

Verbal and Nonverbal Communication Skills among Latchkey Children -A Field Study in Batna Province-

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Abstract:

This study examines the verbal and nonverbal abilities of latchkey children to determine whether these abilities vary depending on various factors. 15 latchkey children (9 boys and 6 girls) were part of the study group. The Verbal and Nonverbal Communication Scale by Violet, Fouad Ibrahim, et al. (2024) was used to collect the data. It uses a descriptive approach. Following data analysis, the following conclusions were reached:

- The verbal and nonverbal communication abilities of latchkey children were mediocre at best.
- The length of time the kids spent at home by themselves (between 6 and 8 hours) did not significantly affect their verbal and nonverbal abilities.

Keywords: Communication skills; Verbal communication; Nonverbal communication; Latchkey children

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1- Problematic introduction:

Communication skills are among the most important variables, which contribute in the child's psychological, social, and cognitive development. They enable the child to build positive relationships with family, peers, and teachers. Insufficiency in these skills may influence negatively the child that will minimize his self-esteem and the ability to express himself, which increase his emotional disturbance and prevent his capacity to form healthy social relationships.

The quick economic and social changes in the modern era due to the increasing rate of parental employment and their absence from child upbringing. Which lead to the appearance of new family patterns such as "Latchkey Children", who spend a long period alone without parental supervision that will deprive them from the opportunity to directly interact with the parents, which will affect the verbal and nonverbal communication skills, which in turns affects their psychological and social growth due to the challenges they encounter. Based on this, we can set the following research problem:

- What is the level of verbal and nonverbal communication skills among latchkey children?
- Are there differences in verbal and nonverbal communication skills among latchkey children based on gender?
- Are there differences in verbal and nonverbal communication skills among latchkey children based on birth order within the family?
- Are there differences in verbal and nonverbal communication skills among latchkey children based on the periods spent alone at home?

2- Study Objectives:

This study aims to:

- To identify the level of verbal and nonverbal communication skills among latchkey children.
- To determine the differences in verbal and nonverbal communication skills based on gender.
- To identify the differences in communication skills levels according to the time spent at home alone.
- To explore the differences in verbal and nonverbal communication skills based on birth order within the family (first-born, middle child, last-born).

3- Significance of the study:

Studying the communication skills of the latchkey children reserve a great importance, as these skills shape the foundation of their psychological, social, and cognitive development in the direct family interaction.

This study is crucial for two main reasons:

3-1- Theoretical Significance:

- This study highlights the importance of both parental and societal awareness to the risks of leaving the child alone for long periods and that to prevent many health and safety risks (e.g.; domestic accidents, exploitation, and violence) and avoid behavioral deviations. The deficiency of supervision can also lead to social isolation or moral misbehave.
- The study concentrate on children aged 6 to 12 years, which equivalent to early childhood which considered as one of the most important phase in personality development, during which children secure traits and behaviors that often remain throughout life.
- It provides a global understanding to verbal and nonverbal communication that plays an important role in children socialization, particularly in their cognitive development.

- The study contributes in building a solid knowledge in psychology, as the latchkey children phenomenon has captured a limited attention in Arab research compared to other western studies, to be precise, there are no Arabic studies on the matter, making this work a valuable addition to psychological and social research related to this group.

3-2- Practical Significance:

This study suggest a set of training and guidance programs aimed to improve the communication skills among latchkey children, including:

- Preparing intervention programs to provide psychological and social support for children and their families.
- Designing after-school programs to reduce isolation among children.
- Designing educational programs to teach children how to rely on themselves and improve their educational and social skills.
- The study provides support to policymakers and professionals in different establishments by emphasizing the importance of child protection policies, such as providing daytime or evening care or support childminders.
- Developing special programs for latchkey children to foster positive outcomes and diminish the negative effects resulting from parental absence.

4- Communication Skills:

- Conceptual Definition:

According to Howaida El-Reedy et al. (2010), communication is the exchange of thoughts and information, which is an active process that involves receive, explain or interpret, and transmit messages to others, including verbal and nonverbal communication which appear in the ability of understanding, interpreting, and transmitting the message between the two parties involved (El-Reedy et al., 2010, p. 830).

Jefferson and Walker (2016) define verbal communication as the process of generating meaning through language, including spoken and written words. While nonverbal communication generating meaning through nonverbal behaviors; however, we may consider them as complementary rather than opposing processes.

