

When Moms Work: Exploring Speech and Social Development in Jakarta's Preschool Children

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Abstract: Maternal employment is increasingly common in urban areas, prompting inquiries into its effects on early childhood development. This study examines the connection between maternal employment and the development of speech, language, and social skills in preschool children in Jakarta, Indonesia. By conducting qualitative analyses of interviews and focus group discussions with working mothers, caregivers, and preschool teachers, the research offers detailed insights into how maternal employment influences children's developmental paths. The results highlight the significance of caregiving arrangements, parental engagement, and socio-cultural influences in shaping these outcomes. This study used a qualitative design with semi-structured interviews to explore the experiences of six working mothers in Jakarta, Indonesia, who have children aged 3 to 6 with speech delays. Participants were purposively sampled and recruited via Twitter. Data were analysed using Thematic Analysis to identify key patterns and themes. This study contributes to the growing body of literature on early childhood development by emphasizing the complex dynamics between maternal employment and child outcomes in a rapidly urbanizing context. It underscores the need for policy initiatives that support working mothers and promote access to quality childcare and early education resources. By highlighting the unique socio-cultural context of Jakarta, the research offers valuable implications for practitioners and policymakers aiming to enhance developmental support for preschool-aged children in similar urban settings.

Keywords: Maternal Employment, Early Childhood Development, Speech Development, Primary Education, Basic Literacy Skills, Education

1. Introduction

The global increase in maternal employment has prompted significant research on its effects on early childhood development^[1]. In Jakarta, a bustling and diverse metropolis, many mothers balance professional responsibilities alongside caregiving duties^[2]. Early childhood, particularly ages 2 to 6, is a critical period for developing speech, language, and social skills, which form the foundation for academic achievement, relationship-

building, and adaptive functioning^[3-5].

Maternal employment can influence child development in both positive and negative ways. Quality maternal interactions, sensitivity, and cognitively stimulating engagement enhance language acquisition, while early workforce entry, reduced mother-child interaction, or work-related stress may hinder verbal and social development^[1,6,7]. Socioeconomic status, parental

education, and family context further shape outcomes, affecting vocabulary growth, social competence, and prosocial behavior^[8-10]. Speech and language delays, affecting 3–20% of children worldwide, can result in social, behavioural, and academic challenges, highlighting the need for early intervention^[11-13].

Parental involvement during early childhood is crucial, as active engagement through nurturing relationships and interactive play supports language and social development^[14]. Conversely, limited interaction, reliance on caregivers, environmental constraints, or genetic predispositions can impede progress^[14-17]. Theoretical perspectives such as Attachment Theory, dual role theory^[18], and Becker's family economics framework^[19] highlight the complex interplay between maternal employment, child development, maternal well-being, and family functioning.

Despite its importance, research on how maternal employment affects preschoolers' speech, language, and social development is limited, particularly in Jakarta^[20]. Reduced interaction time, work-related stress, and limited access to resources may hinder child development, yet few studies explore how mothers cope or utilize support systems^[13].

This study aims to explore the experiences of working mothers in Jakarta, focusing on the challenges they face in supporting their children's speech, language, and social skills, and examining strategies and support systems they employ. The research addresses the following questions:

1. How does maternal employment affect the speech and language development of preschool-aged children in Jakarta?
2. What challenges do working mothers face in supporting their children's social skills development, and how do these challenges affect mother-child interactions?
3. What strategies do working mothers employ to facilitate their children's speech, language, and social skills development, and how do they cope with limited time and resources?

Noam Chomsky's theory^[21] of language acquisition posits that children are biologically predisposed to acquire language. Children form and refine hypotheses about linguistic rules, rather than learning solely through imitation, with parents playing a critical role in reinforcing language by repeating sounds and linking them to meaningful words^[22-23]. This framework guides understanding of how maternal interactions support early speech and language development.

This study contributes to early childhood research by highlighting the challenges working mothers face in addressing speech delays, emphasizing the importance of accessible resources and support systems. Findings aim to inform targeted interventions, early support programs, and policy decisions to enhance language and social

development in children under six, while providing a foundation for future research.

