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Semester: Autumn 2026

ALLAMA IQBAL OPEN UNIVERSITY, ISLAMABAD

Course: Language Learning in Early Childhood (1629) • Level: PGD – ECE

Semester: Autumn 2026

Assignment No. 1 (Units 1–4)

Total Marks: 100 • Pass Marks: 50

SOLVED ASSIGNMENT GUIDE

(For Study & Reference)

Note: This guide is prepared for study and reference purposes. Students are advised to read the relevant units of the course book, understand the concepts, and then write the assignment in their own words.

Question 1: Importance of Language Arts in the ECE Curriculum (20 Marks)

Why is language art considered as very important component of early childhood education curriculum?

Introduction

Language arts is the part of the curriculum that is concerned with listening, speaking, reading and writing, together with the literature, stories, rhymes, drama and conversation through which young children learn to use language. In early childhood education (ECE) it is not treated as one subject among many, taught in a single period of the day. It is considered the most important component of the whole curriculum, because in the years from birth to about eight

the child is not only learning a language; she is learning almost everything else through language. A child understands the world by naming it, remembers it by talking about it, makes friends by speaking to them and will later read, write, calculate and study science by means of words first learnt in these early years. This answer explains why language arts occupies this central place: it is the foundation of all later learning, the main tool of thinking and communication, a support for social and emotional development, the bridge between home and school, and the key to equality of opportunity for every child, including children in Pakistan who arrive at school speaking a home language different from the language of the classroom.

Language Is the Foundation of All Other Learning

Every other area of the ECE curriculum is reached through language. Mathematics begins in words such as big and small, more and less, first and last, before it begins in numbers. Science begins when a child asks why the moon follows the car, names the parts of a plant, or describes what happened to ice left in the sun. Social learning begins in the words with which children greet, request, apologise and share. If a child's language is weak, therefore, her access to every other subject is weak, however bright she may be. Research on early literacy consistently shows that the size of a child's vocabulary and her oral language skill at the age of five are among the strongest predictors of her reading success and school achievement several years later. A language-rich ECE curriculum is thus an investment in the whole of the child's schooling, not merely in her English, Urdu or mother-tongue lesson.

The reverse is also true, and it explains the urgency of the claim. Difficulties that are not noticed in the early years rarely disappear; they grow. A child who enters Grade 1 unable to follow a

story, retell an event in sequence or express a need in a full sentence will struggle to read the textbook, to understand word problems in mathematics and to write answers in any subject. Teachers call this the widening gap between children who were talked and read to and children who were not. Because ECE is the first and cheapest point at which this gap can be closed, curriculum makers give language arts the largest share of time, material and teacher attention in the early years programme.

Language as the Tool of Thought

Language is not only a means of communicating thoughts that are already formed; it is the means by which thought itself is formed. Vygotsky showed that young children think aloud in what he called private speech: a four-year-old building a tower talks herself through the task, saying that the big block must go at the bottom or the tower will fall. Gradually this spoken guidance becomes silent inner speech, the voice with which every adult plans, reasons, remembers and judges. A curriculum that gives children rich occasions to talk, to be questioned, to explain and to argue is therefore literally building the child's mind. Piaget's account of the pre-operational child points in the same direction: as the child's symbols, including words, multiply, she becomes able to hold absent things in mind, to pretend, to draw, to count and eventually to reason about things she cannot see.

Language arts activities are the natural workshop of this mental growth. Storytelling teaches sequence and cause: first the wolf came, then the pigs hid, because of that the house stood. Rhymes and songs teach pattern, memory and the sounds inside words. Discussion after a picture book teaches a child to give reasons, to listen to a different view and to change her

mind, which are the beginnings of critical thinking. Show-and-tell, circle time and dramatic play all oblige the child to organise experience into language, and organised experience is what we mean by understanding. No other component of the curriculum exercises so many thinking processes in so natural a way.

Communication, Social and Emotional Development

A young child is a social being whose deepest needs, to be understood, accepted and included, are met mainly through language. The child who can say that she is hurt, that she wants a turn, or that she is sorry, does not need to push, snatch or cry to be heard. Language arts in ECE therefore supports behaviour and emotional health as much as it supports literacy. Through stories, children meet feelings they cannot yet name in themselves: jealousy of a new baby, fear of the dark, pride in helping. Naming a feeling is the first step towards managing it, and the vocabulary of emotion is learnt largely from stories, poems and the teacher's talk about characters and events.

Language is also the child's entry ticket into the group. Play, which is the main business of early childhood, is negotiated in words: who will be the shopkeeper, what the rules are, how the story of the game will go. Children with stronger language are invited into play more often, lead more often and learn more from play, while children with weak language are left at the edge of the group and lose both friends and learning. A deliberate language arts programme, with pair talk, group discussion, role play and cooperative games, gives every child the words and the confidence to join in, and teaches the courtesies of conversation: listening, waiting for a turn, looking at the speaker and disagreeing politely.