The verbal communication depends on a single channel- spoken language transmitted via sound and received by our ears, meanwhile the nonverbal communication can be perceived via all five senses such as gestures, facial expressions, and eye contact (Jefferson, 2016, p. 42).

- Operational Definition:

The research adopts the definition provided by Violet et al. (2024), developers of the Communication Skills Scale. Communication is the process of exchange ideas and emotions between individuals using different tools such as gestures, signals, and emotional expressions. It also includes using the language as a principle mean to transmit information in details and it considered as both verbal and nonverbal communication process, involving the reception, interpretation, and transmission of messages to others. it forms the foundation for constructing and developing social relationships and obtaining academic and personal success in the future (Violet et al., 2024, pp. 7-9).

5-2- Latchkey Children:

- Conceptual Definition:

Rajalakshmi and Thanasekaran (2015) defined them as children aged between 5 to 13 years who took care of themselves regularly without parental supervision before and after school hours (Rajalakshmi and Thanasekaran, 2015, p. 207). They are called latchkey children because many of them carry their house keys on a string or chain around their necks (Bundy and Judith, 1987, p. 65).

- Operational Definition:

The research defines latchkey children as those who were left alone at home regarding to their parents' work. These children unlock the door, enter the house by themselves, and take care of their personal matters. Their ages expectedly range between 6 and 12 years.

5- Previous Studies:**5-1- Studies Addressing Communication Skills:**

The study by El-Sayed Abedlkader et al. (2024), titled "Enhancing Social Communication Skills in Children with Mild Autism Spectrum Disorder Using Motor Imitation", intended to inspect the effectiveness of a program based on motor imitation in enhancing communication skills among a sample of children with mild autism spectrum disorder. These children displayed clear lack in aspects of social communication. The conclusion of the study was that the program was effective in developing social communication skills in children diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder.

Agnes Indra Etikawati et al. (2023) conveyed an awareness study aimed at discovering the development of communication skills during middle childhood. The study detailed that communication skills are the most important social skills that the child must have also communicating is very essential in educational activities because it has a great influence on the child's academic achievement. Furthermore, the study affirmed that communication skills consist of both perceive and understand verbal and nonverbal messages considered as a special marker of children's communication competence.

Rzhanova et al. (2023) conducted a study entitled "Verbal Abilities" which investigated the differences between both genders across various age groups. The study marked that some research has shown higher verbal abilities among females, whereas other studies has shown superior rates among males. These results depends on the specific cognitive ability, cultural context, and age of the participants. The study indicated as well that gender differences in cognitive abilities may be from social or biological factors, such as prenatal developmental conditions and hormone levels. A noticeable increase in the verbal abilities among female aged 8-9 years, whereas by ages 10-11 males begun to overcome the females in verbal comprehension indices. However, results from sub examinations measuring verbal and visuospatial comprehension displayed stronger performance among female participants across all age groups.

Dini Hadiyah (2021) conducted a study aimed at identify verbal and nonverbal communication patterns among students. The results has showed that male students tend to use spoken verbal communication rather than nonverbal ones. They also prefer direct interaction with their friends face to face. Whereas, female students were found to use both verbal and nonverbal communication and they prefer using different communication patterns. The study emphasized the importance of teachers developing suitable instructional methods to improve students' communication skills.

Amel Abdelaziz Massoud (2018) conducted a study aimed at identifying communication skills among kindergarten children and their relation to some variables. The study discovered that both verbal and nonverbal communication skills are low among kindergarten children despite their gender, their parents' educational level, birth order, or number of siblings. The study emphasized the critical role of the mother in supporting and encouraging the child to communicate, take part in social occasions, and express personal concerns through attentive listening.

Lina Omar Bin Sidiq (2007). Conducted a study aimed at testing the effectiveness of a suggested program to enhance the nonverbal communication skills among a sample of autistic children in Riyadh, and the effect on their behavior. The most important results of the study were the statistically significant differences in nonverbal communication skills between the experimental and control groups on both the pre-and post-measurements, in favor of the

experimental group. However, no statistically significant differences were discovered in appropriate social behavior between two groups across the same measurements. The study also showed statistically significant differences in inappropriate social behavior between the groups, again favoring the experimental group.

