



ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS AFFECTING TODDLER SPEECH DELAY: LANGUAGE EXPOSURE, SOCIAL INTERACTION AND SCREEN TIME

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Abstract

The three key areas of screen time, social interaction, and language exposure are the focus of this study, which looks at how the environment influences babies' early language development and delayed speech. Forty mothers of toddlers between the ages of 18 and 36 months were asked to fill out a structured questionnaire using a psycholinguistic technique. The purpose of the questionnaire was to evaluate language exposure, social interaction, and screen time in the home setting. A pilot test was conducted in order to enhance the device and ensure its reliability. The results indicate that both restricted language exposure and lower levels of social interaction were linked to a higher incidence of speech delay in toddlers. Poor language development has also been connected to excessive screen use, which makes speech problems worse. These findings demonstrate how important it is to decrease passive screen time and create rich language contexts in order to promote language acquisition in a healthy manner. For the purpose of developing targeted interventions for toddlers with speech impairments, the study provides early childhood educators and medical professionals with helpful information. Future research should examine the long-term effects of these environmental factors on language development.

Keywords: *Gadget Use, Input Deprivation, Psychological Factor, Social Interaction, Speech Delay.*

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1. Introductionss

Toddler speech delays have long been a cause for concern. It occurs when a child's speech development is not keeping pace with his age. For example, a 24-month-old child should be able to string two or three words together; if he is not, he may have a speech problem. This study looks at the causes of speech delay and offers a clear cure. Since it is clear that without language, there can be no advancement in any subject and the child will have a low IQ and lack confidence, speech delay can lead to a host of additional issues.

One of the most important aspects of children's cognitive and social development is early language acquisition. Environmental, psychological, and biological factors interact dynamically to affect toddlers' timely development of speaking abilities. However, the prevalence of speech delays has increased recently, raising concerns among researchers, physicians, and caregivers. One crucial area of attention is the impact of psychological elements, particularly parental connection and the emotional environment.

Another issue that may lead to speech delays is excessive gadget use, which has been brought about by the arrival of modern technology. A growing dependence on digital devices for amusement and diversion has been linked to a decrease in the language exchange between children and their caregivers. The possible effect of technology on a kid's early language development is a major concern. To understand the intricate causes of speech delays in children, it is essential to look at these components collectively. This research aims to provide insights that help guide support networks and treatments to improve developmental outcomes for affected children.

1.1. Research questions

1. How do psychological elements like emotional surroundings and parental involvement impact toddlers' early language acquisition??
2. To what extent do gadgets contribute to toddlers' speech delays?

2. Literature review

A kid or toddler who has a speech and language delay is genuinely incapable of speaking at an age-appropriate level. Comprehension issues with what is read or heard are

another aspect of language delays. We can claim that they lack cohesive speech if they have trouble fitting disparate words together to convey a meaning. Toddlers' delayed speech has long been a cause for concern. However, when does a mother become aware that her child is delayed in speaking? What is the precise age? A youngster of a mother is clearly delayed and requires research if they are not using simple words by the age of 36 months (Morley et al., 1955).

At this age, parents should be concerned with their children's speech. A child's social life and academic achievement may suffer as a result of delayed speech, even though it has a major impact on the kids' cognitive, psychological and social growth. The three main theories of nativism, behaviorism, and cognitivism are concerned with the language development of young children and how they relate to the acquisition of comprehension language. According to Chomsky (1965), the nativism theory suggests that language is a complex system that cannot be quickly mastered by merely copying. The behaviorism approach, which was advocated by Skinner (1954), in contrast, emphasizes external factors in language acquisition, particularly the function of environmental catalysts. According to Skinner, children's verbal behavior and the responses they receive from their domain are the primary factors that influence language development. Little ones learn to speak and understand language through imitating others, amplification, and the incentive-response cycle. The third approach, cognitivism, maintains that language development is neither an intrinsic ability nor solely a skill taught by exposure to the environment (Piaget, 2013). On the other hand, it is the result of a baby's mental growth. Piaget asserts that children's language development happens as they engage with their domain and is connected to their mental development.

3. Theories of speech delay

3.1. Environmental elements

This theory suggests that speech delays may be caused by environmental factors for example language exposure or inadequate caretaker involvement or language exposure. Research suggests that children who experience less social involvement may be more susceptible to speech problems. For instance, children that were exposed to insufficient amounts of language in their home domain at the age of two performed worse in terms of vocabulary (Fernald et al. 2013).

3.2. Theory of social interaction

Less social engagement and communication, for instance when a child doesn't have adequate opportunities to talk to their age fellows or caregivers, can unquestionably contribute to their speech delay, according to social interaction theory. Several research have provided data in favor of this theory. For instance, Tomasello & Moll, (2010) discovered that kids who had more chances to communicate and engage with others did better in language than kids who had fewer chances.

3.3. Theory of Psychosocial

According to the psychosocial theory, children who worry or are under stress are more likely to develop speech issues, according to studies. Children that endured prolonged stress, for instance, performed less verbally than their counterparts (Sirianni, 2004).

3.4. Selective mutism

The phrase "selective mutism" (SM) refers to those kids who can use and comprehend language but who persistently avoids talking in some social gathering but not in others (Edwards, 2022). Prior to recently, it was thought to be uncommon but frequently challenging to treat, and it was linked to significant social and academic impairment (Manassis et al., 2003). It is quite rare for children and teenagers to develop selective mutism (SM). It represents less than 1 percent of 25 referrals to psychiatric clinics, according to APA (1994), and it is slightly more common in women ((Manassis et al., 2003). Selective mutism is often misdiagnosed or left untreated because there are no cross-cultural screening questionnaires available. In many cases, people are unaware that this ailment even exists. Additionally, therapeutic settings often meet children who have received inadequate or delayed care for a variety of conditions. According to DSM-5 criteria⁶, kids who are not able to speak the language needed in a social gathering should not be called as selectively mute. However, prior research has demonstrated that kids who suffer with selective mutism and members of their family frequently experience mild language delays or difficulty (Manassis et al., 2003).

3.5. Screen time

The use of tablets, computers, cellphones, and other portable electronic devices, as well as viewing TV or movies and playing computer games, constitute screen time, according to Karani et al. (2022). These devices, which are frequently used while sitting or lying down, significantly increase the amount of time people of all ages spend time

engaging in sedentary activities. Today, adults and kids are utilizing technology excessively, spending most of their time on the screens, either browsing different websites or utilizing a personal computer (Jalil & Bashir, 2021). For young children, there are no proven benefits to media exposure or screen time, and media will never replace the essential face-to-face interaction required for communication. (Reid Chassiakos et al., 2016). There has been and will remain a particular approach to communication and interaction-based learning. Many parents utilize a number of devices to distract their kids from their tantrums so they can work effectively in the media and technological age we live in today (Gold, 2014). Regardless of the possible consequences, parents often utilize devices because children find them more entertaining than other indoor activities. Hu et al. (2021) claims that prolonged screening can have a bad effect on speech, language learning, mental activity, and physical and overall mental health.