The Bridge Between Home, Culture and School

Children do not come to the ECE centre as blank pages. Each child brings a home language, family stories, songs, proverbs, prayers and ways of speaking that are part of her identity. A good language arts curriculum honours and uses this wealth. When a teacher invites children to sing a rhyme their grandmother taught them, or to ask the class the word for rain in the language spoken at home, the child learns that school values what she brings, and her confidence as a learner rises. In a multilingual country such as Pakistan this matters greatly: many children speak Punjabi, Sindhi, Pashto, Balochi, Saraiki or another language at home and meet Urdu, and later English, at school. If the early curriculum builds a strong oral base in the language the child knows, and then bridges carefully into the school languages, the child adds languages without losing the first. If it does not, the child may end up weak in all of them.

Language arts is also the carrier of culture in the curriculum. Stories, folk tales, poetry and songs transmit the values, humour, history and moral imagination of a community to its youngest members. Through them children learn who they are, what their people admire and how the world is understood around them. A curriculum without a strong language arts core would have facts but no stories, activities but no meaning, and would fail in one of education's oldest tasks, which is to hand on a culture while preparing children to improve it.

Language Arts and Equity

Children arrive at ECE with very unequal language experience. Some have been talked to, questioned and read to since infancy and may know thousands more words than a child whose home is quiet, whose parents work long hours, or where there are no books. School cannot

change the past, but a language-rich ECE programme is the most powerful means of levelling this starting line, because vocabulary, listening skill and familiarity with books can all be taught and practised deliberately. Shared reading, word walls, story sacks, talking partners and a print-rich classroom are, in effect, equalising devices: they give the language-poor child, free of charge and inside school hours, the experiences the language-rich child had at home.

- Listening and speaking are developed daily, not occasionally, through circle time, discussion, instructions, songs and play.
- Early reading grows from print awareness, picture books, shared and guided reading, and a classroom full of labels, charts and children's own names in print.
- Early writing grows from drawing, scribbling, mark making and invented spelling towards conventional letters, words and sentences.
- Literature, rhyme and drama give children the pleasure, rhythm and imagination that make them want to become readers and writers for life.

Conclusion

To conclude, language art is considered a very important, indeed the central, component of the early childhood education curriculum because language is at once the foundation on which every other subject rests, the tool with which the young mind thinks, the means by which the child joins society and manages her feelings, the bridge between home culture and school, and the fairest means of giving every child an equal start. A weakness in language in these years becomes a weakness everywhere later, while strength in language multiplies the value of everything else the school does. That is why wise ECE curricula do not confine language arts to

a textbook period; they weave listening, speaking, reading and writing through the whole day, and judge the quality of a centre very largely by the richness of the talk, stories and print that fill it.

Question 2: The Rapid Pace of Language Development in the ECE Years (20 Marks)

We usually see that ECE is the level where language is developed at a very fast pace. Illustrate this statement with examples.

Introduction

Anyone who watches a child between birth and the age of about eight cannot fail to be struck by the speed of what is happening to her language. A newborn can only cry. Within a year she says her first word; within two years she is joining words together; by three she is holding conversations and asking questions without pause; by five she commands most of the grammar of her mother tongue, knows several thousand words and can tell a story with a beginning, a middle and an end; and in the ECE and early primary years she adds reading and writing to speaking and listening. No later period of life shows language growth of this speed or completeness, and the learner achieves it without formal lessons, simply by living among speakers. This answer illustrates the statement with examples from vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, conversation and literacy, and briefly explains why the pace is so fast at this level.

The Explosion of Vocabulary

The clearest evidence of rapid growth is vocabulary. A typical child says a first recognisable word at about twelve months, perhaps mama, baba or ball. Progress at first looks slow, and by eighteen months she may use only twenty to fifty words. Then, at around eighteen months to two years, comes what researchers call the vocabulary spurt or naming explosion. The child discovers that everything has a name and demands names all day long, pointing and asking what that is, and may learn several new words every day. By two years a typical child uses two hundred or more words; by three, about a thousand; by five, well over two thousand words in speech, while understanding many more. A useful classroom example is the child who in September of the nursery class could only point at the water bottle and cry, and by spring is saying, in full, that her bottle has finished and she wants more water, please.

