

Assyfa Journal of Multidisciplinary Education

AJME. Vol. 4 No. 2 (2026) 49-61

e-ISSN: [3047-3942](#) p-ISSN: [3047-3942](#)



DOI: [10.61650/ajme.v4i2.1242](https://doi.org/10.61650/ajme.v4i2.1242)

ORIGINAL RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Role of the Family Environment with Democratic Parenting in Stimulating Children's Receptive Language Ability: A Phenomenological Study

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Article History: Received: 12 Jul 2026 • Revised: 25 Jul 2026 • Accepted: 20 Aug 2026 • Published: 24 Aug 2026

ABSTRACT

This study aims to describe the role of the family environment with democratic parenting in stimulating children's receptive language skills and to identify the obstacles faced by parents. This research employed a qualitative approach with a phenomenological method. The participants consisted of five parents who have children aged 4-5 years at RA Asrorul Huda, Bekasi. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and documentation. Data validity was ensured through source triangulation and technique triangulation. Data analysis used the Miles and Huberman model, including data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings revealed that parents applied democratic parenting through two-way communication, providing children with opportunities to express opinions, giving consistent guidance, and assisting them in daily activities. Receptive language stimulation was carried out through storytelling, daily conversations, giving clear age-appropriate instructions, and creating a language-rich environment. Parents faced challenges including limited time, environmental influences, and gadget use. This research concludes that the family environment with democratic parenting plays an important role in stimulating young children's receptive language skills.

Keywords: family environment, democratic parenting, receptive language skills, early childhood.

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mendeskripsikan peran lingkungan keluarga dengan pola asuh demokratis dalam menstimulasi kemampuan berbahasa reseptif anak usia dini serta mengidentifikasi kendala yang dihadapi orang tua. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan metode fenomenologi. Subjek penelitian terdiri atas lima orang tua yang memiliki anak usia 4-5 tahun di RA Asrorul Huda, Bekasi. Pengumpulan data dilakukan melalui wawancara mendalam, observasi partisipatif, dan dokumentasi. Keabsahan data diuji melalui triangulasi sumber dan triangulasi teknik. Analisis data menggunakan model Miles dan Huberman yang mencakup reduksi data, penyajian data, dan penarikan kesimpulan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa orang tua menerapkan pola asuh demokratis melalui komunikasi dua arah, pemberian kesempatan kepada anak untuk menyampaikan pendapat, pemberian arahan yang konsisten, serta pendampingan dalam aktivitas sehari-hari. Stimulasi kemampuan berbahasa reseptif dilakukan melalui kegiatan membacakan buku cerita, percakapan sehari-hari, pemberian instruksi yang jelas sesuai usia anak, dan penciptaan lingkungan yang kaya bahasa. Kendala yang dihadapi orang tua meliputi keterbatasan waktu, pengaruh lingkungan luar, dan penggunaan gawai. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa lingkungan keluarga dengan pola asuh demokratis berperan penting dalam menstimulasi kemampuan berbahasa reseptif anak usia dini.

Kata Kunci: lingkungan keluarga, pola asuh demokratis, kemampuan berbahasa reseptif, anak usia dini.

How to cite: Kamiliya, A. D., Widiyastuti, A., & Rahayu, W. (2026). The Role of the Family Environment with Democratic Parenting in Stimulating Children's Receptive Language Ability: A Phenomenological Study. *Assyfa Journal of Multidisciplinary Education*, 4(2), 49–61. <https://doi.org/10.61650/ajme.v4i2.1283>

1. INTRODUCTION

Early childhood education is a fundamental foundation for an individual's entire life. This period is often referred to as the golden age, during which brain development occurs rapidly, reaching up to 80% of adult brain capacity. At this stage, every stimulus received will serve as a foundation for shaping the child's character, intelligence, and social skills in later life. One of the most important aspects of development to consider is language development (Rachmawati et al., 2022).