The Australian Physical Activity advised the following screen time limit to people of all ages & Sedentary Behavior Guidelines. Children aged 0 to 2 be lazy but refrain from using screens for longer than one hour at a time. No matter how cranky or restrictive they are, children aged two to five should not spend more than sixty to eighty minutes each day. Children aged 5 to 12: engage in activities and limit screen time (Fatima, 2022) says two hours a day is enough. Screens shorten attention spans; more significantly, it takes time for the basic environmental stimulants that the brain needs to grow and develop to take effect (Hill, 2020). The children have plenty of chance to learn the words as they hear our voices and see the pictures when we read aloud from storybooks (Trelease, 2013). However, because they aren't given enough time to process the frequent sights that are shown on the screen, children's focus and attention are affected. It gets harder for them to manage their urges; they don't wait and want what they want right away. They have never learned how to deal with frustration, therefore they don't comprehend whether they are addicted to or use electronic media constantly as said by McGough & Mylroie (2024).

Patil (2023) explores that overuse of gadgets by kids impairs their ability to recognize their own feelings and diverts them from play and interacting with their peers. kids and young adults who use a lot of time on screens may be at risk for attention problems and hyperactivity. Suicidal thoughts may also be linked to excessive electronic device use. Lastly, children who use screens more frequently acquire a propensity that could potentially result in addicted behavior (Lissak, 2018).

3.6. Screen time and covid 19

Screen time of children increased significantly in the COVID-19 pandemic when lockdowns were implemented globally. With no other choice, youngsters continued to

watch cartoons, play computer games, and use their phones. Even though COVID-19 is now under control, children may find it difficult to go back to their normal life routines when they are not on their screens at all. This is because screen usage has increased significantly over this time (Imran et al., 2020). This study demonstrated that excessive usage of electronic media may have a negative impact on speech-language development, particularly in young children, despite the possible benefits, such as enjoyment.

As a result, numerous studies stress the value of parental supervision and the benefits of limiting our kids' screen usage. Electronic devices with screens have become much more prevalent as children grow up in the era of technology. The introduction of technology and gadgets made parenting simpler. Young children's increased reliance on technology and screens limits their creativity and productivity. Excessive screen time has been caused by a variety of circumstances, including increasing screen time during previous lockdowns and a lack of alternatives for kids' physical activities, like going to nursery, playgrounds, or any other outdoor activities (Schmidt et al., 2020). Because they are restricted to their homes, they spend more time watching tv screens, playing video games, and enjoying cartoons.

Additionally, the online aspect of the educational system over the past few years has had a big impact on screen usage because students are forced to utilize screens..

Lack of parental time and attention is the most frequent reason why children are spending more time on screens; if both parents work and are unable to provide their children with adequate time, it may have an bad effect on the speech and language development of the children over all. More screen usage finally impacts children's development for a variety of motives, according to all the study. One is that, particularly in animated cartoons, everything that shows up on television is phony (Chahrazed, 2019).

Children begin to live in their own cosmos as they are unable to understand between the real and imaginative worlds (Goldman, 2020). They start loving the solitude by avoiding play or social interaction with their peers and instead concentrating on the computer, which significantly impairs their ability to learn.

3.7. Speech-Language Pathologists Have a Crucial Function

Speech-language pathologists assess, diagnose, and treat children with SSDs (Fabiano-Smith, 2019). The duties of a speech pathologist include: A comprehensive evaluation is carried out by speech-language pathologists to determine the type of speech difficulties that the child has. Oral-motor examinations, systematic tests, and informal

observations may all fall under this category. They provide individualized treatment plans that might involve articulation therapy (Blasco, 2001). Focusing on the particular sounds that the kid finds challenging. Speech-language pathologists also add phonological therapy. educating children on the fundamentals of sound patterns. When it comes to strengthening the skills their children are learning, parents are crucial. To promote improvement, speech-language pathologists assign homework for patients to complete at home. To address any co-occurring issues and provide comprehensive support, SLPs may collaborate with occupational therapists, pediatricians, other audiologists, and special educators.

3.8. Bilingualism and speech delay:

Language development is hampered in children raised in bilingual households because they often mix the two languages to some extent. By the time they reach adulthood, these kids typically speak both languages fluently (Redlinger et al., 1980). Kao CP and Leung AK, 1995. Unless there is an issue with the first language, bilingual language acquisition usually does not require the help of a speech pathologist. Bilingual children should be evaluated according to the same standards as monolingual children. Between 2.3% and 19% of children between the ages of two and seven are reported to have a language delay. 1–5. Severe speech and language impairments in children may have a detrimental effect on their future academic success even after receiving extensive care. Numerous studies indicate that children who go through language problems between the ages of two and a half and five have more problems in elementary school reading (Durkin, 1974). 7 to 9 Children are more likely to suffer from attention and social stress if their speech and language issues persist over the age of five and a half. When compared to kids without speech and language problems, ten children with these disabilities, ranging in age from 7.5 to 13, have demonstrated poor writing skills, including a conspicuous lack of spelling and grammar (Leonard, 2017).

4. Methodology

4.1. Research design

The broad plan or approach a researcher develops to address a particular research issue or series of questions is referred to as research design. It influences the methods and strategies that will be employed for data collection and analysis. It functions similarly to a study's appropriate design, directing researchers on how to gather and interpret data in order to successfully meet their goals. The term "research design" describes the quantitative element of this study because it is grounded in statistical facts and figures. In

process of collecting data for this study, a questionnaire is used. It makes gathering information from several respondents simple.

4.2. Population

Mothers with children between the ages of 18 and 36 months who live in Pakistan's largest city, Faisalabad, make up the research population. Early childhood is a crucial time for language development, especially between the ages of 18 and 36 months, hence this group is the focus of the study. The project intends to collect information on a wide range of socioeconomic backgrounds, educational attainment, and parenting styles by concentrating on women in Faisalabad.

4.3. Sampling

This study used a sampling technique to choose a total of 40 participants, comprising mothers (housewives) and teachers of toddlers aged 18 to 36 months from Faisalabad. The moms were selected because they have a direct impact on their kids' home environments, influencing screen time, social engagement, and language exposure. Due of their professional knowledge of early children development in educational environments, teachers were included. To give a comprehensive picture of the environmental elements causing child speech delay, the sample was designed to include a range of socioeconomic backgrounds, educational levels, and parenting styles.