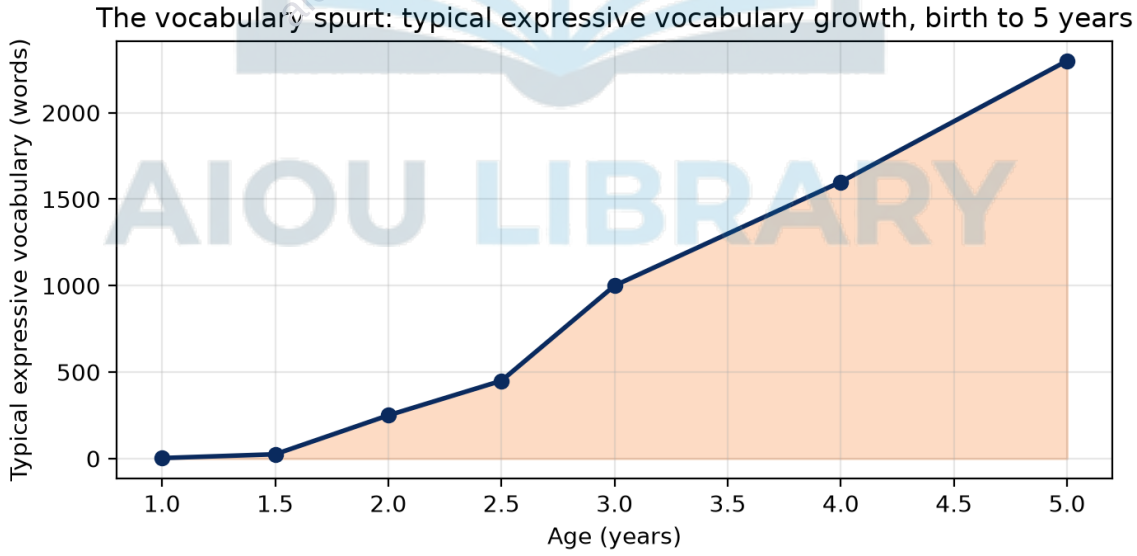

Figure 1: Typical expressive vocabulary growth from birth to five years. The curve stays almost flat in the first year and then rises steeply, which is the vocabulary spurt described in the text. The figures are typical milestone values, given to illustrate the pace of growth.

The examples of fast mapping make the speed vivid. A three-year-old who hears a new word once, in a clear context, often remembers and uses it correctly days later: shown a whisk in the play kitchen and told its name, she will ask for the whisk next week. Children at this age also invent words by rule when they do not know the real one, calling a man who drives a bus a bus-driver-man or saying that the baby is cry-ing loudly with a new adverb. Such inventions are mistakes, but they are the mistakes of a mind learning at high speed, extracting patterns from everything it hears.

Grammar Is Mastered at Remarkable Speed

At about eighteen to twenty-four months the child passes from single words to two-word combinations, the telegraphic stage: more juice, daddy go, mama shoe. These tiny sentences already contain word order, and the order is not random; children say drink water, not water drink. Within months the combinations lengthen. The three-year-old produces sentences such as I want to go to the park with Ali, asks questions, uses negatives, and is beginning to use plurals, past tenses and joining words like and and because. The famous over-regularisation errors show the system at work: a child who once said went correctly by imitation begins to say goed and comed, because she has now discovered the rule for past tense and applies it everywhere. By five, most children use questions, negatives, passive forms in simple cases, reported speech in play (she said that...), and the polite forms of their language, a grammatical achievement that adult foreign-language learners take many years of study to approach and rarely complete so perfectly.

Conversation develops just as quickly. The two-year-old's talk is largely about the here and now and often runs parallel to a companion rather than with her. The four-year-old, by contrast, can wait for a turn, answer the question actually asked, add new information, repair a misunderstanding by repeating in other words, and adjust her speech to the listener, speaking more simply to a baby and more formally to the teacher. In the ECE classroom one can observe this in a single term: a child who at admission answered every question with a nod is, a few months later, explaining to the whole circle why her plant died, in sequence, answering questions from classmates and using words such as because and so.

Pronunciation, Listening and the Sounds of Language

The sound system too is acquired at speed. Babies babble the sounds of all languages; by the end of the first year their babbling already leans towards the sounds of the language around them. Between two and five years children master sound after sound of their mother tongue, usually in a predictable order, until their speech is intelligible to strangers, though a few difficult sounds may still be simplified, such as saying tat for cat or wabbit for rabbit. At the same time listening sharpens: the three-year-old who could follow only a one-step instruction (bring your shoes) soon manages two and three steps (put the book on the shelf, wash your hands and sit on the mat), remembers songs and rhymes after a few hearings, and notices when a familiar story is read with a word changed, protesting loudly. This sensitivity to sound, rhyme and rhythm in the ECE years is the seed of phonics and reading later.

Emergent Reading and Writing Appear in the Same Short Period

Perhaps most remarkably, in these same few years the child begins the second, written half of language. The toddler who scribbled discovers that marks can carry a message and announces that her scribble says her name. The four-year-old recognises the sign of a favourite shop, finds her own name card among twenty others, holds a book the right way up, turns pages one by one and pretends to read a well-loved story from memory, turning the pages at the right places. In kindergarten and the first school year, this emergent literacy becomes conventional: letters are named and sounded, words are decoded, and the child writes first her name, then labels, lists, captions and little stories with invented spelling that steadily approaches the standard. A process that took human civilisation thousands of years, the invention of writing, is retraced by each child in about four years, which underlines how exceptionally fast language development is at the ECE level.