2. Methodology

This study employed a qualitative research approach, chosen for its effectiveness in capturing the nuanced experiences and perspectives of participants^[24]. A case study design was specifically utilized to allow in-depth exploration of phenomena, providing a richer understanding of the complexities involved in balancing maternal employment and child development^[25]. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, which facilitated detailed insights into participants' experiences, perceptions, and beliefs^[26], aligning with the qualitative focus on subjective understanding.

2.1 Sampling and Participants

Purposive sampling was used to select participants based on predefined criteria, enabling the recruitment of individuals most likely to provide valuable insights relevant to the research objectives^[27]. The study targeted working mothers in Jakarta, Indonesia, with children aged 3 to 6 years experiencing speech delays. The eligibility of children with speech delays was determined through caregiver reports of prior professional diagnosis (e.g., pediatrician, speech therapist) and confirmation from preschool teachers during the screening stage. Exclusion criteria eliminated children without speech delays, those over 6 years old, and individuals living outside Jakarta. Six participants were recruited, expanding on previous small-scale^[28] to capture a broader range of experiences regarding work-life balance and support for speech development.

2.2 Data Collection

Participants were recruited primarily through social media platforms, such as Twitter, which offered a convenient and effective way to reach a diverse pool of candidates. Eligibility screening ensured alignment with study criteria, and interviews were scheduled at times suitable for participants. Prior to participation, all mothers received detailed information sheets and provided informed consent. Semi-structured interviews enabled the systematic collection of qualitative data, which was recorded, organized, and prepared for comprehensive analysis.

2.3 Pilot Study and Instrument

A pilot study was conducted to refine the interview protocol, which was reviewed by the research committee and trialed with a potential participant. Feedback from this process led to revisions enhancing clarity, coherence, and effectiveness of the interview guide. The finalized instrument (Appendix A) addressed participants' socio-demographic profiles, biological factors, family-related risks, and environmental influences, enabling in-depth

exploration of their experiences and strategies in supporting their children's speech and language development.

Ethics approval was obtained prior to data collection, with all procedures adhering to ethical guidelines. Participants were provided with comprehensive information about the study, ensuring informed consent and voluntary participation throughout the research process.

2.4 Data Analysis

The study employed Thematic Analysis as the analytical framework, following the systematic approach outlined by Byrne^[29]. This method facilitated the identification, analysis, and reporting of patterns within the qualitative data, enabling a structured understanding of participants' experiences.

The analysis proceeded in six phases:

1. **Familiarization with Data:** Interview transcripts were reviewed repeatedly to gain a deep understanding of participants' perspectives. Initial notes captured key points, such as challenges in balancing work and caregiving, and emotional strains experienced by mothers.
2. **Generating Initial Codes;** Significant phrases and descriptions were systematically coded, including aspects such as "limited interaction time," "emotional exhaustion," and "reliance on external support," allowing the raw data to be organized into meaningful segments.
3. **Searching for Themes;** Codes were grouped into broader categories to uncover recurring patterns. Five main themes emerged:
 - **Impact of Maternal Employment on Child's Speech and Language Development** (sub-themes: Limited Interaction Time, Role of Caregivers and External Support)
 - **Work-Life Balance Challenges** (sub-themes: Emotional and Physical Exhaustion, Struggling with Time Management)
 - **Maternal Guilt and Anxiety** (sub-themes: Not Being Present, Anxiety About Child's Development)
 - **Support Systems for Working Mothers** (sub-themes: Need for Flexible Work Arrangements, Dependence on Caregivers and External Support)
 - **Suggestions for Improved Support and Resources** (sub-themes: Affordable Access to Speech Therapy and Early Intervention, Community and Educational Resources)
4. **Reviewing Themes –** Themes were refined and validated against the data to ensure coherence and meaningful representation. Overlaps and inconsistencies were addressed to produce clear, distinct categories reflecting participants' experiences.
5. **Defining and Naming Themes –** Each theme was clearly defined and labelled to capture its essence,

providing a comprehensive view of the challenges and needs of working mothers.

6. **Presenting and Discussing Results –** The finalized themes were synthesized into a cohesive narrative. Findings indicated that working mothers face difficulties balancing professional and family responsibilities, leading to guilt, anxiety, and limited direct interaction with children, which can affect speech and language development. Participants highlighted the importance of support systems, including flexible work arrangements, affordable therapy, and community resources. The analysis offers practical recommendations to enhance support for working parents and provides a nuanced understanding of their experiences and the implications for child development.