Hani Gergis Ayad (2005). Conducted a study titled “Methods for Developing Communication Skills in Children”, which underlined the importance of developing the children’s social skills. It pointed out that encouraging effective communication with children requires patience and desire to communicate with them and that is via active listening, using age-appropriate language, strengthen empathy between parents and children, and creating an environment where the child feels valued. The study concluded that communication skills not only supporting the child’s growth but also forming a foundation for building healthy relationships and strong communication abilities throughout their life.

5-2- Studies Addressing Latchkey Children:

Shailla Cannie (2020) conducted a study titled “Home Syndrome and Its Impact on Children”, which emphasized the urge to strengthen latchkey children programs to foster positive outcomes and reduce the negative harms. The institutional employees must provide daytime childcare facilities to meet the need of working parents. Also, schools may organize some before and after school programs for these children, either free of charge a reasonable fee.

Rajalakshmi and Thanasekaran (2015) found that leaving children and teenagers alone at home may be very dangerous and scary for them. Those children confronted many problems such as physical abuse, crimes, delinquency, depression, behavioral and emotional problem, learning difficulties, and domestic violence. The study emphasized on instructing the parents in order to reduce the periods spent alone by their children and prepare them in advance on how to deal with the situation that may occur during the absence of parental supervision. It also underlined on the role of the educational institutions in providing after school programs and activities for these children, calling for collaborative efforts to support their well-being.

According to Frances Kemper Alston’s 2010 study, “Latchkey Children,” the problem of “latchkey kids” gained attention during World War II. Mothers entered the industrial workforce, creating tanks, aircraft, military uniforms, and the ammunition soldiers needed while fathers enlisted in the military. Children thus came home with keys around their necks on ribbons or chains. Some moms decided to work “swing shifts,” which are night shifts, which involved putting their kids to bed, locking the door, and leaving for the factory. With a prompt and all-encompassing response, the government set up programs in factories, schools, and community centers to bring together all children whose parents were working on the war effort. As soon as the war was over, these programs were discontinued, and women returned to their positions as housekeepers.

5-3- Commentary on Previous Studies:

Since communication skills have a major impact on academic achievement as well as psychological and social adjustment, it is evident from the review of prior research that they are among the most important social competencies that a person should have. The majority of research has focused on communication skills in a variety of child populations, such as preschoolers (as in the study by Amal Abdel Aziz, 2018) and autistic children (as in the program created by Lina Omar Sadiq, 2007 to improve communication skills in autistic children). The study by El-Sayed Abdel Qader (2024), which sought to enhance social communication abilities in kids with mild autism spectrum disorder, serves as another illustration.

Studies examining the communication skills of latchkey children are still scarce, despite the fact that their numbers are increasing due to parents’ frequent absences and busy schedules. Latchingkey children have only been the subject of three studies: Shailla Cannie

(2020), Rajalakshmi and Thanasekaran (2015), and Frances Kemper Alston (2010). These studies addressed how parents should work to limit their children's time alone and teach them how to deal with situations when they're by themselves, as well as how schools can assist by providing after-school programs. However, none of these studies examined the way in which these kids learn to communicate. This study closes a research gap, which is why it's significant.

The researcher conducted the current study because of the clear dearth of Arab and international studies addressing communication skills in latchkey children.

Methodological measures:

1. Study Approach:

The researcher employed the descriptive method to explore the dimensions and relationships of a phenomenon with other variables and to portray it as it actually occurs. This approach was particularly successful in assessing and describing the level of verbal and nonverbal communication skills in latchkey children.

2. Sample:

The research targeted elementary school students labelled "latchkey children" because they were left at home unattended by their parents for a period of time. A sample of fifteen (15) children, nine (09) boys (60%) and six (06) girls (40%) were purposefully sampled from different Batna schools during the academic year of 2024-2025. The ages of children whose parent is sometimes or always away range from six to twelve years old. Students were grouped based on their gender (boys or girls), order of birth (first, middle and last) and time spent at home unattended (6-8 hours).

Below are the attributes of the sample, including the children's distribution by gender, amount of time alone, and birth order in their families.

According to gender,

Table 1: shows the sample characteristics.

Gender	Number	Percent age
males	9	60%
Females	6	40%
The total	15	100%

According to the earlier table, there were (09) boys in the sample, which accounts for 60% of the sample and is the largest proportion of the sample. In comparison, girls represented 40%, or 6 girls, in the smaller group compared to boys.