4.4. Data collection

Closed-ended poll was used to get the information. This was developed using usual five Likert scales which consists of strongly disagree, disagree, agree, highly agree, and uncertain. Survey-based research used questionnaires to find out what people thought.

5. Data analysis

5.1. Pilot Test

Before collecting the main data , a pilot test was taken to assess the structured questionnaire's validity and reliability. The pilot test was administered to a limited sample of ten mothers in order to guarantee a participant balance similar to the main experiment. Finding any issues with the survey's overall thoroughness, question clarity, and response time was the aim. The questionnaire had minor revisions in response to feedback, such as clarifying some questions and ensuring that the language was appropriate for both mothers

and educators. After the pilot test demonstrated that the questionnaire was reliable and effective in collecting the necessary data, the final version was used for the primary study.

With a focus on psycho-neurolinguistic factors, the analysis of data of this study examines the causes of toddlers' delayed first language utterance. This study sought to identify significant factors that contribute to speech delay, with particular emphasis on the effects of excessive screen usage and insufficient linguistic input from parents. Data was collected from a sample of 40 mothers who told about their opinions on their infants' language development was gathered through surveys and observational observations. Housewives, teachers, and other professional women provided the data. The data was then analyzed through SPSS to identify patterns, relationships, and significant factors influencing speech delay.

Table 4.1: *My toddler knows what he/she wants and how to convey through gestures*

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Strongly Agree	14	35.0	35.0	35.0
Agree	17	42.5	42.5	77.5
Neutral	3	7.5	7.5	85.0
Disagree	3	7.5	7.5	92.5
Strongly Disagree	3	7.5	7.5	100.0
Total	40	100.0	100.0	

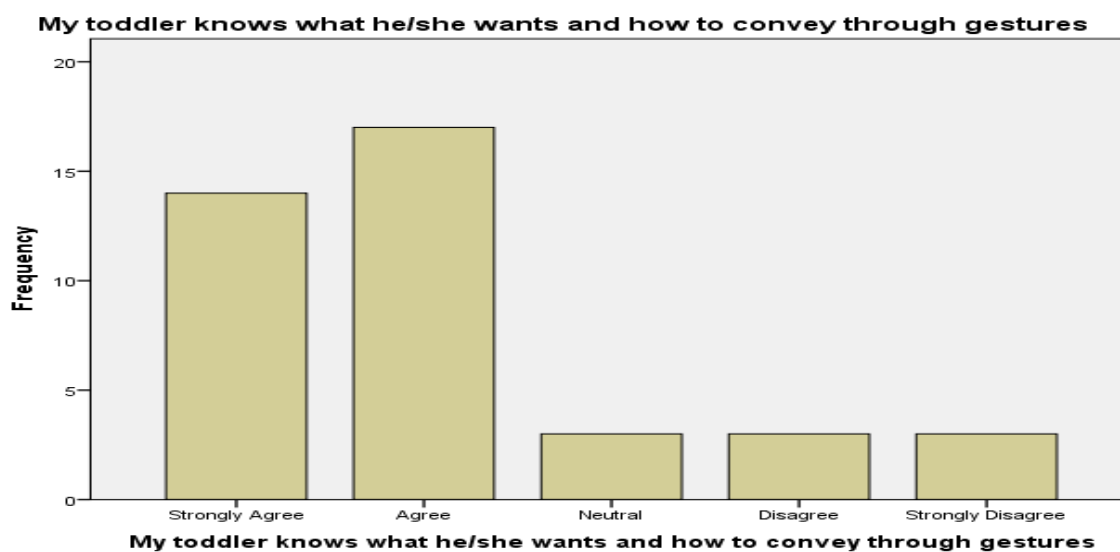


Figure 4.1: *My toddler knows what he/she wants and how to convey through gestures.*

Table 4.1 According to 77.5% of parents, their toddlers are able to communicate their wants through gestures. 15% of respondents disagree, which may indicate that they are concerned about their toddler's capacity for being nonverbal

Table 4.2: The grandparents are talking a lot with the toddler

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Strongly Agree	7	17.5	17.5	17.5
Agree	14	35.0	35.0	52.5
Neutral	14	35.0	35.0	87.5
Disagree	2	5.0	5.0	92.5
Strongly Disagree	3	7.5	7.5	100.0
Total	40	100.0	100.0	

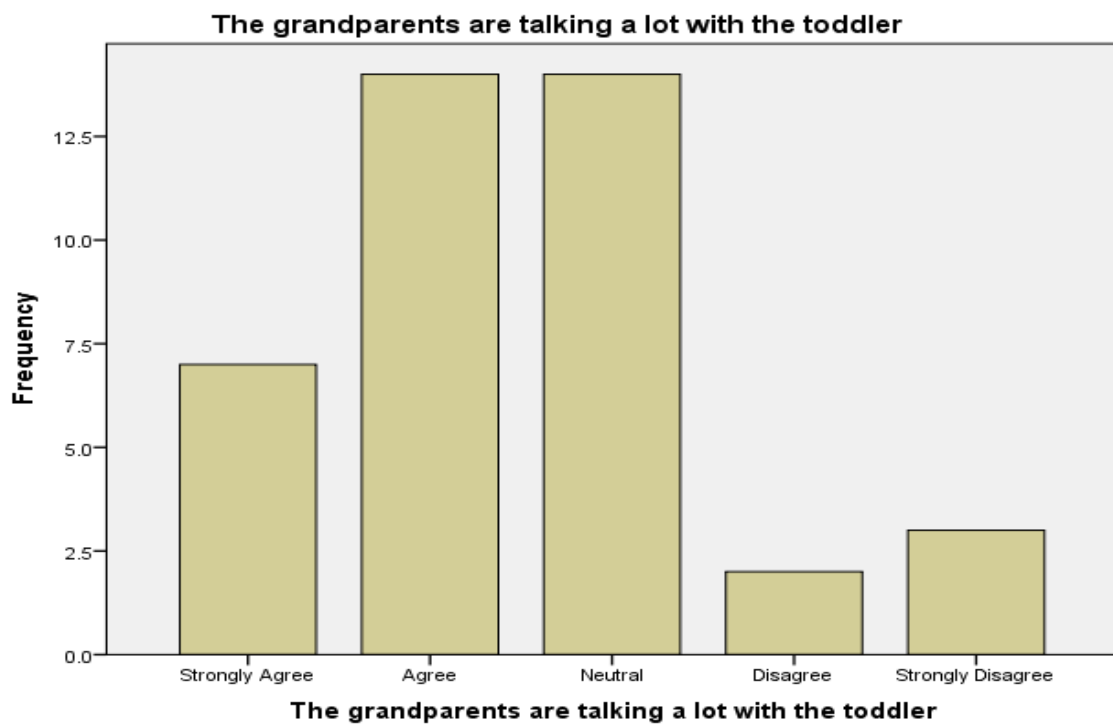


Figure 4.2: The grandparents are talking a lot with the toddler

In this table The survey found that 52.5% of respondents reported frequent interactions with grandparents, whereas 35% of respondents were ambivalent, indicating uneven communication. In the remaining 12.5%, grandparents might not be actively involved. The results suggest that a significant portion of the population may not be satisfied with the communication style of grandparents,

