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## The Development of Language in Elementary School-Aged Children

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### Abstract

*During the school years, children experience integrated development that combines various skills to handle increasingly complex tasks, including language development. Language development is an individual's ability to communicate with their environment. This communication is essential for building relationships with others, allowing individuals to feel connected to their surroundings. Language skills continue to develop throughout the school years, during which students can increasingly understand and interpret communication through speech, writing, and body language, enabling them to understand and be understood by those around them. Children develop language abilities from simple to complex forms along with their growth and development. Children learn language by imitating and repeating words used by adults, similar to how they learn other things.*

## INTRODUCTION

Formally and institutionally, basic education is categorized as fundamental education. According to Article 17, Paragraphs 1 and 2 of the National Education System Law No. 20 of 2003, basic education is the foundation for secondary education. It includes Elementary Schools (SD), Islamic Elementary Schools (MI), as well as Junior High Schools (SMP), Islamic Junior High Schools (MTs), or other equivalent forms of education—defined as compulsory education for 9 years, starting from SD or MI through SMP or MTs.

Throughout the educational process in schools, learning is the spearhead for achieving quality education (Septianti and Afiani, 2020, p. 8). In the academic sphere, teachers or educators also need to understand the importance of the characteristics of elementary school students, as this aspect cannot be overlooked (Mardison, 2016, p. 635). The term *characteristics* originates from the word *character*, which refers to psychological traits, morals, or disposition, as well as habits and nature that distinguish one individual from another (Meriyati, 2015). Their social environment influences the formation of students' characteristics, how they interact and socialize with those around them, and the learning experiences they gain from their surroundings (Hajar and Nanning, 2022, p. 11). Generally, the characteristics of students describe the specific traits possessed by learners, both as individuals and as groups, which are considered in the management, organization, and implementation of learning (Safitri et al., 2022). Understanding these student characteristics is important because children in elementary schools, particularly in the early grades, are in the early age range. This early age is a brief yet crucial period in individual development. During this time, a child's potential needs to be nurtured to develop optimally.

Each individual undergoes psychological growth and development stages, including physical and mental aspects. One critical aspect of cognitive development in elementary school-aged children is language development. Language development is an essential stage determining a child's ability to communicate with their environment (Yusuf, 2001, p. 118; Nurkholifah and Wiyani, 2020, p. 61). In this context, all forms of communication are included, where thoughts and feelings are expressed using symbols or signs to convey meaning, such as speech, writing, gestures, numbers, paintings, and facial expressions. Humans can understand themselves, others, the environment, knowledge, and moral or religious values through language. During elementary school, children experience rapid development in recognizing and mastering vocabulary.

Khalfan (2004, p. 22) states that children can master up to seven different languages before the age of nine, provided they are exposed to and require those languages for daily communication. This ability is a natural tendency possessed by children at an early age, which is considered a great gift from Allah with a significant purpose. As explained in the Qur'an, the creation of language variations and skin colors are among the signs of His power, which serve as evidence for those who understand (Q.S. ar-Rum: 22).

A child must be guided to master various languages during childhood, as at this stage, they are still under the supervision of their parents. Based on the background presented by the author, this paper will discuss how children's language development is explained explicitly in the context of elementary school (SD/MI).

## **METHOD**

This study employs a qualitative descriptive approach to understand language development in elementary school-aged children. Data were collected through interviews, observations, and document analysis. Interviews were conducted with teachers and parents to gain insights into children's language development. Observations were carried out in school and home environments to observe children's verbal and non-verbal communication patterns directly. Document analysis included examining academic records and children's written assignments. The collected data were analyzed thematically through data reduction, presentation, and conclusion drawing. Data validity was ensured through triangulation of sources, methods, and theories to guarantee the accuracy of the research findings.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Definition of Language Development**

Language is a tool of communication used by individuals to interact with others. The use of language begins with imitating sounds or meaningless noises, which then develops into uttering single syllables, and two-syllable words, and eventually forming simple and more complex sentences. Children can engage in social relationships and build their social behavior through language.