Table 2: presents the sample characteristics based on the duration of time each child spends alone at home

The length of time the child spent home alone	Number	Percentage
6 hours	7	46%
8 hours	8	54%
The total	15	100%

The table shows the largest proportions in the sample where 54% of the children spend 8 hours each day alone at home and 46% spend 6 hours alone each day at home, which represents the smaller portion of the sample.

Table 3: presents the sample characteristics based on the child's birth order within the family.

Birth order	Number	Percentage
The first born	5	33.3%
The middle child	5	33.3%
The youngest child	5	33.3%
The total	15	100%

The table demonstrates that the birth order of children within their families reflects an equal and balanced distribution among the sample members.

3- Study Instruments:

To achieve the main goal of the study, the researcher used the Verbal and Nonverbal Communication Scale developed by Violet Fouad Ibrahim and colleagues (2024).

3-1- Explanation of the Scale:

The scale has a total of 83 items covering nine dimensions:

- **Dimension 1:** Essential Communication Skills – When individuals use their bodies to communicate information or messages to other individuals and the natural environment without using words. This dimension has nine items.
- **Dimension 2:** Communication Skills via Eyes – Indicators of body language that you use to communicate specific ideas or information to another individual without words using your mechanism of eye contact. This dimension has four items.
- **Dimension 3:** Joint Attention Skills – This term indicates the shared attention of two people directed towards another object or event. Attention can be shared or initiated through verbal direction or other directional means of pointing or looking with eyes. This dimension has six items.
- **Dimension 4:** Imitation Skills – The ability to replicate or mimic the behaviour of others, which also has a role in language development as well as transmission of behaviours or customs. This dimension has five items.
- **Dimension 5:** Understanding Facial Expressions and Voice Tones – This area relates to how well individuals express emotions, thoughts and feelings more openly. This includes interpreting their feelings or thoughts, more efficiently. This dimension has six items.
- **Dimension 6:** Listening/Discrimination Skills – Encompasses engaged listening along with analytical processing of that listening and includes 11 items.
- **Dimension 7:** Comprehension Skills – References the ability of the child to understand a situation which may involve translating (known as relating), interpreting, explaining or inferring, which includes 9 items.
- **Dimension 8:** Cognitive Knowledge Skills – Involves key competencies such as attention, memory, acquisition and retrieval of information, as well as organizing, analyzing and applying knowledge in problems and decisions, along with 18 items.
- **Dimension 9:** Speaking/Expressive Skills – Involves cognitive processes, purposeful practical activities, and mental, learning strategies and includes 15 items.

3-2-Rating Evaluation:

Each evaluation includes three responses, which are worded as: Always, Sometimes, and Not Applicable. Children mark with a (✓) in the box based on their reaction. The rating is scored as followed:

- Positive items (which indicate more communication) score as follows:
 - Always = 3
 - Sometimes = 2
 - Not Applicable = 1
- Negative items (indicate less communication) score as follows:
 - Always = 1
 - Sometimes = 2
 - Not Applicable = 3

The total score then can range from a minimum of 83 to a maximum of 249 and higher scores indicated more verbal and nonverbal communication behaviours.

3-3-Reliability of the Scale:

The researcher evaluated the reliability of the scale using two methods:

- Cronbach's Alpha Method – to assess internal consistency for the dimensions and for the scale as a whole.
- Split Half Method – to assess the consistency of responses between two halves of the scale.

Table 4: presents the reliability coefficients estimated for the scale.

Dimensions	Cronbach's Alpha	Split-Half Reliability (Spearman-Brown)
Physical Communication Skill	0.85	0.83
Visual Communication Skill	0.73	0.71
Joint Attention Skill	0.76	0.71
Imitation Skill	0.74	0.71
Understanding Facial Expressions and Tone	0.80	0.75
Listening and Discrimination Skill	0.79	0.78
Comprehension Skill	0.82	0.80
Knowledge Skill	0.78	0.74
Speaking and Expression Skill	0.79	0.77
Overall Scale	0.89	0.87

Based on the above, it is evident that all reliability coefficients are high, which confirms the consistency and reliability of the Verbal and Nonverbal Communication Skills Scale.