Why Is the Pace So Fast at This Level?

Several reasons combine. First, the young brain is at its most plastic; the early years are widely described as a sensitive period for language, in which sound patterns and grammar are absorbed with an ease that is never quite repeated. Second, the young child's whole life is a language lesson: she spends her waking hours among speakers, hears language used for real purposes all day, and has an intense social need to understand and be understood. Third, adults instinctively teach: they speak to babies in a slower, higher, repetitive way, name things, expand the child's short utterances into full sentences and answer endless questions. Fourth, play drives language: pretending, building, dressing up and playing shop all demand talk,

negotiation and new vocabulary. Finally, in a good ECE setting these natural engines are deliberately strengthened by trained teachers, books, rhymes, conversation and print, which is why the development is so visible precisely at this level.

- Example of speed in one year: the same child may pass from ten words at eighteen months to several hundred words and two- and three-word sentences by thirty months.
- Example of speed in grammar: from mama go at two years to because mama has gone to the market and she will bring milk at four years.
- Example of speed in use: from crying to attract attention as an infant to narrating yesterday's visit, joking, bargaining and comforting a friend by the age of five.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the statement is fully borne out by observation. In the ECE years language grows faster than at any other time of life: vocabulary explodes from a handful of words to thousands, grammar is built from single words to complex sentences, pronunciation becomes clear, conversation becomes social and skilled, and reading and writing begin. The examples, from the vocabulary spurt and the goed-type errors to the child who pretends to read in nursery and writes her first story in Grade 1, all show a pace that later schooling never matches. The practical lesson for teachers is serious: these years are a window that does not stay open for ever, and an ECE programme must fill them with talk, stories, songs and print so that no part of this natural speed is wasted.

Question 3: Key Areas of Language Development During the ECE Years (20 Marks)

What are the key areas of language development during ECE years?

Introduction

Language development in the early childhood years is not one single skill growing in one single way. It is a cluster of related areas, each with its own course of growth, which support one another and together make up a competent language user. Teachers and curriculum writers usually describe these areas under two broad heads: oral language, which covers listening and speaking, and written language, which covers emergent reading and writing; and within oral language they distinguish the sound system, vocabulary, grammar, meaning and the social use of language. A child may be ahead in one area and behind in another, for example speaking in long sentences with poor pronunciation, or knowing many words but unable to use them politely with others. This answer describes the key areas one by one, with the signs by which a teacher can recognise growth in each during the ECE years.

Phonological Development: The Sound System

The first area is phonology, the system of sounds of the language. It includes the ability to hear and distinguish the sounds that make words different (cat from cap, ball from bell), to produce the sounds clearly, and later to play with sounds in rhyme, rhythm and syllables. In the ECE years children move from babbling and simplified words to speech that strangers can understand, and they develop phonological awareness: they clap the beats in their names,

enjoy rhymes, notice words that begin with the same sound and, towards the end of the period, can blend simple sounds into words. This area is foundational, because a child who cannot hear the difference between sounds will struggle to attach letters to them when reading begins. Teachers support it with rhymes, songs, sound games, tongue twisters and careful, clear speech of their own.

Semantic Development: Vocabulary and Meaning

The second area is semantics, the development of meaning and vocabulary. It has two sides: receptive vocabulary, the words a child understands, which is always larger, and expressive vocabulary, the words she can use. During the ECE years vocabulary grows from a few words to several thousand, and, just as importantly, the quality of word knowledge deepens. The toddler's word dog may mean only the family pet; the five-year-old's word covers many kinds of dogs, connects with words such as puppy, bark, kennel and vet, and sits inside categories such as animals, pets and living things. Children also learn colour, number, size, position and time words, question words, and the small connecting words (because, before, if) that make complex thought possible. Alongside vocabulary grows conceptual knowledge of the world, since every new experience, a visit, a story, an experiment, arrives carrying new words with it, and every new word makes a new distinction in the child's picture of the world.

Syntactic and Morphological Development: Grammar

The third area is syntax and morphology, usually together called grammar: the rules for ordering words into sentences and for building words with endings such as plurals, possessives and tenses. The ECE child moves from single words, through two-word combinations, to

sentences of increasing length and complexity: questions, negatives, compound sentences joined by and and but, and complex sentences using because, when and that. Morphological growth shows in the steady, sometimes over-regular, use of -s for plurals, -ed for past tense and comparative forms such as bigger. Grammar matters because it is the machinery that turns a stock of words into unlimited communication; with a finite set of words and rules the child can produce and understand sentences she has never heard before, which is the true mark of having learnt a language rather than a list of phrases.