Table 4.3: We (parents) are talking to our toddler most of the time in 24 hours

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Strongly Agree	4	10.0	10.0	10.0
Agree	7	17.5	17.5	27.5
Neutral	10	25.0	25.0	52.5
Disagree	12	30.0	30.0	82.5
Strongly Disagree	7	17.5	17.5	100.0
Total	40	100.0	100.0	

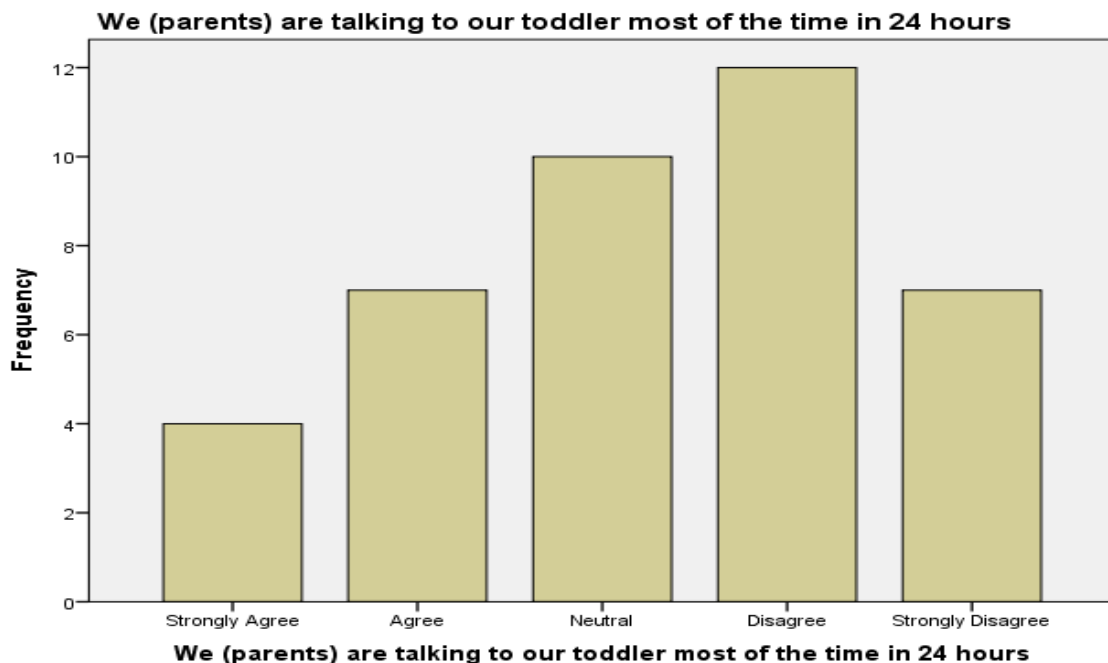


Figure 4.3: We (parents) are talking to our toddler most of the time in 24 hours

Only 27.5% of parents verbally interact with their toddlers on a regular basis, and 47.5% of parents only do so rarely, the survey found. These results can point to a communication breakdown or time restraints for certain parents. This discrepancy can indicate inadequate communication or timing constraints.

Table 4.4: *My toddler prefers to cry when he has a need instead using language*

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Strongly Agree	4	10.0	10.0	10.0
Agree	13	32.5	32.5	42.5
Neutral	10	25.0	25.0	67.5
Disagree	11	27.5	27.5	95.0
Strongly Disagree	2	5.0	5.0	100.0
Total	40	100.0	100.0	

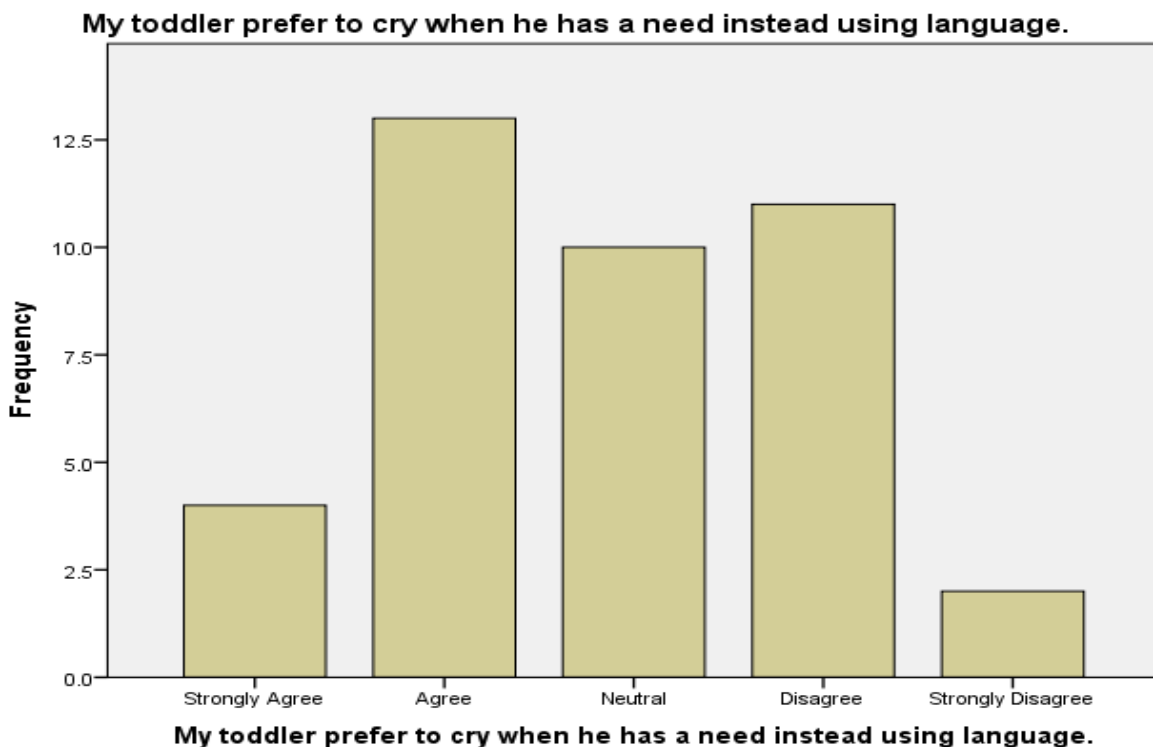


Fig 4.4: My toddler prefers to cry when he has a need instead using language

Table 4.5: *My toddler does not use words to express his/her needs*

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Strongly Agree	7	17.5	17.5	17.5
Agree	26	65.0	65.0	82.5
Disagree	4	10.0	10.0	92.5
Strongly Disagree	3	7.5	7.5	100.0
Total	40	100.0	100.0	