3-4- Scale Validity:

Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was employed by the researcher to assess the validity of the scale and involved the computation of construct validity indicators based on a sample of 10 respondents. Findings from the analysis suggested a good fit between the structure of the scale and the sample data and suggested factorial validity of the Verbal and Nonverbal Communication Skills Scale. All factor loadings of the dimensions produced significant values at the 0.01 level, thus providing further evidence of the validity of the scale.

Internal Consistency Validity:

To further assess the validity of the scale, internal consistency analyses was conducted. Specifically, correlations coefficients were computed between each item and the total score of the corresponding dimension. The researcher determined that all items yielded statistically significant correlations at the (0.01) level, therefore suggesting the measure had internal consistency.

The correlations between the sub-dimensions and the overall score of the scale were computed as well. It was determined that sub-dimensions were aligned with the overall measurement of the intended construct, with correlation coefficients ranging from 0.76 to 0.89, all statistically significant at the 0.01 level. From these analyses, we concluded that the scale exhibited strong internal consistency across all dimensions and supports the general validity of the scale in measuring the intended construct.

- Statistical Methods Used in the Study:

The researcher employed the following statistical techniques neural networks:

- Means and Standard Deviations to describe the level of verbal and nonverbal communication skills.
- Independent Samples t-test to examine differences between males and females.

- One-way ANOVA to investigate group differences based on the child's birth order within the family and the duration of time spent in solitude.
- Scheffé Post Hoc Test to indicate the direction of group differences when differences were statistically significant.

- Presentation and Discussion of Study Results:

The first question: which states: "What is the level of verbal and nonverbal communication skills among latchkey children?"

To verify the validity of this question, the researcher did the following:

- Measured and summarized means and standard deviations for the communication skills scale for overall communication skills score to assess the level of communication skills for the sample.
- Interpreted the overall communication skills score with the measurement ranges for the communication skills scale to determine if verbal and nonverbal communication fell into the moderate level.

Table 5: shows the sample's means and standard deviation for the Verbal and Nonverbal Skills Scale across their overall score

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation
Verbal Communication Scores	117.93	15.00
Nonverbal Communication Skill	70.53	13.00
Total score	175	25.60

This information allows us to understand how the participants performed on average, and whether their communication skills were in accordance with the hypothesis that it was moderate.

The table indicates variability in children's scores on verbal and nonverbal communication skills, but the scores generally fell in the moderate range. In verbal communication the average was 117.93 (SD=15), indicating most children fell around this level. In nonverbal communication the average was 70.53 (SD =13), also indicating a moderate level.

The overall communication score averaged 175, ranging from 161-226. Most children scored in the 150-201 range which showed variance, but fell in the moderate level for communication. This indicates that the latchkey children in the study generally fall in the average range for communication skills.

Discussion of the first question:

The results derived from this question support Bandura's theory. (1997) Social Learning Theory, which posits that social and communication skills are learned through modelling, observation, and imitation. In the case of latchkey children, this is important because while they are home alone, they lack the chance to learn by way of their direct social models (their parents or siblings) when they are alone. This wears on their social environment, which is integral to acquiring language and widening communication skills.

Nevertheless, the presence of moderate degrees of communication skills reflects their environment when they attend school because those skills can be developed through their interactions with teachers and peers and their increased independence.

In addition, the results were supported by Violet Ibrahim et al. (2024), who found that children under 12 showed no significant differences between verbal and nonverbal communication skills, further supporting the credibility of the results in this study.

The second question:

The second question was mentioned: "Are there differences in verbal and nonverbal communication skills among latchkey children based on gender?"

As a way to test this question, the researcher calculated the t-test value for independent samples, which resulted in the following outcomes:

Table 6: presents the means and standard deviations for the dimensions of verbal and nonverbal communication skills, comparing males and females

Variable	Variable Classification	Mean	Standard Deviation	T-value	Significance Level	Significance
Physical Communication	Male	21.76	4.14	1.21	0.27	Not statistically significant
	female	24	2.28			
Visual Communication	Male	9.67	1.73	0.69	0.49	Not statistically significant
	Female	10.33	1.86			
Joint Attention	Male	21.44	3.83	1.54	0.1	Statistically significant
	female	15.17	2.99			
Imitation	Male	8.56	3.13	3.12	0.01	Statistically significant
	female	12.67	1.97			
Comprehension of Expressions	male	11.67	2.37	1.46	0.1	Statistically significant
	female	13.67	2.73			
Auditory Discrimination	Male	25.7	5.12	1.29	0.21	Not statistically significant
	female	28.33	2.73			
Understanding	male	22.11	7.36	1.02	0.26	Not statistically significant
	female	23.67	9.08			
Knowledge	Male	29.56	5.10	1.70	0.1	Statistically significant
	female	33	7.2			
Oral Communication and Self-Expression	Male	35.22	3.35	5.03	0.001	Statistically significant
	female	42.5	2.26			