Pragmatic Development: Using Language in Society

The fourth area is pragmatics, the social use of language: knowing what to say, to whom, when and how. A developed language user greets appropriately, requests politely, takes turns in conversation, stays on a topic, adjusts her speech to a younger child, a friend or a teacher, tells a story in an order a listener can follow, and understands that words can joke, promise, apologise and persuade as well as describe. Much pragmatic growth happens in the ECE years through play and classroom routines. Halliday's well-known account of children's language functions, language for getting things, for controlling others, for interaction, for expressing feelings, for learning, for imagining and for informing, is essentially a map of this area. Pragmatic delay is easy to miss because the child's sentences may be correct, yet she cannot join a game, hold a conversation or understand a joke; teachers must therefore observe language in real social use, not only in lessons.

Listening and Speaking: The Oral Language Skills

Standing across the areas above are the two oral skills. Listening develops from hearing sounds, through attending to a speaker, understanding instructions, stories and explanations of increasing length, to the beginnings of critical listening, noticing when something does not make sense. Speaking develops from sounds and words to narration, description, explanation and discussion, with growing fluency, audibility and confidence before a group. Oral language is the platform on which literacy is built: children read with understanding the language they can already speak and understand, and they write the language they can say. An ECE programme therefore treats talk as its main teaching instrument, surrounding children with good models of spoken language and daily reasons to listen and to speak at length.

Table 1: The key areas of language development in the ECE years, with observable signs of growth in each.

Area of development	What develops during ECE years	Simple signs a teacher can observe
Phonology (sounds)	Clearer pronunciation; hearing differences between sounds; rhyme and sound awareness	Child enjoys rhymes, claps syllables, speech understood by visitors
Semantics (meaning)	Vocabulary grows to several thousand words; categories and concepts deepen	Child names, describes, sorts and asks the meaning of new words
Grammar (syntax/morphology)	From single words to complex sentences; tenses, plurals, questions, negatives	Child tells events in order using because, when, first and then
Pragmatics (use)	Politeness, turn-taking, adjusting to listener, storytelling, functions of	Child joins play, negotiates roles, greets and requests

	language	appropriately
Listening	Longer attention; following multi-step instructions; understanding stories	Child retells a story and carries out a sequence of tasks correctly
Emergent reading	Print awareness, book handling, letter knowledge, decoding begins	Child finds her name, pretends to read, recognises letters and some words
Emergent writing	From scribble and drawing to letters, words and simple written messages	Child writes her name, labels pictures and 'writes' lists and stories

Emergent Reading and Writing: The Written Language Skills

The final key area is emergent literacy, the child's growing knowledge about print before and while conventional reading and writing begin. It includes concepts about print (that print carries the message, that in English print runs left to right and in Urdu right to left, that books have covers, pages and authors), alphabet knowledge, early phonics, recognition of environmental print such as shop signs and labels, and the understanding that one's own speech can be written down and read back. In writing, development runs from scribble, through letter-like forms and strings of letters, to invented spelling, in which the child writes words as they sound (KT for cat), and finally to conventional spelling and simple composition. These are not extras added after oral language is finished; they grow alongside it in the ECE years wherever children live among books, labels, writing materials and adults who read and write in front of them.

Conclusion

To conclude, the key areas of language development during the ECE years are the sound system (phonology), meaning and vocabulary (semantics), grammar (syntax and morphology), the social use of language (pragmatics), the oral skills of listening and speaking that carry all of these, and emergent reading and writing. The areas are distinct enough to be observed, planned for and assessed separately, a teacher can and should ask in which area a particular child needs support, yet they are so interdependent in real use that the wisest ECE practice develops them together through talk, story, song, play and print. A balanced language programme is simply one in which no area is neglected: sounds without meaning are empty, vocabulary without grammar cannot build sentences, grammar without pragmatics cannot make friends, and none of them is complete until the child also steps into the written world.

Question 4: Learning Sounds as a Step Towards Language Development (20 Marks)

Learning sounds is a very important step towards language development. Discuss.

Introduction

Every language is, before it is anything else, a system of sounds. A child meets language first not as words on a page or rules in a grammar, but as a stream of sound flowing around her from the moment of birth, and indeed from before birth, since the unborn baby already hears the rhythm and melody of the mother's voice. Her first task as a language learner is therefore a sound task: to pick out, from all the noises of the world, the particular sounds of her language,

to learn which differences between sounds matter, to produce those sounds with her own mouth, and to join them into words. This answer discusses why learning sounds is such an important step towards language development: it is the child's entry into the language, it makes words and their meanings possible, it underlies clear speaking and being understood, it prepares the ground for reading and spelling, and it supports memory, listening and social confidence. It also notes how teachers and parents can support this learning in the early years.