Language development plays a vital role as the primary means of thinking and interacting with others. Language is not merely the ability to string words together but also a mental tool for understanding the surrounding world. In more detail, language development is divided into two types: expressive language (the ability to convey thoughts) and receptive language (the ability to understand, receive, and process verbal information). Often, the attention of educators and parents is focused on expressive abilities, while receptive language is actually a very important foundation. Without the ability to listen and understand instructions properly, a child will face difficulties in absorbing knowledge, following social norms, and even risks feeling frustrated due to an inability to understand their surroundings (Khosibah & Dimyati, 2021).

Receptive language is the child's ability to understand words and language through the process of acquiring information and meaning. This ability includes listening and reading activities and serves as the basis for the development of other language skills, such as speaking, reading, writing, socializing, and learning. This potential needs to be nurtured through stimulation from the surrounding environment and through the learning process that takes place both outside and inside school (Fitriani et al., 2019).

Early language ability is crucial in the child's developmental process, especially in helping them communicate and interact socially. The first language is generally acquired from the family environment and functions as a foundation for children to understand and adapt to their environment. In this context, the role of parents has a significant influence through the implementation of appropriate parenting. Parental parenting includes teaching methods, mentoring, and providing stimulation that can support various aspects of child growth, including their language abilities (Nuraeni & Lubis, 2022).

The family environment is the initial ecosystem experienced by the child. As the primary and main educators, parents have an important role in building an environment rich in literacy and verbal stimulation. The quality of interaction between parents and children at home greatly influences how much vocabulary the child acquires and how deeply they understand the context of the communication around them. Here, parenting style plays a very strong determining role. Parenting style is not just an educational method but also an "environment" that determines whether the child feels comfortable adapting verbally or instead experiences pressure (Salwiah & Asmuddin, 2022).

In developmental psychology literature, democratic parenting is consistently considered the most effective approach to maximizing a child's potential. Unlike authoritarian approaches that are one-sided or permissive without limits, democratic parenting emphasizes two-way dialogue, emotional warmth, while still setting clear boundaries (Pratiwi, 2020). In this approach, the child is given a rational explanation for every instruction, their opinions are heard, and they are involved in meaningful communication. Such stimulation directly trains the child's receptive language skills, as they become accustomed to analyzing meaning, responding to arguments, and understanding the context of complex yet affectionate conversations (Ilmiah & Novita, 2024).

Parenting plays a role beyond just serving as a communication channel between parents and children; it also influences the quality of stimulation children receive from their environment. Routine verbal interactions, emotional support, and consistent and positive approaches can accelerate progress in children's language development. Conversely, less effective parenting styles, such as those that are overly strict or overly permissive without supervision, can hinder children's language abilities. Additionally, the duration of screen time and the content watched also influence children's language development (Jumiati & Patilima, 2023).

Although many studies discuss the relationship between parenting styles and children's language development, most tend to focus on expressive language ability and use quantitative methods. On the other hand, research specifically examining receptive language ability is still relatively rare. Furthermore, studies linking democratic parenting to the stimulation of children's receptive language ability using a phenomenological approach to explore parents' subjective experiences are also still not widely conducted (Divina et al., 2022).

Receptive language ability, which is the foundation of cognitive development for children aged 4-5 years, requires appropriate and continuous stimulation from the family environment. The family, as the first educational setting, holds a vital role in the formation of this ability, especially through the communication methods used by parents. Democratic parenting that emphasizes balanced interaction, openness, and emotional warmth needs to be investigated further concerning language stimulation in children (Husna & Eliza, 2021).

Based on the above description, there is a need for a more in-depth study of how democratic parenting is applied in daily interactions to stimulate children's receptive language ability. Quantitative methods are considered incapable of fully uncovering the meaning, processes, and dynamics of interactions occurring within the family context. Therefore, this study uses a phenomenological approach to deeply explore the subjective experiences of parents in providing language stimulation to children, aiming to gain a more holistic understanding of the role of democratic parenting in receptive language development in early childhood (Anidi et al., 2025). This study aims to: (1) describe the role of the family environment with democratic parenting in stimulating children's receptive language ability, (2) identify the forms of stimulation carried out by parents, and (3) analyze the obstacles faced by parents in stimulating children's receptive language ability.