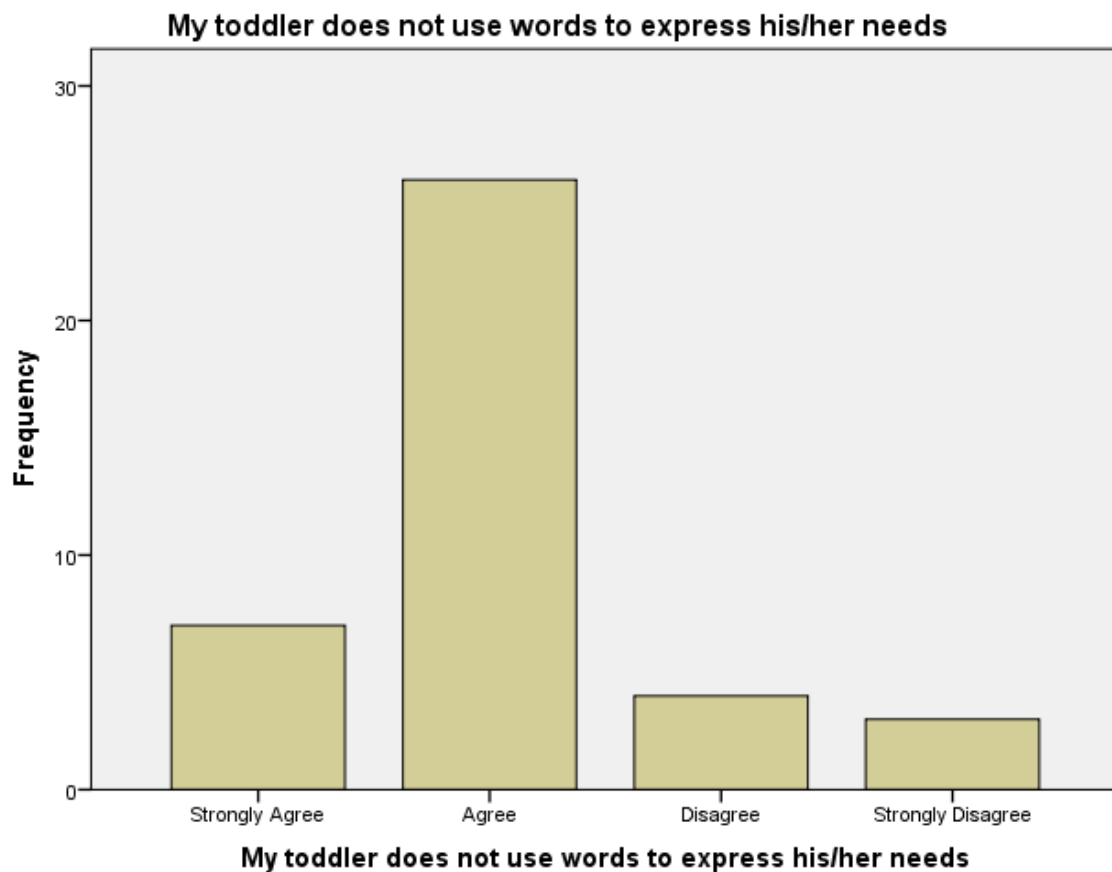


Table 4.6: *My toddler only uses one word to point or ask something*

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Agree	17	42.5	42.5	42.5
	Agree	16	40.0	40.0	82.5
	Neutral	5	12.5	12.5	95.0
	Disagree	1	2.5	2.5	97.5
	Strongly Disagree	1	2.5	2.5	100.0
	Total	40	100.0	100.0	

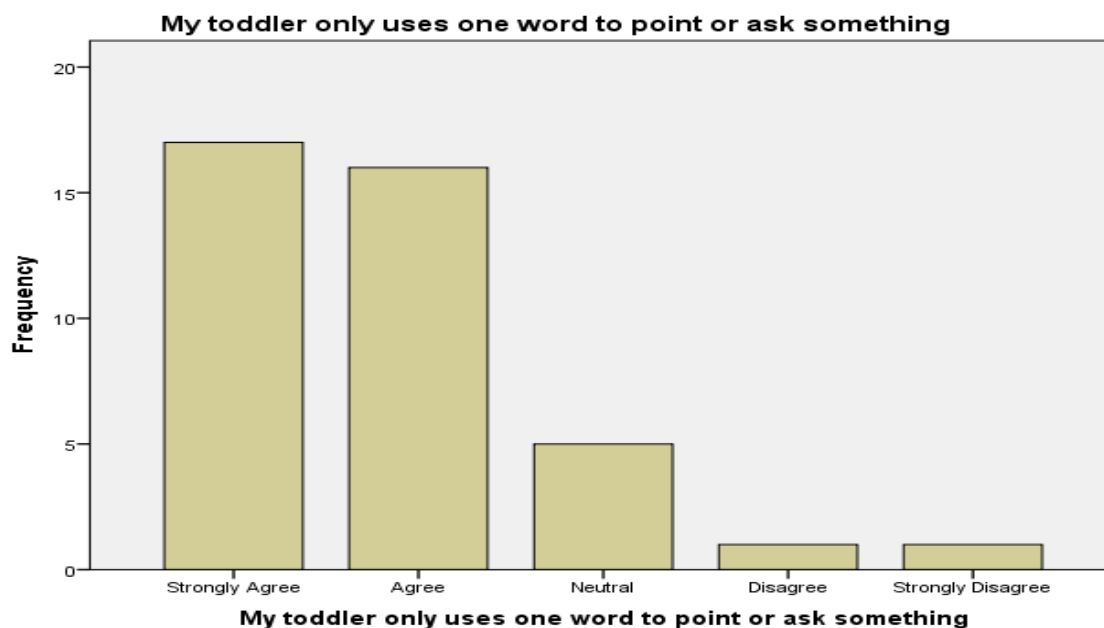


Figure 4.6: *My toddler only uses one word to point or ask something*

In line with the early phases of language development, 82.5% of toddlers ask with just one word, according to a study. Some babies have sophisticated verbal skills, as evidenced by the small percentage (5.0%) that disagrees. Language is rarely used; instead, a lot of individuals cry or gesture. Although there are opportunities to enhance language

exchange, parental and grandparental involvement appears to be uneven. According to the study, even when other children are meeting developmental milestones, a sizable portion exhibit language development delays or lack the drive to speak. Additionally, the study considers developmental issues, screen time, environmental influences, and speech improvement.

