

# What do educators know about language development and language support practices in toddler classrooms ?

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## Introduction

Language development during the early years is influenced by the quality of educator-child interactions [1].

Educators play an essential role in fostering early development. However, educators lack specific knowledge of language development and evidence-based strategies, limiting their ability to support children’s language development effectively [2; 3].

These knowledge gaps are problematic for identifying and preventing communication challenges in at-risk children [4].

Despite the critical role of educators [5], little data exists on their knowledge in toddler classrooms.

## Objectives

- 1 Assess educators' knowledge of language development by domain (e.g., phonology, lexicon) and language support practices (e.g., recasts, expansions).
- 2 Examines the relationship between their knowledge and confidence in applying these practices.

## Methodology



40 Toddler classrooms

Questionnaires

N = 72 educators



Language development

Language support practices

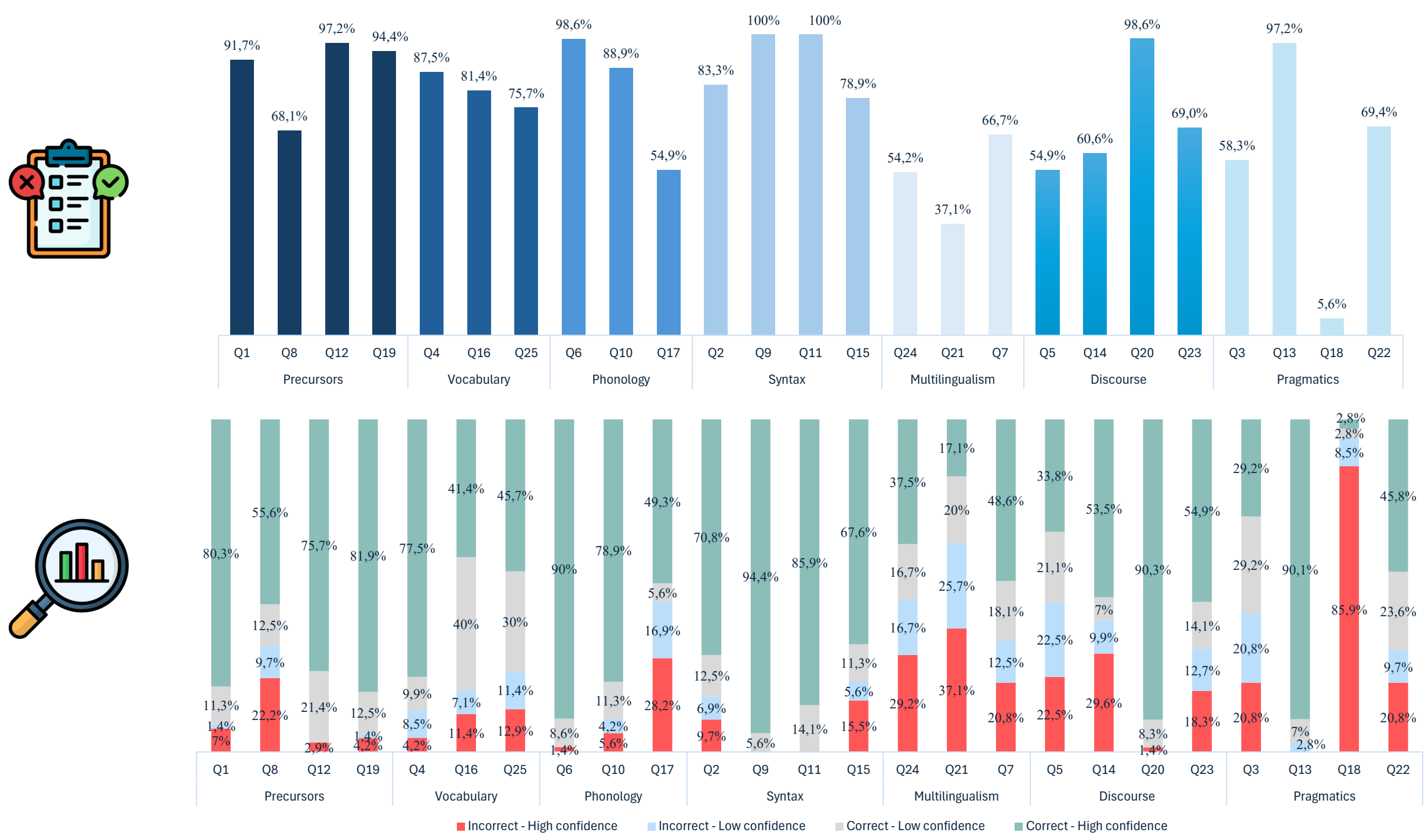


Confidence scale

Incorrect - high confidence    Incorrect - low confidence    Correct - low confidence    Correct - high confidence

## Results

### Language development



### Language support practices



## Interpretation

### Language development



- Strengths: precursors, vocabulary, phonology, syntax
- Areas of variability: discourse
- More challenging areas: multilingualism, pragmatics



- Incorrect/High confidence: mainly multilingualism (e.g., Q21: Bilingual children produce their first words later than monolingual children)
- Correct/Low confidence: less stable knowledge in vocabulary, multilingualism, and discourse

### Language support practices



- Strengths: phonology, syntax
- More challenging area: vocabulary



- Incorrect/High confidence: mainly vocabulary (e.g., Q1: Your colleague comes across the word “crib” during book reading and isn’t sure whether the children understand it. What’s the best way to support their vocabulary development?)

## Practical implications

- Consolidate knowledge on vocabulary, discourse and multilingualism
- Address misconceptions (multilingualism, pragmatics, vocabulary)
- Include specific modules in pre-service training

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2. Cash, A. H., Cabell, S. Q., Hamre, B. K., DeCoster, J., & Pianta, R. C. (2015). Relating prekindergarten teacher beliefs and knowledge to children's language and literacy development. *Teaching and teacher education*, 48, 97-105.  
3. Degotardi, S., & Gill, A. (2019). Infant educators' beliefs about infant language development in long day care settings. *Early Years*, 39(1), 97-113.  
4. Letts, C., & Hall, E. (2003). Exploring early years professionals' knowledge about speech and language and development and impairment. *Child Language Teaching and Therapy*, 19(2), 211-229.  
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