The table indicates that when it comes to nonverbal communication skills like body language, eye contact, facial expression comprehension, and tone of voice, there are no appreciable differences between boys and girls. On the other hand, girls outperform boys in joint attention, imitation, and expression understanding, with statistically significant differences at the 0.01 level.

Regarding the verbal communication dimensions, the findings indicate that there are no appreciable differences in the listening, discrimination, and comprehension abilities of boys and girls. Nonetheless, girls outperform boys in speaking, expression, and knowledge skills, where there are statistically significant differences.

Discussion of the second question:

This result illustrates Rzhanova et al. (2023) findings where there are gender differences in verbal abilities. Differences in findings on verbal skills where girls and boys perform differently can be explained by the essence of the verbal skills and the differences shaped by social and biological factors.

It further aligns with the findings of Dini Hadianiv (2021) where boys tend to rely more on spoken language when peers converse and for girls, they more frequently employ a combination of verbal and nonverbal communication. It was noted that girls heavily rely on nonverbal communication and this suggest that boys and girls may differ in how they communicate and relate to one another.

“There are statistically significant differences in the level of communication skills (verbal and nonverbal) among latchkey children depending on how long the child stays alone at

home,” according to the third hypothesis. The researcher performed the following actions in order to test this hypothesis:

Table 7: presents the means and standard deviations of the dimensions of communication skills—both verbal and nonverbal—based on how long the child stays alone at home

Variable	Variable Classification (Time spent by the child at home)	Mean	Standard Deviation	T-value	Significance Level	Significance
Physical Communication	6 hours	22.43	3.74	0.17	0.86	Not statistically significant
	8 hours	22.75	3.77			
Visual Communication	6 hours	10.43	1.99	0.99	0.34	Not statistically significant
	8 hours	9.50	1.60			
Joint Attention	6 hours	13.75	3.65	0.23	0.84	Not statistically significant
	8 hours	13.75	3.65			
Imitation	6 hours	11.14	3.76	0.34	0.73	Not statistically significant
	8 hours	9.38	2.97			
Comprehension of Expressions and vocal prosody	6 hours	13.00	3.06	0.71	0.48	Not statistically significant
	8 hours	12.00	2.27			
Auditory Discrimination	6 hours	27.29	3.95	0.39	0.35	Not statistically significant
	8 hours	26.38	4.98			
Understanding	6 hours	23.29	2.43	0.71	0.48	Not statistically significant
	8 hours	22.25	3.24			
Knowledge	6 hours	23.29	2.43	0.71	0.48	Not statistically significant
	8 hours	22.25	3.24			
Oral Communication and Self-Expression	6 hours	39.43	5.13	0.99	0.34	Not statistically significant
	8 hours	37.00	4.24			

Based on how long children spent alone at home, which differ from 6 to 8 hours, the table demonstrates that there are no statistically significant differences in the verbal and nonverbal communication skills dimensions.

Thinking about the third question:

This outcome is in accordance with Bianchi's (2000) research, which states that unsupervised children are likely to get into trouble. However, the extent of the negative influence is contingent on the factors such as the child's age, development, and the surroundings. Children from poor households are usually the ones to face difficulties with interaction and conduct.

It also supports the assertion made by Garbarino (2001) that the length of time a child spends alone is not the primary concern. The support the child receives and the state of family relationships are more important. Lack of family support during extended periods of isolation can impair a child's capacity for communication and adaptation.

For this reason, there were no significant differences between children who spent six to eight hours alone. A two-hour difference, according to the researcher, is insufficient to alter their communication abilities because their daily routines are similar. Social media is one of the many coping mechanisms these kids use to keep in touch with their friends. The amount

of hours does not seem to have much of an impact because they are also adept at adjusting to being by themselves.