3. Results

This qualitative research provides insights into the experiences of working mothers and their views on balancing work and parenting responsibilities. The analysis focuses on three primary research questions as mentioned in introduction to guide the study. The study's findings identified five key themes, each offering valuable perspectives on the lives of working mothers in Jakarta.

3.1 Characteristics of Participants

Semi-structured interviews with six working mothers in Jakarta (Parents A–F) explored how occupational demands affect their ability to support preschool-aged children's speech, language, and social development. Participants held diverse roles and schedules, from rigid 12-hour shifts to flexible academic hours, which influenced the time and quality of mother-child interactions. Mothers with extended or inflexible work hours struggled to engage directly with their children, while those with more flexible schedules had slightly greater opportunities for interaction. Common themes included guilt over limited presence, challenges with time management, and reliance on support systems. The findings highlight the importance of flexible workplace policies, accessible childcare, and societal recognition of the dual roles of working mothers in supporting children's developmental outcomes (see Table 1).

3.2 Impact of Maternal Employment on Child's Speech and Language Development

Mothers reported that work commitments significantly reduced their time for direct engagement with their children, which they perceived as hindering speech and language development. Participants with long or inflexible work hours, such as Participant B with 12-hour hospital shifts, relied heavily on caregivers, while others, like Participant F, attempted to compensate with evening activities despite fatigue. This limited interaction often led to feelings of guilt and concern over their children's

developmental progress.

Despite these challenges, participants highlighted the benefits of structured routines in supporting language development. Mothers with flexible schedules, such as Participant E, incorporated brief, regular speech-focused activities during work-from-home days, while others, including Participants D and F, set aside specific evening or after-work times for therapy exercises and reading. Even those with less flexibility, like Participants A and C, used weekends or evenings to engage in language-rich activities. These consistent routines not only promoted speech and language growth but also provided children with stability and continuity, helping to mitigate the impact of maternal employment on developmental outcomes.

3.3 Work-Life Balance Challenges

3.3.1 Emotional and Physical Exhaustion and Time Management Challenges

Participants frequently reported emotional and physical exhaustion from balancing demanding work schedules with parenting responsibilities. Long hours, high-pressure jobs, and tight deadlines often left mothers drained, making it difficult to fully engage in their children's speech and language development. This exhaustion contributed to feelings of inadequacy and guilt over their perceived inability to meet both professional and parental expectations (Participants B, D, F).

Time management further compounded these challenges. Mothers struggled to allocate sufficient time for developmental activities amid rigid work schedules and therapy sessions. Some relied on weekends or carefully planned evenings to compensate for limited daytime interaction (Participants A, C, E), yet still felt their efforts were insufficient. The interplay of fatigue and time constraints created significant stress, underscoring the emotional and practical burden working mothers face in supporting their preschool-aged children's development.

3.3.2 Maternal Guilt and Anxiety

Participants frequently expressed guilt and emotional strain stemming from their inability to be fully present for their children due to work commitments. Relying on caregivers and missing important daily moments intensified feelings of inadequacy and internal conflict between professional and parental responsibilities (Participants A, B, F). Mothers reported that this sense of absence compounded their emotional exhaustion, creating persistent tension in balancing work and parenting.

In addition to guilt, participants experienced anxiety about their children's developmental progress, particularly regarding speech and language delays. Concerns ranged from whether children would catch up to peers despite therapy, the influence of bilingual exposure, genetic factors, and family stress, to doubts about their own

parenting effectiveness (Participants A, C, D, E). These worries left mothers feeling uncertain and helpless, highlighting the emotional burden of supporting their children's development while managing work obligations. The findings underscore the importance of professional guidance and accessible support systems to alleviate maternal anxiety and promote confidence in nurturing children's growth.

3.4 Support Systems for Working Mothers

Flexible work arrangements and external support were critical in helping mothers balance professional responsibilities with their children's developmental needs. Participants with flexible schedules, such as work-from-home days, were better able to incorporate therapy sessions, engage in daily routines, and provide focused attention to their children (Participants E, F). In contrast, mothers with rigid or long hours faced challenges in addressing speech and language development, expressing frustration over limited control of their work schedules (Participant B).