Sounds Are the Child's First Entry into Language

The newborn hears a continuous stream of speech in which there are no spaces between words as there are on a printed page. Before she can learn any word she must solve the sound problem of breaking that stream into units and recognising the same word again when different speakers say it at different speeds and pitches. Remarkably, young infants are specialists in exactly this. In the first months of life babies can distinguish the sound contrasts of every language in the world; during the second half of the first year this universal ability narrows, as the brain keeps and sharpens the contrasts of the language it hears daily and lets the others fade. A baby growing up with Urdu becomes expert at its particular sounds, including the aspirated and retroflex consonants that an English-speaking adult finds difficult, while a baby in an English-speaking home becomes expert in a different set.

This early sound learning is therefore a genuine step, logically and in time, before vocabulary and grammar. Cooing, babbling and the first playful repetitions of syllables such as ba-ba and ma-ma are the child's practice of the sound material of her language, and adults instinctively answer babbling as if it were conversation, rewarding the practice. When the first true word

appears at about twelve months, it is the visible tip of a year of sound learning beneath it. A child whose hearing is impaired, or who suffers repeated ear infections in these months, shows by contrast how much depends on this step: her words are delayed and unclear precisely because the sound foundation was interrupted, which is why early hearing checks matter so much.

Sounds Make Words and Meanings Possible

Words are built of sounds, and small sound differences carry whole differences of meaning. In English, pat, bat, pit and pot are four different words because one sound differs; in Urdu, a single changed consonant or a difference in aspiration likewise changes the word entirely. The child who is learning sounds is therefore learning the tool with which meanings are made and distinguished. When she can hear that ball and bell are not the same, she can hold two separate words in her vocabulary; when she can say them distinctly, others can understand which one she wants. Phonological development and vocabulary development advance together: each new contrast mastered unlocks a family of words that were previously confused or unusable.

Sound learning also gives the child the ability to hold words in memory. Research on how children learn words shows that a short-term sound memory, sometimes called the phonological loop, is heavily used when a new word is first taken in: the toddler repeats a new word aloud or under her breath, rehearsing its sounds until its meaning can be attached and the whole word stored. Children with stronger sound memory learn vocabulary faster, and the familiar ECE experience of a child repeating a new word from a story several times with delight

is this mechanism at work. Rhythm and rhyme strengthen the same system, which is one reason nursery rhymes, far from being mere entertainment, are among the most serious language tools of the early years: they train the ear to notice, hold and play with the sounds of which words are made.

Sound Learning Leads to Clear Speech and Being Understood

A language exists to communicate, and communication fails if speech cannot be understood. Children master the sounds of their language in a fairly predictable order during the ECE years, the early, easy sounds first and the difficult clusters and fricatives later, passing through normal simplifications such as stopping, where a child says tun for sun, or fronting, where tat replaces cat. As each sound is mastered, the child's intelligibility rises: family members understand the two-year-old, familiar adults the three-year-old, and by about four to five years strangers should understand nearly everything the child says. Each advance brings social rewards that themselves drive further language growth, because the understandable child is talked to more, invited into more play and corrected and expanded more helpfully than the child nobody can follow.

For the teacher, this area carries a responsibility of judgement. Most sound errors in the ECE years are developmental and disappear with maturity, hearing good models and practice in songs, rhymes and conversation; they should be met by calm recasting, in which the adult simply says the word correctly in reply, rather than by drilling or shaming, which makes a child afraid to speak at all. A minority of children, however, show persistent, unusual or worsening sound difficulties, or speech that remains largely unintelligible after the age of four, and these

children need referral to a speech and language specialist. The ECE teacher who understands sound development is the person best placed to tell the difference, because she hears the child daily and knows the normal pattern of progress.

Table 1: The main stages of learning the sounds of language, from birth to the early school years.

Stage of sound learning	Approximate age	What the child does
Listening and tuning in	Birth to 6 months	Turns to voices, is soothed by the mother's voice, distinguishes the sounds of her own language from others
Cooing and babbling	6 to 12 months	Plays with sounds, babbles syllable chains such as ba-ba, da-da, varying pitch like conversation
First words and simplifications	1 to 3 years	Uses real words but simplifies difficult sounds; speech clearest to family members
Mastering most sounds	3 to 5 years	Most consonants and vowels produced correctly; speech understood by strangers; enjoys rhyme and sound play
Phonological awareness	4 to 6 years	Claps syllables, spots rhyming words, hears first and last sounds in words, ready to link sounds with letters

Sounds Prepare the Ground for Reading and Spelling

The importance of sound learning is nowhere clearer than when reading begins. Reading an alphabetic script such as English, or the Perso-Arabic script of Urdu in its sound-based early teaching, requires the child to connect written symbols with sounds she already knows. A child who arrives at reading able to hear that cat is made of three sounds, that sun and sand start alike and that pin and pen differ in the middle has the essential insight ready: words are built of sounds, and letters stand for them. This cluster of abilities, called phonemic or phonological awareness, is one of the strongest known predictors of early reading success, and weakness in it is at the heart of most early reading difficulty. Conversely, children can be taught and practised in sound awareness through games long before formal reading, which is a major reason ECE gives so much time to rhymes, alliteration, sound lotto, I-spy games with initial sounds, clapping syllables and songs.