2. RESEARCH METHODS

Research Design and Approach

This study employs a qualitative approach with a phenomenological method. The phenomenological approach was chosen because it aims to understand and deeply explore the subjective experiences of parents in applying democratic parenting and its role in stimulating children's receptive language ability. This method allows researchers to capture the meaning, process, and dynamics of interactions occurring within the family context holistically and contextually (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

This research was conducted at RA Asrorul Huda, located on Jl. Tol Lkr. Luar Jkt, RT.006/RW.006, Jatiwarna, Pondok Melati District, Bekasi City, West Java. The location was selected based on its suitability with the research focus regarding the role of the family environment and early childhood development, as well as the availability of access and research permission from the foundation.

Research Subjects

The research subjects were determined using a purposive sampling technique with the following criteria: (1) parents who have children aged 4-5 years, (2) the child is enrolled as a student at RA Asrorul Huda, (3) the parents are willing to become informants and participate actively in the research. Based on these criteria, five parents were selected as research informants.

Table 1. Characteristics of Research Informants

Informant Code	Initials	Status	Number of Children	Child's Age	Occupation
CLW 01	Mrs. MS	Housewife	2	5 years	Teacher
CLW 02	Mrs. MR	Housewife	3	5 years	Housewife
CLW 03	Mrs. FTR	Housewife	3	5 years	Housewife
CLW 04	Mrs. AY	Housewife	1	5 years	Housewife
CLW 05	Mrs. DWD	Housewife	2	5 years	Working Mother

Data Collection Techniques

Data collection techniques used include three main methods: Participatory Observation: The researcher conducted direct observation of parent-child interactions in daily activities both at school and at home. Observations were carried out non-participatively using an observation guide prepared based on indicators relevant to the research focus. In-depth Interview: Interviews were conducted semi-structurally using an interview guide prepared based on the research sub-foci. Interviews were conducted face-to-face with each informant at an agreed-upon location, with a duration of approximately 45-60 minutes per informant. All interviews were recorded with the informants' permission and transcribed verbatim. Documentation: Document data collection included school profiles, student data, activity photos, and field notes relevant to the research.

Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis used the interactive model by Miles and Huberman (2014), which includes three stages: (1) data reduction, which is the process of selecting, focusing, simplifying, and abstracting raw data from field notes; (2) data display, which is the systematic organization of information in descriptive narrative form to facilitate conclusion drawing; and (3) conclusion drawing/verification, which is the interpretation of meaning from the displayed data.

Data Validity Testing

Data validity was tested through source triangulation and technique triangulation. Source triangulation was conducted by comparing data from different informants, while technique triangulation was conducted by comparing data from interviews, observations, and documentation. In addition, the researcher also conducted extended observation and member checks to ensure the suitability of the researcher's interpretation with the informants' intent (Sugiyono, 2023).

3. RESULTS AND FINDINGS

The Role of the Family Environment with Democratic Parenting

Based on the results of interviews and observations, all informants indicated that the family environment plays an important role in stimulating children's receptive language ability. The application of democratic parenting was reflected through the following indicators:

All informants gave their children opportunities to express opinions and make choices according to their wishes. As expressed by Mrs. MS (CLW 01):

"Sometimes I give my child a chance. For example, when it's his birthday. Usually, I give him freedom. Whether he wants a toy as a gift, or he wants to go to the playground." (CLW 01)

Similar sentiments were conveyed by Mrs. MR (CLW 02), stating that the child is given opportunities to express what they want to convey to their parents:

"When the child is starting to understand, we give them the opportunity to give their opinions or convey words they want to say to us." (CLW 02)

Mrs. DWD (CLW 05) added that getting children used to expressing their opinions helps parents understand their children's needs:

"I get my child used to expressing their opinion. Because when they express their opinion, it means we as parents are trusted by the child and we know what they want." (CLW 05)

The researcher found that two-way communication is the most dominant form of democratic parenting applied by parents. Mrs. MS (CLW 01) explained:

"I usually just invite them to chat. So they feel comfortable talking to me, so that good communication is built." (CLW 01)

Mrs. FTR (CLW 03) expressed that she tries to be a friend to her children:

"We try to be a friend to them too. So we can be a confidant, a chat partner. We also condition ourselves as parents to enter the children's world." (CLW 03)

Mrs. DWD (CLW 05), as a working mother, still makes time to communicate with her child:

"Yes, every day, actually. Since I'm a working mother, usually when I get home I ask, 'What did Dede do today? What did you play? What did you eat?' Later, he also usually asks, 'What did Mama do today?' Then I also tell him." (CLW 05)

Parents give instructions using simple language tailored to the child's age. Mrs. MR (CLW 02) stated:

"Sometimes, yes. Sometimes after one instruction, he can immediately carry it out. But sometimes, perhaps due to a lack of focus or other reasons, we need to give instructions several times before he understands." (CLW 02)

Mrs. DWD (CLW 05) explained her strategy for giving instructions:

"We see what he's doing first. For instance, if he's having screen time, usually he's focused. So we really have to repeat. But by saying, 'Mama needs your help with this, okay?' If he doesn't hear me, I call him again until he responds." (CLW 05)

Parents explain rules along with reasons that the child can understand. Mrs. MS (CLW 01) stated:

"For rules, usually we convey them verbally and must be consistent. For example, my child can watch TV only on Saturdays and Sundays, so the rule is already set for Saturdays and Sundays. I have to be consistent." (CLW 01)

Mrs. DWD (CLW 05) emphasized the importance of leading by example:

"The rules are like this; we have to follow them. For example, not littering, parents have to set that example. So actually, it's not only the children learning from us, but we also learn from the children." (CLW 05)

Forms of Receptive Language Stimulation

Reading storybooks was a routine stimulation activity carried out by most informants. Mrs. MS (CLW 01) explained:

"Almost every day, actually. Almost every day, usually before bed, I read him a storybook. Since we have many storybooks at home. Sometimes he chooses two to three books, and then I read them to him." (CLW 01)

Mrs. DWD (CLW 05) added that after reading, the child is asked questions about the content of the reading:

"Usually, we get into the habit of reading books every day. After reading, I usually ask about the content of what they've read. Whether they understand the content of what they've read or not." (CLW 05)

Parents give positive responses when children tell stories. Mrs. MS (CLW 01) stated:

"Usually, I listen first. I listen, and after he finishes telling me everything he wanted to tell, then I give my response to his story." (CLW 01)

Mrs. DWD (CLW 05) emphasized the importance of being a role model in listening:

"We want to be listened to, right? Likewise, when we want to talk, we also want to be listened to. So we have to set an example first. We listen to them first, then they will listen to us." (CLW 05)

Obstacles Faced by Parents in Stimulating Receptive Language Ability

Mrs. MS (CLW 01) revealed that children sometimes have difficulty understanding new terms:

"Sometimes... well, with children, their daily language is usually already fine. It's just that there are some terms they still don't understand, but the good thing is they ask, 'Mom, what does that mean? What does that mean?'" (CLW 01)

Several informants expressed that the environment outside the home is a challenge. Mrs. MR (CLW 02) stated:

"Sometimes the obstacle is that what we teach our children is absorbed for a while. Then when they go outside the house, the environment... the language of the environment is what

they use. The language of the environment is sometimes not in line with the language at home." (CLW 02)

Mrs. FTR (CLW 03) added:

"At home, there's no problem. But for example, when he plays outside, he hears strange language that is usually not spoken at home. Outside, he hears a lot of negative things." (CLW 03)

Mrs. AY (CLW 04) explained that the child's emotions become an obstacle in communication:

"The obstacle is that sometimes their wishes must be fulfilled exactly. If they aren't fulfilled, they will throw a tantrum, sulk, or roll on the floor." (CLW 04)

Mrs. DWD (CLW 05) explained the challenge of language use in the environment:

"In the environment, sometimes there is impolite language. I tell my child, 'We are good children. Such language is not for good children; that's rude language. So, can we not use language like that?'" (CLW 05)

4. DISCUSSION

The Role of the Family Environment with Democratic Parenting

The research findings indicate that the family environment plays a very important role in stimulating children's receptive language ability. All informants showed that the language stimulation process was not carried out through formal learning activities but through interactions that occur naturally in daily life. Parents build communication with their children when talking about daily activities, giving children opportunities to express opinions, explaining rules that apply at home, and providing directions using easy-to-understand language. These interactions make the family the first environment where children learn to understand language, grasp the meaning of information, and develop listening skills through experiences gained every day (Rachmawati et al., 2022).

The model of implementing democratic parenting in the family environment, consisting of four main pillars: two-way communication, providing opportunities to express opinions, clear instructions, and explaining rules. These four pillars are integrated with each other and form the foundation for stimulating children's receptive language ability. Two-way communication becomes the first pillar, allowing children to feel valued and heard, making them comfortable expressing opinions. Providing opportunities to express opinions trains children to be active in conversations and develop speaking courage. Clear instructions delivered in simple language help children understand information and directions well. Explaining rules with logical reasons teaches children about consequences and responsibility. Overall, this model shows that democratic parenting consistently applied in the family environment plays an important role in optimizing the receptive language development of early childhood.

The research findings show that a warm and communicative family atmosphere provides opportunities for children to actively participate in the communication process. Children do not only receive information from parents but are also given space to ask questions, express opinions, and share their experiences. Through this process, children's ability to understand the meaning of language develops gradually because they acquire direct language experiences within the family environment.

These findings align with the opinion of Erwan Effendi (2023), who explains that the family is the first educational environment that shapes a child's personality through close, continuous interactions grounded in affection. Thus, the family environment becomes a highly strategic place for providing stimulation for children's language development from an early age.

Furthermore, the research findings also show that the parenting style applied by parents tends toward democratic parenting. Parents give children the freedom to express their opinions, but still accompanied by guidance, supervision, and explanations for every rule implemented. This interaction pattern makes children feel valued, making them more courageous to communicate, ask questions, and understand information conveyed by parents. This condition indicates that democratic parenting is one of the factors supporting the development of children's receptive language ability through open communication in the family environment (Pratiwi, 2020).

This finding is reinforced by Ilmiah and Novita (2024), who state that democratic parenting emphasizes open communication, emotional support, and consistent rules, making children feel safe and comfortable in exploring their language abilities. Based on the research results, this condition is evident through parents' habits of always involving children in daily conversations, listening to children's opinions, and providing explanations in easy-to-understand language, so that the receptive language stimulation process can take place optimally.

Forms of Receptive Language Stimulation

Based on the research findings, the stimulation of receptive language ability carried out by parents is not only in the form of specially designed activities but is also carried out through various interactions that occur naturally in daily life. Parents utilize various opportunities when communicating with their children to provide meaningful language experiences. The forms of stimulation found in this study include building two-way communication, reading storybooks, giving simple instructions, and creating a home environment rich in language exposure. All these forms of stimulation are carried out consistently according to the conditions, needs, and developmental stages of each child.

The results showed that two-way communication is the most frequent form of stimulation carried out by parents. In daily interactions, parents not only convey information to children but also give children the opportunity to express opinions, ask questions, and share their experiences. This communication pattern makes children not only listeners but also actively involved in the communication process. When children listen to parents' conversations, understand the content of the discussion, and then respond according to what they understand, the child's receptive language ability indirectly continues to develop (Romeo et al., 2021).

This study also found that reading storybooks is a routine form of stimulation for most parents. Storytelling activities are generally done before the child sleeps or during free time when parents have the opportunity to accompany the child. In this activity, parents not only read the story but also invite the child to observe pictures, explain the meaning of unfamiliar vocabulary, and ask simple questions about the story's content. Through these activities, children gain experience in listening to complete information, understanding the story's content, connecting pictures with spoken language, and enriching their vocabulary (Ulfah et al., 2022).