Table: 4.7 *My toddler's screen time is more than 8 hours a day*

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Agree	4	10.0	10.0	10.0
	Agree	9	22.5	22.5	32.5
	Disagree	17	42.5	42.5	75.0
	Strongly Disagree	10	25.0	25.0	100.0
	Total	40	100.0	100.0	

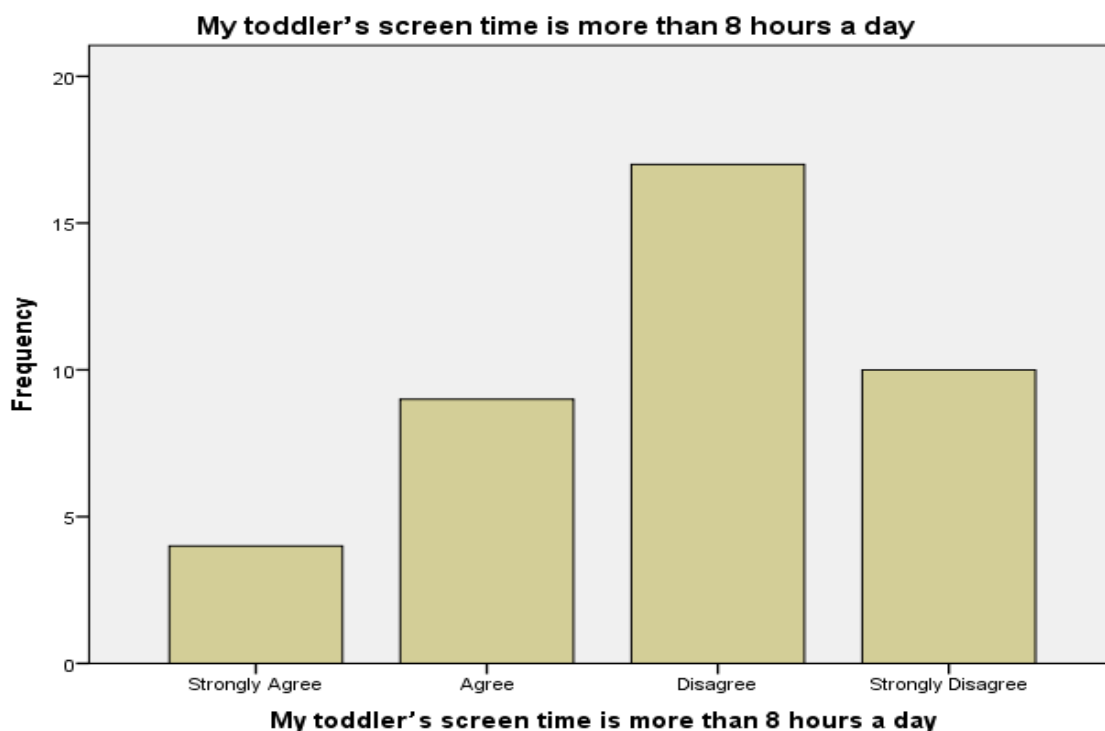


Table:4.8 My toddler mostly uses phone at night

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Strongly Agree	12	30.0	30.0	30.0
Agree	15	37.5	37.5	67.5
Disagree	7	17.5	17.5	85.0
Strongly Disagree	6	15.0	15.0	100.0
Total	40	100.0	100.0	

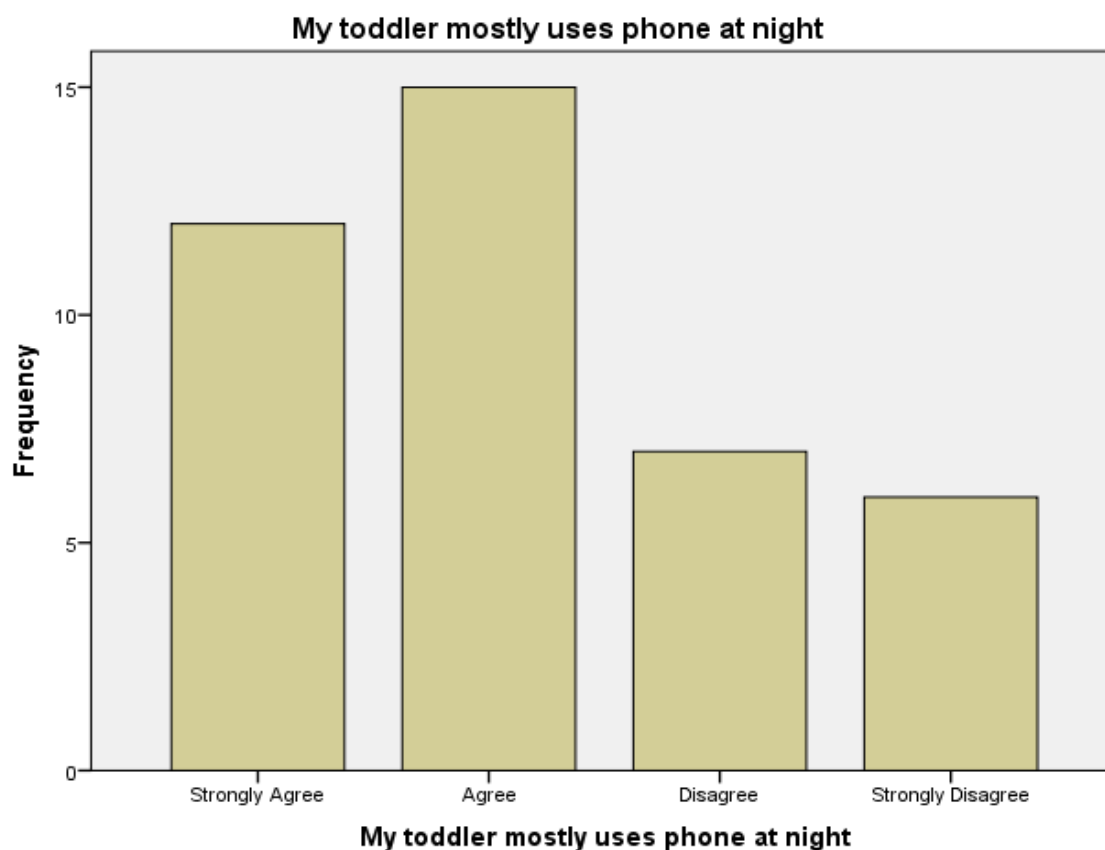


Table:4.9 *My toddler irritates when I don't give mobile to him/her*

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Strongly Agree	18	45.0	45.0	45.0
Agree	13	32.5	32.5	77.5
Neutral	2	5.0	5.0	82.5
Disagree	2	5.0	5.0	87.5
Strongly Disagree	5	12.5	12.5	100.0
Total	40	100.0	100.0	

