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Kids' patter matters

ALBERT Einstein might not have talked until he was three, but a new Victorian study suggests most late-talking children won't be so lucky.

Almost half of all those who start talking late develop language difficulties by the age of four, a University of Melbourne study of 1900 kids has found.

The difficulties include learning and forming problems at school and forming relationships with other children.

The five-year study found almost 20 per cent of children were "late talkers" with vocabularies of less than 50 words by the age of two.

Professor Sheena Reilly, lead author and speech pathologist at the Murdoch Childrens Research Institute, said the study dispelled the myth that all child-

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ren grew out of language problems. She urged parents to seek help early.

"Some children spontaneously overcome their early language delay, but 46 per cent of late talkers experience future language impairment," she said.

"By the age of two, your child should be able to understand simple sentences, use more than 50 words, use some pronouns and sing simple songs."

The study, tracking kids from eight months to seven years, found some two-year-olds didn't speak, but others had over 600 words in their repertoire. Boys were more likely to have problems and girls more likely to overcome them.