These findings align with the opinion of Rohmah et al. (2022), who explain that reading storybooks provides early literacy experiences that help children understand information, recognize new vocabulary, and improve listening skills through interaction between parents and children.

This study also found that parents give simple instructions as part of receptive language stimulation. Instructions are given in various daily activities, such as asking the child to pick up an object, tidy up toys, put things in their place, or perform several activities sequentially. Although seemingly simple, these activities train children to listen carefully, understand the meaning of each instruction given, remember the order of commands, and then translate them into appropriate actions (Syahla et al., 2026).

Obstacles Faced by Parents in Stimulating Receptive Language Ability

Based on the research findings, parents face several obstacles in stimulating children's receptive language ability. These obstacles not only stem from the child's ability to understand language but are also influenced by the social environment and the child's emotional condition. Although each family has different experiences, all informants showed that the language stimulation process does not always go as expected due to various factors that can affect the child's ability to receive and understand information conveyed by parents.

One obstacle found is that some children still experience difficulties in understanding new vocabulary or terms. In daily communication, children are not always able to understand all the words conveyed by their parents, so they still require simpler explanations. This finding indicates that receptive language development occurs gradually, so parents need to repeat explanations, use age-appropriate language, and provide easy-to-understand examples.

In addition to limited vocabulary comprehension, the research results also show that the social environment is a considerable challenge in the process of stimulating receptive language ability. Children do not only acquire language experiences from their parents but also from peers and the surrounding community. The difference in language use between the home environment and the play environment causes children to sometimes more easily imitate the language heard outside the home compared to the language accustomed to by parents (Rachmawati et al., 2022).

This study also found that the child's emotional condition is one of the obstacles in the receptive language stimulation process. In certain situations, children show behaviors such as crying, anger, or tantrums when their wishes are not fulfilled, thus reducing their attention to the explanations given by parents. In such conditions, parents choose to calm the child down first before inviting

the child to communicate again. This step is taken because children will more easily understand information when they are in a calm emotional state (Pratiwi, 2020).

Theoretically, this research enriches the study of early childhood language development, particularly regarding the role of the family environment and democratic parenting in stimulating receptive language ability. This study shows that the phenomenological approach is capable of revealing the subjective experiences of parents that are not measurable quantitatively, thereby providing a more holistic understanding of the dynamics of language stimulation within the family (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Practically, the findings of this study provide implications for parents, teachers, and early childhood education institutions. Parents are expected to continue implementing democratic parenting by building warm, open, and attentive communication with their children. Teachers and educational units are expected to establish good cooperation with parents in providing continuous receptive language stimulation for children between home and school. This study has several limitations. First, the research only involved five parent informants from one early childhood education institution, so the results cannot be generalized to a broader context. Second, the research only focused on the parents' perspective without deeply exploring the children's and teachers' perspectives. Third, the research was conducted within a limited time frame, so it could not observe the long-term development of the stimulation provided.

5. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

Based on the research findings, it can be concluded that the family environment with democratic parenting plays an important role in stimulating the receptive language ability of early childhood. This role is demonstrated through the application of open communication, providing opportunities for children to express their opinions, giving instructions using easy-to-understand language, and explaining rules consistently and accompanied by reasons that the child can comprehend. The forms of receptive language stimulation carried out by parents are implemented through various simple activities in daily life, such as reading storybooks before bed, inviting children to communicate about daily activities, responding to children's stories and opinions, and using simple language when giving explanations and instructions. Through this stimulation, children gain opportunities to enrich their vocabulary, understand the content of conversations, follow instructions, grasp the meaning of information, and develop listening skills in various communication situations.

The obstacles faced by parents in stimulating children's receptive language ability include the child's limited understanding of new vocabulary or terms, the influence of language use from the surrounding environment, the child's emotional condition that sometimes affects the communication process, and the child's habit of imitating language acquired from the play environment. Despite facing various obstacles, parents continue to make efforts to provide assistance through open communication, use of easy-to-understand language, repeated explanations, and supervision of the child's social environment.

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