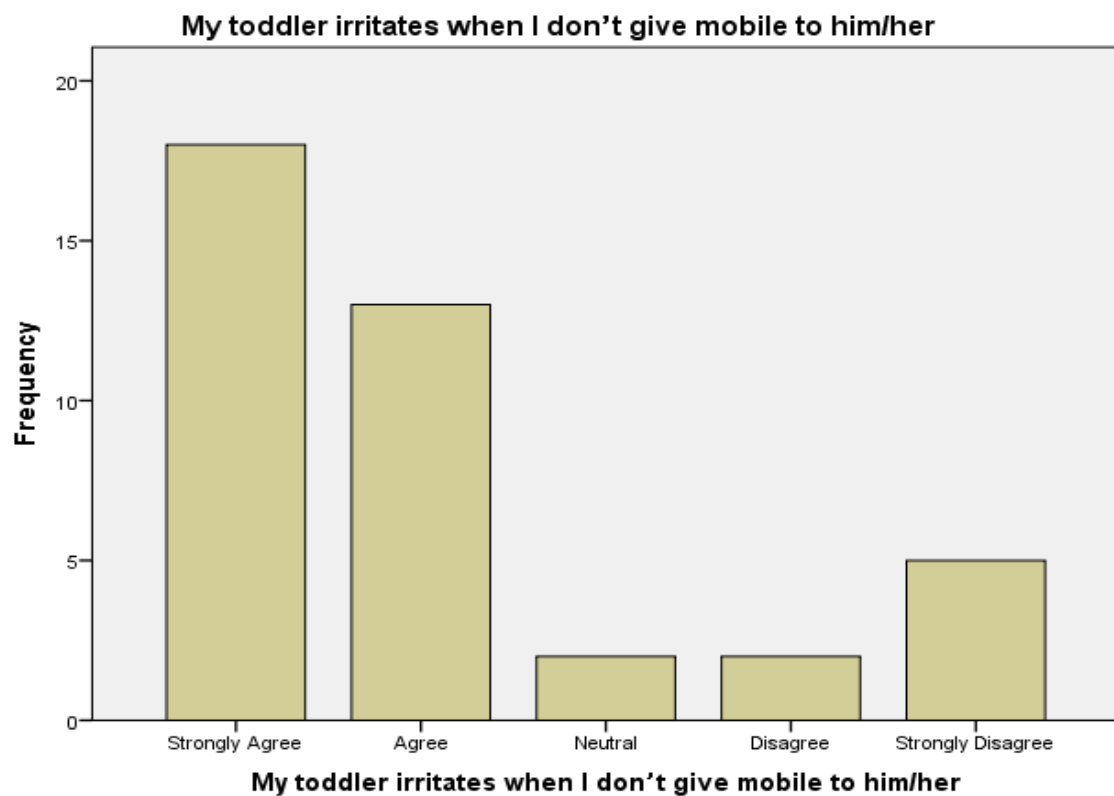


Table 4.10: *My toddler prefers watching mobile than any other activity or going outside to play*

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Strongly Agree	14	35.0	35.0	35.0
Agree	8	20.0	20.0	55.0
Neutral	1	2.5	2.5	57.5
Disagree	6	15.0	15.0	72.5
Strongly Disagree	11	27.5	27.5	100.0
Total	40	100.0	100.0	

My toddler prefers watching mobile than any other activity or going outside to play

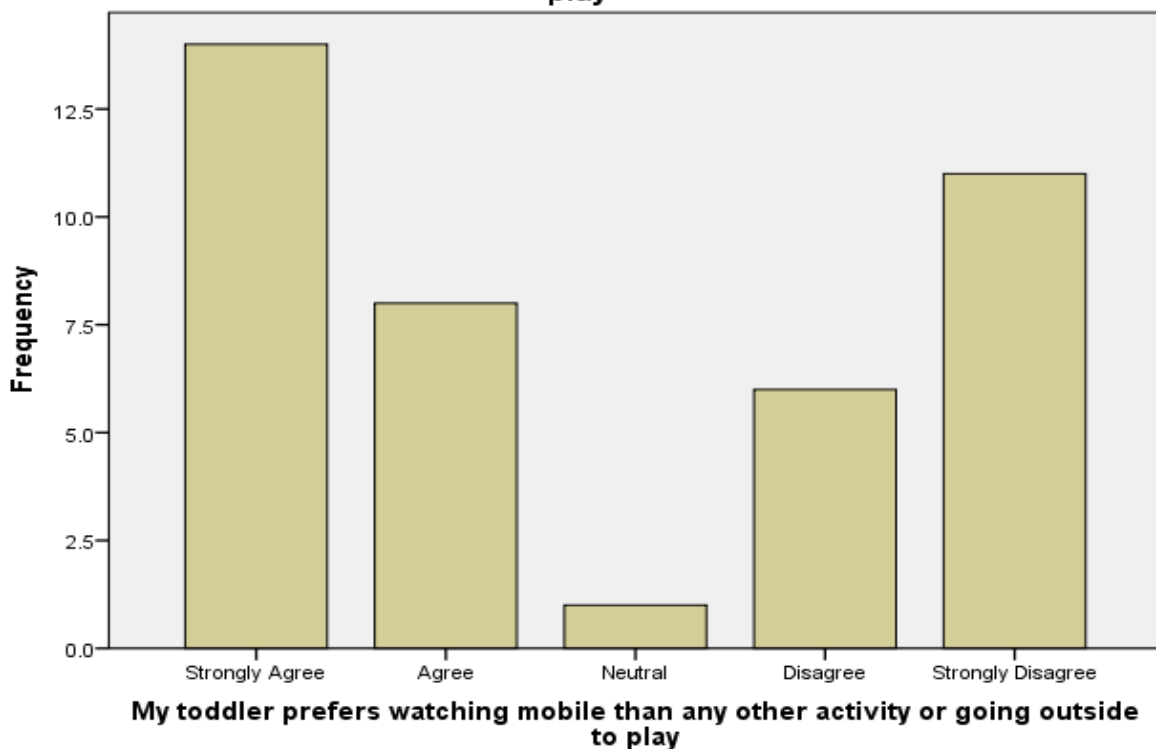
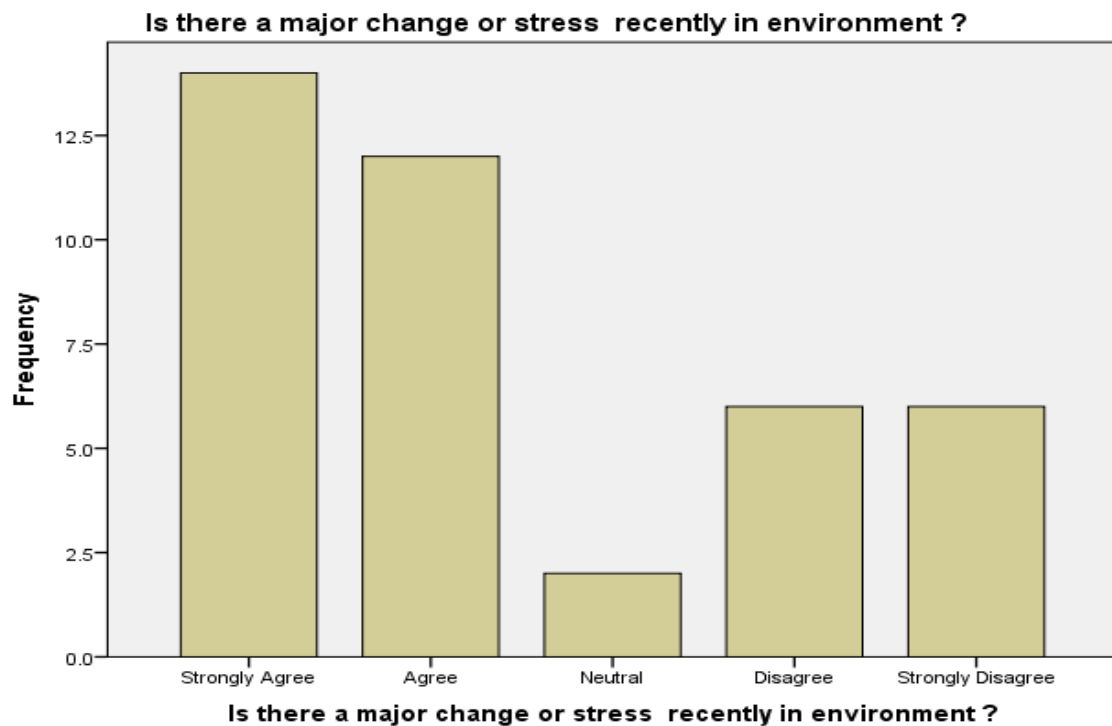