Children's language development is closely related to their cognitive development. Language development encompasses communication abilities, including verbal, written, body language, and gestures (Taufiqurrahman and Suyadi, 2019, p. 160). This indicates that intelligence influences language abilities. Initially, a child's intellectual level is still simple, but their language ability progresses from basic to more complex as they grow and develop.

Children live and are shaped by diverse environments (Janawi, 2019, p. 70). The environment plays a significant role in children's language development because language is fundamentally learned from their surroundings. Children learn language by imitating and repeating the words they hear from adults, similar to how they learn other things. Children begin to truly understand language when they reach the age of 6-7 years, which is when they start formal education at school. Language development is improving the ability to use communication tools, whether verbally, in writing, or through gestures and symbols. Mastering these communication tools allows individuals to understand others and be understood (Fatimah, 2006, p. 100).

Two main factors influence language development:

1. The process of physical maturation, where the child's speech organs become functional, enables them to start speaking.
2. The learning process, where, after their physical readiness for speech, children learn the language spoken by others by imitating the words they hear (Yusuf, 2001, p. 179).

These processes begin during infancy and childhood, so by the time children enter elementary school, they are already able to:

1. For more complex sentences,
2. Construct compound sentences, and
3. Ask questions.

### **Language Development of Elementary School-Aged Children**

Speaking ability is the most prominent aspect of language in daily life. This ability is essential for children as a foundation for interacting with peers and adults (Putri, 2018, p. 115). In early childhood, children have a powerful drive to speak for two main reasons:

1. Without the ability to speak, they may not be accepted as group members as a means of social interaction.
2. As a way to achieve independence, if they cannot speak, parents may not understand the child's desires, which can cause the child to remain dependent like a baby and hinder the development of their independence (Rumini & Sundari, 2004, p. 43).

Allen and Marotz (2010, p. 159) Explain the Profile of Development and Growth Patterns in Children, Including Speech and Language Development in Children Aged 6-12 Years, which Includes:

1. Speech and Language Development in 6-Year-Old Children
  - a. Continuously talking; often resembling someone who is overly chatty.
  - b. Conversing like an adult; frequently asked questions.
  - c. Add five to ten new words daily; their vocabulary reaches 10,000 to 14,000 words.
  - d. Using correct verb forms, word order, and sentence structure.
  - e. Using language to express dissatisfaction instead of crying or physical aggression, such as "This is mine! Give it back, you're stupid."
  - f. Talk to themselves while planning steps to solve simple problems (though their logic may not be apparent to adults).
  - g. Mimicking popular words and curse words; finding dirty words funny.
  - h. They enjoy telling jokes and riddles, but their humor is often unsophisticated.
  - i. Enjoying being read stories and creating their own stories.
  - j. Able to learn more than one language; can spontaneously do so in bilingual or multilingual families.
2. Speech and Language Development in 7-Year-Old Children
  - a. I enjoy storytelling and like to write short stories and tell imaginative tales.
  - b. Using sentence structures and conversational language like adults; sentence patterns reflect cultural and geographical differences.
  - c. Becoming increasingly precise and extensive in language use; employing more descriptive adjectives and adverbs.
  - d. Using body gestures to illustrate conversations.
  - e. Criticizing their work: "I didn't draw it right," or "His drawing is better than mine."
  - f. Exaggerating events are typical: "I ate ten hot dogs at the picnic."
  - g. Explaining events according to their understanding or needs: "It didn't rain today because I was going on a picnic."
  - h. Describing experiences in detail: "First, we parked the car, then we walked up a long little path, and then we sat on a fallen tree near the lake and ate."
  - i. Understanding and following multi-step instructions (up to five steps); sometimes asking for instructions to be repeated because they didn't fully listen the first time.
  - j. Writing messages and short notes for friends is something they enjoy.
3. Speech and Language Development in 8-Year-Old Children
  - a. Enjoying telling jokes and guessing word riddles.
  - b. Understanding and executing multi-step instructions (up to five steps); sometimes asking for repetition because they didn't hear everything.
  - c. Reading fluently and understanding what they read.
  - d. Writing letters or sending messages to friends, including imaginative and detailed descriptions.
  - e. Using language to provide criticism and praise to others; repeating popular expressions and curse words.
  - f. Understanding and following grammatical rules in conversation and writing.
  - g. Interested in learning secret codes and using coded language.

