

## Summary of Research Findings

### Brief Report: Associations between autism characteristics, written and spoken characteristics, and social interaction skills in preschool-age children on the autism spectrum

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#### Overview

Learning to read is one of the most important skills children learn at school. Our research examines the early reading skills of children on the autism spectrum.

#### Why did we do this study?

We want to better understand why some children on the spectrum do really well in reading, while many other children struggle in learning to read (i.e. reading the words *and* understanding what they mean).

#### What did we do?

In this study, we used parents' (of 4- and 5-year-olds) responses to three questionnaires to find out:

- 1) If parents reported their children to show better written communication skills (i.e., knowing letter names; being able to write their name; being able to read some words) than spoken communication skills (i.e., knowing what words mean, talking in sentences, and understanding what people say) on the Vineland Adaptive Behavior Scales (VABS).
- 2) If children's written communication skills at age 4/5 were linked to the number of autism traits and/or to parent-reported difficulties in their children's social communication skills (i.e., ability to use language in social situations, such as greeting).

#### What did we find?

Our results confirmed a profile of better written communication skills than spoken communication skills in 4- and 5-year-old children on the spectrum. However, this may be specific to the questionnaire we used (the VABS). We found no strong links between children's written communication skills and their number of autism traits or parent-reported difficulties in their children's social communication skills. This means that pre-school children's strengths or weaknesses in written communication cannot be explained by the number of autism traits, nor by children's strengths or weaknesses in social communication.

#### What does this mean?

We need to continue our research to better understand why many preschoolers on the spectrum show strengths in knowing their letter names and sounds, with some of them being able to read words before starting school. Because we know that these early strengths in written communication skills do not always lead to later reading success, we advise in-depth assessment and monitoring of early reading related skills in preschoolers and young children on the spectrum, to help guide early individualized intervention for those children who are most likely to struggle in acquiring and developing their reading skills.

#### Where are we sharing this study?

If you would like to read the full paper, please download the accepted version here:

<https://www.marleenwesterveld.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Westerveld-Brief-Report-2021-Accepted.pdf>

If you are interested in our research, please feel free to contact A/Prof Marleen Westerveld (m.westerveld@griffith.edu.au).