Table: 4.11 *Is there a major change or stress recently in environment ?*

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Strongly Agree	14	35.0	35.0	35.0
Agree	12	30.0	30.0	65.0
Neutral	2	5.0	5.0	70.0
Disagree	6	15.0	15.0	85.0
Strongly Disagree	6	15.0	15.0	100.0
Total	40	100.0	100.0	



6. Discussion:

Parents that actively engage with their newborns by reading to them, talking to them, and responding to their attempts at communication provide vital language input. Richer interactions, whether through frequent verbal exchanges, item identification, or questioning, provide toddlers more opportunities to understand grammar and increase their vocabulary. Parents who monitor their children's speaking efforts not only help them acquire the language more quickly but they also assist them to develop their communication skills.

The emotional environment in which a child is growing up has a big impact on language development as well. Language acquisition and social and cognitive development happens only in a stable and sound emotional surroundings. Children are more inclined to investigate their environment and engage with their caregivers when the feeling of safety and when someone is emotionally invested in them, which increases their language learning abilities. On the other hand, children who are get to suffer with higher levels of stress, worry, or abuse may take longer to acquire speech. A youngster who experiences emotional uncertainty may be less inclined to engage with others and communicate verbally.

A child's temperament, attitude, and emotional bond with their primary caregivers can all have an impact on language development. For example, children who are more fearful or withdrawn might be less likely to speak, which could impede down the development of their language skills.

Through careful research and real data, the study has shown the expected outcomes, proving the accuracy and applicability of the recommended approach. A toddler's early language acquisition is significantly impacted by both the emotional environment and parental connection. Positive, responsive interactions in a secure, caring environment foster language development, but negative emotional experiences or a lack of engagement can postpone or obstruct language skills. Therefore, a nurturing, communicative, and emotionally safe setting is vital for kids to acquire language in a healthy manner.

Studies have shown that excessive use of these gadgets, particularly when children are young, might cause delays in speech development. Gadgets usage can significantly lessen opportunities for active use of language, which is crucial for speech growth, particularly when children are passive content consumers, such as those who play games

or watch movies. The extent of the influence changes depending on a many elements, which includes the kind of gadget used, the age of a child, and the social setting in which the gadgets are used. Devices occasionally only transmit information in one direction, as contrast to face-to-face encounters where parents or nannies communicate a lot. For example, toddlers who spend more time on TV or are into passive content might not have the time to learn new vocabulary or identify new objects or answer the questions all of which are necessary to aid in speech development. This lack of involvement in speaking could stop the development of language understanding and stop vocabulary growth. The Information quality is another crucial element, according to research. Studies reveal that A child's developing brain may be overloaded by passive exposure to non-interactive media, especially fast-paced or overstimulating content, and stops language learning, despite the fact that educational programs and apps can only help you helpful when they are utilized rightly.

A key element of language development is social communication, which includes responding to nonverbal clues like facial emotions and taking turns in conversations. Children who use electronics more often than when they interact with people are less likely to form deep social bonds, which can cause delays in the development of their Language skills, both expressive and receptive. Additionally, some research shows that a lot of usage of technology may cause a less out door and physical activities, two activities that are essential for the growth of language and cognition. Through outdoor games, imaginative games , and physical activity and exploration of nature , children can improve their verbal communication, motor skills, and problem-solving skills. The kids will lose out on these significant language growth experiences if gadgets will take the place of these activities. Additionally, the studies shows that every child has different effect of gadget use but no matter what it is always the worse. Specially some children may be more resilient to the negative effects of screen usage if they have meaningful verbal relationships in other aspects of their daily lives. However, kids whose parents don't spend much time with them or whose children spend most of their time on screens may be more likely to experience speech delays.

7. Results:

The results of this study have shown that one of the primary causes of baby speech delay is excessive technology use, which diminishes meaningful social interactions. Children's language development is seriously hampered by the lack of communication opportunities brought on by parents' absence. Underlying neurological abnormalities have

also been identified as contributing causes to the difficulties children have in learning language.

8. Conclusion:

The results of the study show how varied and intricate first language speech delays in children can be. Since meaningful human interaction is essential for language learning, it is clear that excessive screen time impedes language development. Toddlers who spend too much time on screens interact with their caretakers and other people less verbally, which slows down the development of their expressive and receptive language abilities. In addition to contextual factors like screen time, the study highlights the negative effects of insufficient exposure to language.

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