Spelling depends on the same foundation from the other direction: to spell, the child must break the spoken word into its sounds and choose letters for each, exactly the skill displayed in invented spelling when a five-year-old writes ELEFNT. Even fluent adult reading continues to use sound silently, sounding out new names and unfamiliar technical words. Sound learning is therefore not a baby stage that literacy leaves behind; it is the permanent bridge between spoken and written language, built in the early years and used for life.

How Adults Can Support Children's Learning of Sounds

- Talk and sing to babies and toddlers constantly, using rhymes, songs, lullabies and word play in the home language every day.

- Read aloud daily, choosing books with rhyme, rhythm, repetition and sound play, and let children join in with the repeated sounds and lines.
- Play sound games: clapping names into syllables, finding things that begin with a given sound, odd-one-out games with rhyming words, and listening walks to identify environmental sounds.
- Speak clearly and slightly slowly to young children, face them when speaking, and recast their sound errors by repeating the word correctly rather than demanding repetition.
- Protect hearing: treat ear infections promptly, keep classroom noise reasonable, seat children with hearing difficulty near the teacher, and arrange hearing screening where possible.
- Give time and encouragement: never mock a child's pronunciation, and praise attempts, since confidence to speak is itself a condition of further sound practice.

These practices cost little and require no special equipment, yet they strike at the foundation of the whole language edifice. A home or classroom rich in rhyme, song, talk and story is, whether the adults know the term or not, a place where phonological development is being professionally well supported.

Conclusion

In conclusion, learning sounds is a very important step towards language development because it is chronologically first, logically foundational and permanently useful. The infant must master the sound stream before words can be found in it; words themselves are made of sounds and distinguished by sounds; clear speech, and with it social acceptance and further learning,

depends on producing sounds well; sound memory carries new vocabulary; and reading and spelling are built directly on the awareness that words consist of sounds. The teacher or parent who takes sound learning seriously, through talk, rhyme, song, story and listening games, is not filling time pleasantly but laying the one foundation on which vocabulary, grammar, literacy and confident communication all later stand.

Question 5: Stages of Language Development from Birth to Five Years (20 Marks)

Briefly explain the stages of language development from birth to the age of 5 years.

Introduction

Language development from birth to five years follows a sequence of stages that is remarkably similar for children all over the world, whatever language they are learning. The order of the stages is dependable, though the exact age at which an individual child reaches each one varies, and a healthy child may be a few months ahead of or behind the typical ages without cause for worry. Knowing the stages matters to parents and ECE teachers for two reasons: it tells them what to expect and what experiences to provide next, and it alerts them when a child's progress departs so far from the pattern that advice or help should be sought. This answer describes the stages briefly, from the pre-linguistic period of crying, cooing and babbling, through first words, word combinations and telegraphic speech, to the fluent, grammatically rich language of the five-year-old, summarising them in a table.

Stage 1: The Pre-Linguistic Stage (Birth to About 12 Months)

In the first year the baby has no words, yet a great deal of language learning is happening, which is why this is called the pre-linguistic stage. From birth the baby communicates by crying, and caregivers quickly learn to distinguish the cry of hunger from the cry of pain or discomfort. At about six to eight weeks cooing begins: soft vowel like sounds made when the baby is content, often in response to a smiling face. From about six months comes babbling, the playful repetition of consonant-vowel syllables such as ba-ba and ma-ma, which gradually takes on the intonation patterns of the language around the baby, sounding more and more like conversation without words; this tuneful stage in the later months is sometimes called jargon. Meanwhile the receptive side races ahead: the baby turns to her name, understands no and bye-bye, enjoys peek-a-boo and rhymes, and by the end of the year understands many everyday words and simple instructions, long before she can say them. Understanding, as always, comes before speaking.

Stage 2: The One-Word or Holophrastic Stage (About 12 to 18 Months)

At around the first birthday the first true word appears: a sound used consistently for the same thing, such as mama, baba, ball or, in many Pakistani homes, pani for water. In this holophrastic stage a single word does the work of a whole sentence. The toddler who says milk while pointing at the kitchen may mean I want milk, there is the milk or give me more milk, and adults interpret the word with the help of gesture, situation and tone. Vocabulary grows slowly at first, perhaps a word or two a week, and the words are mostly names of people, food, animals, body parts and everyday objects, together with social words such as hello, bye and no.