According to the fourth question, which states: "Are there differences in verbal and non-verbal communication skills among children who spend time alone at home based on the durations they spend alone?", according to the fourth hypothesis. As can be seen below, the researcher used an analysis of variance (ANOVA) to test this hypothesis.

Table (8) shows the F-value indicating whether there are significant differences in the average responses of the study sample on the communication skills scale—both verbal and nonverbal—based on the child's birth order in the family.

Variable	Variable Classification	Sum of squares	Degrees of Freedom	Mean Square	F-Value	Significance Level	Significance
Physical Communication	Between groups	43.07	2	21.54	2.45	0.13	Not statistically significant
	Within groups	105.60	12	8.80			
	The sum	148.67	14				
Visual Communication	Between groups	4.933	2	2.467	0.740	0.498	Not statistically significant
	Within groups	40.000	12	3.333			
	The sum	44.933	14				
Joint Attention	Between groups	43.33	2	21.67	1.77	0.05	Not statistically significant
	Within groups	146.40	12	12.20			
	The sum	189.73	14				
Imitation	Between groups	87.6	2	43.8	7.42	0.01	Statistically significant
	Within groups	70.8	12	5.9			
	The sum	158.4	14				
Comprehension of Expressions	Between groups	12.15	2	6.08	0.87	0.40	Not statistically significant
	Within groups	83.60	12	6.97			
	The sum	95.75	14				
Auditory Discrimination	Between groups	155.2	2	77.6	8.08	0.01	Statistically significant
	Within groups	115.2	12	9.6			
	The sum	270.4	14				
Understanding	Between groups	23.34	2	11.67	1.56	0.20	Not statistically significant
	Within groups	89.60	12	7.47			
	The sum	112.94	14				
Knowledge	Between groups	37.7	2	18.85	0.94	0.40	Not statistically significant
	Within groups	241.20	12	20.10			
	The sum	278.9	14				
Oral Communication and Self-Expression	Between groups	188.8	2	94.4	10.12	0.01	Statistically significant
	Within groups	121.2	12	9.32			
	The sum	310.00	14				

The table shows that there are no statistically significant differences in nonverbal communication skills, such as physical communication, eye contact, joint attention, understanding expressions, and tone of voice, depending on whether the child was born first, middle, or last. However, there were notable differences as last-born children performed better on the imitation test. There were also notable disparities in listening and distinguishing abilities, which again favoured last-born children. No appreciable differences in knowledge and comprehension skills were found based on birth order. However, there was a statistically significant difference in speaking and expression skills at the (0.01) level, with last-born children outperforming other children.

The Fourth Question was discussed. The findings indicated that there were no appreciable variations in the three birth order groups' nonverbal communication abilities, with the exception of imitation, where last-born children outperformed the others. With the exception of speaking and expression, which favoured first-born children, there were no significant differences in verbal communication abilities.

These results are consistent with research by Dunn & Plomin (1990) and Sulloway (1996), which indicates that sibling communication skill differences are typically minimal. Birth order alone is not as important as other factors, such as parenting style, family dynamics, and emotional support.

According to Bandura's (1977) social learning theory, children frequently learn by watching and imitating others, which explains why last-born children have stronger imitation abilities. Younger siblings learn this skill by mimicking the gestures, movements, and facial expressions of their older siblings.

Research conducted by Sulloway (1996) and Falbo (1981) suggests that firstborns generally possess better verbal and expressive abilities than their younger siblings. The reason for this is that the firstborns' strong language skills are supported by the fact that they usually have more interactions with their parents during their early years, receiving thereby more attention and eventually having more chances to be heard and speak with others. On the other hand, it is likely that middle kids do not get the same level of attention as the youngest and the oldest ones, and this may explain their lack of uniqueness in any specific communication skill area.

Conclusion:

This study aimed to find out how well latchkey children communicate both verbally and nonverbally and whether these skills varied based on certain factors. The sample consisted of 15 latchkey kids, including nine boys and six girls. The researcher used a descriptive approach and the Verbal and Nonverbal Communication Scale developed by Violet, Fouad Ibrahim, and their team in 2024 to collect data. Statistical analysis revealed that latchkey children had a moderate level of communication skills in both areas. The long periods these children spent alone at home, ranging from 6 to 8 hours, did not greatly influence their verbal and nonverbal communication skills.

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