

Why imitation matters for a speech and language pathologist?

Khadija Saleem, Saba Abrar, Muhammad Sikander Ghayas Khan

Dear Editor, I want to shed light on an important preverbal skill "Imitation" for speech Language Pathologists and parents. Imitation arises very early in typical development and serves as a pivotal factor in a baby's acquisition of new skills from infancy, toddler stage, childhood and beyond. Initially, a newborn's abilities, like sucking for feeding, are reflexive and innate, requiring no explicit teaching.¹

In typical development, learning to imitate often occurs spontaneously. Observing and mimicking parents, siblings, or peers is how a child learns to navigate various milestones, such as feeding, using the potty, riding a bike, writing, and tying shoes laces.² Additionally, imitation plays a significant role in social development, aiding in making friends and learning to interact and play with others.³

There are many levels of imitation developed by professionals in the form of hierarchy. Organizing them into smaller, achievable steps with practical examples and detailed instructions serves as a helpful reminder.⁴

The following are the levels of imitation:

Level-1: The child will mimic actions with objects

Your goal is for the child to mimic listed actions. Demonstrate each action 3 to 5 times, assisting if needed. Use simple language and short phrases. For example;

- 1-Pop a bubble on the floor with your hand, saying "Pop!"
- 2-Pop a bubble in the air with your finger, also saying "Pop!"

Level-2: The child will mimic movements, gestures,

.....
Department of Rehabilitation Sciences, The University of Lahore, Lahore, Pakistan.

Correspondence: Khadija Saleem.

Email: khadija.saleem@dhpt.uol.edu.pk

ORCID ID: 0000-0002-1209-2884

Submission complete: 15-05-2024 **First Revision received:** 16-08-2024

Acceptance: 29-08-2024 **Last Revision received:** 16-08-2024

and sign language with bubbles

Demonstrate the body movements and gestures for the child to copy. Assist him in performing each gesture after showing him 3 to 5 times. Remember, the child is not expected to talk yet, but your simple and repetitive words are crucial. For example;

- 1-Kick, stomp, or clap bubbles while saying "Pop!"
- 2- Then, clap to show excitement after popping bubbles and say "Yayyy (yahoo)."

Level-3: The child will mimic facial and mouth movements without speaking while interacting with bubbles

Keep it simple and use single words. Emphasize the importance of copying the movements. For example;

- 1-Blow a bubble and utter "Blow!"
- 2-Mimic eating a bubble, then say "Eat!"

Level-4: Model play sounds for the child to imitate while playing with bubbles together

For example

- 1-Model the sound /p-p-p/ without a vowel as you pop bubbles.
- 2-Enhance anticipation by audibly inhaling before blowing.⁵

Dear Editor, by adhering to these guidelines and instructions, parents and professionals alike can initiate therapy effectively, paving the way for success and reaching significant milestones.

DOI:<https://doi.org/10.47391/JPMA.20616>

Disclaimer: None.

Conflict of Interest: None.

Source of Funding: None.

References

1. Subiaul F, Patterson EM, Zimmermann L, Barr R. Only domain-specific imitation practice makes imitation perfect. *J Exp Child Psychol.* 2019; 177:248-64. doi: 10.1016/j.jecp.2

- 018.07.004.
 2. Maratos O. Trends in the development of imitation in early infancy. In *Regressions in mental development*. London: Routledge, 1982; pp 81-102.
 3. Meltzoff AN, Moore MK. A theory of the role of imitation In: Rochat P, eds. *The self in infancy: Theory and Research* 1st ed. North Holland: Elsevier, 1995; pp 73-93.
 4. Garcia EE. THE DEVELOPMENT AND GENERALIZATION OF DELAYED IMITATION 1. *J Appl Behav Anal*. 1976; 9:499. doi: 10.1901/jaba.1976.9-499
 5. Jones SS. Imitation in infancy: The development of mimicry. *Psychol Sci*. 2007; 18:593-9. doi: 10.1111/j.1467-9280.2007.01945.x.
-

Authors' Contribution:

KS: Design, data acquisition and drafting.

SA: Drafting.

MSGK: Revision.