Caregivers and external support networks—such as in-laws, parents, and hired caregivers—played an essential role in ensuring children's routines and therapy exercises were maintained during mothers' work hours (Participants A, B, F). These support systems helped mitigate the impact of limited direct interaction and enabled mothers to manage both work and parenting demands more effectively.

Teachers and therapists also served as external supports, with Participant D praising her son's school and therapy centre for providing tailored programs that complemented her efforts at home.

Participants emphasized the importance of affordable access to developmental services and therapy, highlighting the financial strain associated with consistent care. High costs often required meticulous budgeting, and mothers suggested expanding insurance coverage and government-supported programs to make early intervention more accessible (Participants A, D, E, F).

Community-based and educational resources were also seen as vital in supporting both children's development and working mothers' caregiving efforts. Parent groups, school and community workshops, and educational tools such as interactive apps provided emotional support, practical guidance, and supplemental learning opportunities (Participants B, C, D, F). Participants further recommended establishing dedicated support networks for parents of children with developmental delays to foster collaboration, resource sharing, and mutual encouragement. Together, these measures were viewed as essential for promoting developmental progress, easing parental stress, and enhancing mothers' confidence in managing their children's needs.

Table 1 Research Results

Themes	Sub-Themes	Codes	Representative Quotations	Participant
Impact of Maternal Employment on Child's Speech and Language Development	Limited Interaction Time	Work hours reduce time for direct interaction; weekend activities are used to compensate for missed interaction.	<i>"Because of my 12-hour shifts, I only get to talk with my son on weekends. I feel like I'm missing so much of his progress."</i> (Participant B)	
	Structure Routine on Development	Routines play a role in supporting the child with the challenges of maternal employment.	<i>"Even though I work from home, I set aside 15 minutes daily for reading aloud. It keeps him on track."</i> (Participant E)	
Work-Life Balance Challenges	Emotional and Physical Exhaustion	Feeling drained after managing both work and parenting responsibilities.	<i>"After long hours at the office, I'm too exhausted to do speech exercises with my daughter."</i> (Participant D)	
	Time Management Struggles	Therapy sessions and activities around rigid work hours is challenging.	<i>"Therapy sessions are always scheduled when I'm still at work—it's hard to manage everything."</i> (Participant C)	
Maternal Guilt and Anxiety	Not Being Present	Express guilt over relying heavily on	<i>"I feel guilty when my child calls the nanny 'mama' because I'm rarely home."</i> (Participant F)	
	Worry About Development		<i>"I keep wondering if my son will catch up to his friends despite all the therapy."</i> (Participant A)	
Support Systems for Working Mothers	Flexible Work Arrangements		<i>"On my remote workdays, I can join therapy sessions, which makes a big difference."</i> (Participant E)	
	Dependence on Caregivers and Professionals		<i>"I rely on my mother-in-law to keep the speech routines going when I'm at work."</i> (Participant B)	
Suggestions for Improved Support and Resources	Affordable Therapy and Early Intervention		<i>"We had to cut back on therapy sessions because the cost is too high."</i> (Participant D)	
	Community and Educational Resources		<i>"Parent groups give me ideas and emotional support—it helps me feel less alone."</i> (Participant C)	

