ECE institutions and health professionals. Early identification and intervention for communication delays require integrated systems that bridge education and health services. Policies that facilitate access to speech-language therapists, psychologists, and pediatric services within or alongside ECE settings could significantly enhance support for children with communication delays (Löytömäki et al., 2020). In conclusion, this study contributes to both theory and practice by demonstrating that communication delays are socially situated, culturally influenced, and best addressed through reflective, collaborative, and inclusive approaches within early childhood education (Amrani et al., 2023).

The findings of this study highlight that communication delays in early childhood are complex and multifaceted, shaped by interactions between individual developmental profiles and contextual factors within educational environments. Recent studies between 2020 and 2025 increasingly emphasize that communication delays should be understood as dynamic and socially situated phenomena rather than isolated linguistic deficits (McCormack, J., Harrison, L. J., McLeod, S., & McAllister, 2020). Consistent with this perspective, the present study demonstrates that

communication delays manifested through interconnected patterns of limited verbal expression, reliance on non-verbal communication, emotional expression through behavior, and the need for responsive teacher intervention.

The strong reliance on non-verbal communication identified in this study aligns with recent international research highlighting gestures and body movements as primary communicative resources for children with delayed speech. For example, Lüke and Ritterfeld (2021) found that children with expressive language delays frequently use pointing, gaze, and physical proximity to maintain interaction. Similarly, the present findings show that non-verbal strategies were purposeful and functional, reinforcing contemporary views that non-verbal communication represents communicative competence rather than deficiency (Bavin, E. L., Bretherton, L., Prior, M., Reilly, S., Eadie, P., & Wake, 2022).

Importantly, contemporary research cautions against interpreting such behaviors as purely disciplinary problems. Greene and Winkler (2021) emphasize that challenging behaviors in young children often reflect unmet communication or emotional needs. Teachers in the present study adopted similar interpretations, viewing behavioral expressions as communicative signals rather than intentional misbehavior. This alignment with recent literature highlights the importance of communication-sensitive behavior management approaches in early childhood education (Greene, R. W., & Winkler, 2021).

6. CONCLUSION

This study explored the characteristics of children with delayed communication and the intervention strategies implemented by educators at KB Fatimatuzzahra, Sukabumi City. The findings indicate that children with communication delays exhibit distinctive patterns, including limited verbal expression, heavy reliance on non-verbal communication, and emotional expression through behavior. These characteristics demonstrate that communication delay in early childhood is a complex and multifaceted developmental issue that is closely related to social interaction and emotional regulation.

The study also highlights the critical role of teachers in early identification and intervention. Educators at KB Fatimatuzzahra applied responsive and individualized strategies, such as play-based communication stimulation, continuous observation, collaboration with parents, and referrals to professionals when necessary. These approaches reflect sociocultural principles that emphasize interaction, scaffolding, and learning through meaningful social experiences. Overall, the study underscores the importance of contextually grounded, collaborative, and inclusive practices in supporting children with delayed communication in early childhood education settings. Despite its limitations, particularly the small sample size and single-site focus, this research provides valuable insights for educators, institutions, and policymakers and suggests the need for further studies across diverse contexts to strengthen early intervention practices.

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