


## The communicative participation in pre-school children estimated by the FOCUS questionnaire: a functional communicative outcome measure

Silvia Piazzalunga<sup>a</sup> , Nicoletta Salerni<sup>b</sup>, Federico Ambrogi<sup>c</sup>, Sofia Limarzi<sup>d</sup>, Sabrina Gianera<sup>a</sup> and Antonio Schindler<sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Department of Biomedical and Clinical Sciences “L. Sacco”, University of Milan, Milan, Italy; <sup>b</sup>Department of Psychology, University of Milan-Bicocca, Milan, Italy; <sup>c</sup>Department of Clinical Sciences and Community Health, University of Milan, Milan, Italy; <sup>d</sup>Scientific Institute IRCCS “E. Medea”, Bosisio Parini, Italy

### ABSTRACT

**Purpose:** Participation-outcome measures are required in the phoniatic and speech-language pathology practice to evaluate real-life changes during interventions. In line with the bio-psycho-social model of health, ‘Focus on the Outcomes of Communication Under Six’ (FOCUS) is a validated scale by which parents rate their child’s Communicative Participation (CP). CP has been widely investigated in atypically-developing population, and it may be an innovative construct also for typically-developing children (TDC). The aim of the study is to describe the CP and its components observed in a large group of TDC, exploring whether children’s CP is influenced by their age.

**Method:** Through a cross-sectional observational study, parents of 355 Italian-speaking TDC aged 3.0–5.11 years without developmental impairments completed the Italian FOCUS (FOCUS-I).

**Result:** CP significantly increased with age ( $p < .001$ ). Components’ scores differed by age, with some competences (‘pragmatics’, ‘receptive language/attention’, ‘social competence/play’, ‘coping strategies/emotions’) increased with age less than others (‘speech’, ‘intelligibility’, ‘independence’, ‘expressive language’).

**Conclusion:** The study suggests that a spontaneous significant increase in CP should be expected with a child’s development and it discusses the differences in the profile scores. When exploring real-life communicative participation, parents rate their children as changing mostly in their speech and expressive-linguistic competences.


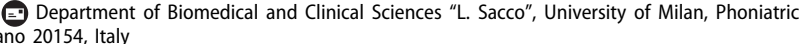
### KEYWORDS


Focus on the Outcomes of Communication Under Six; functional outcome; parent-report; communicative participation; ICF-CY

Besides research evidence, clinical expertise and patient preference, the evidence-based-practice framework involves the need to adopt outcome measures to evaluate the efficacy of interventions in healthcare. This need should meet the conceptual framework of the World Health Organisation’s (WHO) International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health for Children and Youth (ICF-CY) [1], which views the functioning of a child within an integrated and bio-psycho-social framework. Adopting the ICF-CY framework, Cunningham et al. [2] proposed to identify three main types of outcome measures: first, the body function and structures-based outcome which is related to the integrity and functioning of the parts of the body and, second, the activities-based outcome, which is related to task execution. The third measure is the participation-based outcome, which is related to an individual’s social

participation. ‘Participation’ is a multidimensional construct defined as ‘attending and being involved in life situations’, while a ‘participation restriction’ refers to ‘problems an individual may experience in involvement in life situations’ [1]. A participation-based outcome could help clinicians to identify clinical changes [2] and evaluate how a communication disorder may affect a child’s everyday life [3,4].

Thomas-Stonell et al. developed the ‘Focus on the Outcomes of Communication Under Six’ (FOCUS) as an innovative tool to measure a participation-related outcome by which parents or speech-language pathologists (SLPs) can rate their perception of a child’s Communicative Participation (henceforth CP) [5]. It includes a 50-item rating scale intended to capture, according to the ICF-CY qualifiers [1], both children’s capacity (‘an individual’s ability to execute a task or an action’) and performance (‘what an individual

**CONTACT** Silvia Piazzalunga  [silvia.piazzalunga@unimi.it](mailto:silvia.piazzalunga@unimi.it) 

 Supplemental data for this article can be accessed [here](#).

© 2022 International Association of Physicians in Audiology