4. Discussion

The findings reveal that maternal employment in Jakarta has significant implications for preschool children's speech, language, and social development, primarily due to reduced interaction time, reliance on external caregivers, and the emotional and physical strain faced by mothers. Limited opportunities for consistent engagement were associated with speech and language delays, as illustrated by mothers who worked long shifts or relied on relatives for childcare. This supports Vygotsky's Social Constructivism Theory, which emphasizes the critical role of dialogue and guided interaction in language acquisition^[30], and Bronfenbrenner's Bio-Ecological Systems Theory, which explains how workplace demands in the exosystem disrupt proximal processes in the microsystem^[31]. Similar challenges were evident in the development of children's social skills. Mothers reported that fatigue, stress, and time constraints limited their ability to provide responsive communication and role modelling, both essential for social development. Reduced exposure to social settings, often due to rigid work schedules, further hindered children's opportunities to practice social norms and reciprocal communication. These findings align with Vygotsky's view of learning as socially mediated^[32] and Bronfenbrenner's perspective on how exosystem stressors negatively influence family interactions^[33]. Despite these barriers, mothers employed strategies to mitigate challenges, highlighting the importance of systemic and community-level supports. Affordable access to therapy and insurance coverage were seen as crucial to alleviating financial burdens, while parent groups and localized workshops provided emotional support and practical guidance. Flexible work arrangements also emerged as a protective factor, enabling intentional and consistent interactions that supported children's speech and social growth. This reflects Bronfenbrenner's notion that exosystem-level flexibility can enhance microsystem functioning^[34]. Furthermore, while Chomsky's Theory^[21] posits an innate capacity for language, the study illustrates that environmental factors—such as maternal engagement and social exposure—are vital in activating this potential^[35-36]. Overall, the results demonstrate that maternal employment influences children's development in complex ways, with both risks and protective factors at play. Strengthening systemic supports, providing community resources, and promoting workplace flexibility are essential to empowering working mothers and ensuring optimal developmental outcomes for their children.

4.1 Implication of the Study

This study highlights that maternal mental health and work schedules are central to shaping children's speech, language, and social development. Feelings of guilt,

anxiety, and emotional strain among working mothers reduce both well-being and the quality of parent-child interactions, underscoring the need for accessible mental health support services, workplace wellness initiatives, and counseling resources. Addressing these challenges can enhance maternal involvement and improve children's developmental outcomes^[36]. The findings also reveal that rigid or extended maternal work schedules limit opportunities for meaningful communication, which is essential for language acquisition and social growth. This stresses the importance of flexible workplace policies and systemic interventions—such as parental leave schemes, adaptable scheduling, and childcare subsidies—that enable mothers to balance professional and caregiving responsibilities.

Beyond the policy level, the study provides practical guidance for early education and childcare practitioners. Teachers and caregivers play a crucial role in early detection of speech and language delays, fostering home-school communication, implementing language-rich classroom strategies, and offering parental engagement programs that equip working parents with practical techniques to support their children despite limited time. Finally, the findings emphasize the importance of community-based and culturally responsive interventions that integrate extended family and peer networks with formal services to create a holistic support system for working mothers. In sum, improving children's developmental outcomes requires multilevel action, where policymakers, educators, practitioners, and communities collaborate to enhance maternal well-being and promote positive child development in urban contexts.

4.2 Limitations of the Study

The study has several limitations. It was conducted only in Jakarta, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. The focus on mothers excluded the perspectives of fathers, caregivers, and other stakeholders. The age range of children (3–6 years) restricted insights into development across broader stages. Additionally, the study emphasized maternal employment without fully considering other factors such as socioeconomic status, cultural practices, and childcare settings. These limitations point to important directions for future research to provide a more comprehensive understanding.

4.3 Recommendation for Future Study

Future research should broaden its scope across regions and communities to capture cultural and socioeconomic variations in how maternal employment affects child development. Including fathers, caregivers, and teachers would provide a more holistic perspective, while studying a wider age range could reveal developmental changes over time. Key factors such as socioeconomic status, parental education, childcare quality, and family dynamics should also be examined. Employing longitudinal and

mixed-method approaches would yield deeper, multidimensional insights into long-term outcomes, ultimately informing more effective interventions and policies to support working mothers and their children.

5. Conclusion

This qualitative case study explored the effects of maternal employment on the speech, language, and social development of preschool-aged children in Jakarta. The findings indicate that maternal work schedules affect both the time spent with children and the quality of those interactions, revealing the difficulties in balancing professional duties with developmental support. Key issues identified include limited interaction time, emotional and physical exhaustion, and financial obstacles to accessing developmental services. The study found that

structured routines and support from caregivers and external systems are crucial in alleviating these challenges.

Additionally, it was found that working mothers often feel guilt and anxiety due to their limited availability for their children, which can impact the quality of parent-child interactions. These results emphasize the need for flexible work arrangements, accessible services, and community resources to assist working mothers and meet their children's developmental needs. By addressing these challenges, there is an opportunity to create an environment where mothers can effectively manage their roles and promote positive outcomes for their children.

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