Pronunciation is still very simplified, and much meaning is carried by pointing, reaching and other gestures, which are an honourable part of early communication and not a substitute for language that should be discouraged.

Stage 3: The Two-Word and Telegraphic Stage (About 18 Months to 2½ Years)

Towards the middle of the second year, and often alongside the vocabulary spurt in which words are suddenly learnt at several a day, the child begins to join two words: more juice, daddy go, mama shoe, baby cry. These combinations are not random; they express real relations such as agent and action, possession, location and recurrence, and their word order already respects the grammar of the language being learnt. As the third year proceeds, utterances lengthen to three and four words but still leave out the small grammatical words and endings, like a telegram: me go park, daddy car big, want more roti. This telegraphic speech is an economical system: the child keeps the words carrying the most meaning and drops the rest, while her understanding of full sentences, stories and instructions continues to grow well beyond what she can produce.

Stage 4: Towards Fluency (About 2½ to 4 Years)

Between two-and-a-half and four years the child's language is transformed in length, complexity and purpose. Sentences grow to five, six and more words; questions multiply (the famous why stage belongs here), negatives and plurals appear, and the past tense is used, at first with over-regularised errors such as goed and breaked which show that rules, not just imitations, are being learnt. Vocabulary expands to around a thousand words and beyond, including colour, size, number and position words. The child talks during play, narrates what

she is doing, retells simple events, sings rhymes and songs, and begins true conversation, though staying on one topic and taking the listener's needs into account are still developing. Speech becomes understandable to people outside the family, although a few sounds may still be immature. Imaginative play and language feed each other strongly in this stage: the child who can say let us pretend this box is a bus has opened a whole new world of shared make-believe.

Stage 5: The Fluent Preschool Child (About 4 to 5 Years)

By four to five years the basic structure of the mother tongue is essentially in place. The typical five-year-old uses sentences of adult-like length and complexity, including compound and complex sentences with and, but, because and when; uses questions, negatives and most tenses correctly; knows well over two thousand words in speech and understands many more; tells stories and recounts events in sequence with a beginning, middle and end; jokes, teases, bargains, explains rules of games and adjusts her talk to different listeners. She asks about word meanings, enjoys rhymes and sound play, recognises that words are made of sounds, knows many letter names and may read and write a little, including her own name. Language is now ready to become the main instrument of formal schooling: she can learn from being told, from discussion and, increasingly, from books. A summary of all five stages is given in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Summary of the stages of language development from birth to five years. Ages are typical; individual children vary by a few months.

Stage	Typical age	Main features	Examples
Pre-linguistic	Birth – 12 months	Crying, cooing,	Turns to name; babbles

		babbling, jargon; understands far more than she says	ba-ba; understands 'no' and simple words
One-word (holophrastic)	12 – 18 months	Single words stand for whole sentences; heavy use of gesture	'Milk!' meaning 'I want milk'; 'pani' with pointing
Two-word / telegraphic	18 months – 2½ years	Two-word combinations; then short sentences without small grammatical words	'Daddy go'; 'me go park'; 'want more roti'
Towards fluency	2½ – 4 years	Longer, complex sentences; questions, tenses, plurals (with rule errors); vocabulary c. 1,000 words	'Why is the moon following us?'; 'I goed to Nani's house'
Fluent preschool	4 – 5 years	Adult-like grammar; vocabulary 2,000+ words used; storytelling; sound and letter awareness	Tells a sequenced story; explains game rules; writes own name

Variations, and When to Be Concerned

It must be emphasised that the stages describe a typical pattern, not a timetable to be enforced. Girls on average are slightly ahead of boys in early language; children in talkative homes and those read to daily often advance faster; bilingual children may appear slower in each single language in the second year while their total vocabulary across both languages is

normal, and they catch up fully. What should concern adults is not a few months' difference but a clear departure from the sequence or a loss of skills: no babbling by about ten months, no single words by about eighteen months, no two-word combinations by about two-and-a-half years, speech that strangers cannot largely understand by four, or a child who stops using words she once had. In such cases hearing should be checked first, since unnoticed ear problems are a common cause, and a doctor or speech and language specialist consulted. Early help, given while the brain is most ready for language, is far more effective than help delayed.

Conclusion

To conclude, language development from birth to five years passes through clear stages: the pre-linguistic stage of crying, cooing and babbling; the one-word stage in which single words carry whole meanings; the two-word and telegraphic stage in which grammar begins; the stage of lengthening, questioning and rule-learning between two-and-a-half and four; and the fluent stage of the five-year-old, whose grammar is essentially complete and whose vocabulary runs into thousands of words. The journey from a cry to a told story in five short years is one of the most remarkable achievements of human childhood. Parents and teachers who know the stages can support each one with the right experiences at the right time, talk and response in the first year, naming and conversation in the second, stories, songs, play and print thereafter, and can also recognise early the few children who need additional help.