- h. Speaking fluently with adults, able to think and talk about the past and the future; e.g., “What time are we going swimming next week?”
4. Speech and Language Development in 9-10-Year-Old Children
- a. Enjoying talking, often endlessly and without an apparent reason; sometimes used to attract attention.
  - b. Expressing feelings and emotions effectively through words.
  - c. Understanding and using language as a system of communication with others.
  - d. Using phrases or words frequently used by peers, such as “cool,” “awesome,” or “top-notch.”
  - e. Recognizing that some words have double meanings, such as “light fingers” (a thief) or “stirring the pot” (causing trouble).
  - f. I enjoy wordplay in jokes and riddles and often find bizarre humor funny.
  - g. Displaying a high-level understanding of grammar; recognizing when a sentence is grammatically incorrect.
5. Speech and Language Development in 11-12-Year-Old Children
- a. Nearly completing language development by the end of this period; only minor improvements are needed in the following years.
  - b. Enjoying speaking and arguing, often endlessly, with anyone willing to listen.
  - c. Using longer and more complex language structures.
  - d. Expanding their vocabulary by 4,000 to 5,000 new words each year, skillfully using vocabulary to develop and clearly describe stories.
  - e. Becoming thoughtful listeners.
  - f. Understanding that sentences can have implied meanings or intentions; for example, when their mother asks, “Have you finished your homework?” she wants them to stop playing, take their books, and start working on their homework.
  - g. Understanding irony and sarcasm; developing a sense of humor and enjoying telling jokes, riddles, and poems to entertain others.
  - h. Mastering various language styles depending on the situation: formal language when speaking to teachers, casual language with parents, and a style using popular phrases and secret words with friends.

### **Factors Influencing Children's Language Development**

According to Riksa (2009, p. 148), language development is influenced by several key factors, which include:

- a. **Health:** Poor health conditions can slow children's language development because inadequate nutrition affects brain performance, impacting their ability to process information. Limited interaction with the environment can also restrict the child's vocabulary.
- b. **Intelligence:** The level of intelligence significantly affects language development. Children with severe intellectual disabilities tend to have limitations in language, whereas children with normal intelligence levels generally possess good language abilities. Brilliant children can often read and understand speech at a very young age.
- c. **Socioeconomic Status:** Children from low-income families often experience language development barriers due to limited literacy access, such as recognizing letters and sounds. Limited learning opportunities and inadequate nutrition can also negatively affect their language development. Children from low economic backgrounds are at higher risk of illiteracy, both in Latin and Arabic scripts.
- d. **Gender:** Vocalization development in girls tends to progress more quickly, starting at two. More intense social interaction with parents and peers also increases vocabulary. In school environments where gender is not discriminated against, the language development of both

boys and girls can be optimized.

- e. Family Relationships: Democratic and authoritative parenting styles within families, where children are seen as an integral part of the family, can help children learn and provide examples of communicating effectively. Children in such families can express their thoughts and feelings through various types of language.
- f. Communication Access: Support and openness to interact with the surrounding environment, including nuclear families, extended families, society, educational institutions, and communication media, are crucial to facilitating optimal language development in children.

### **The Influence of Language Ability on Thinking Ability and Learning Readiness**

The level of thinking ability significantly influences language ability. Similarly, individuals with low thinking ability will have difficulty constructing words or sentences that are logical, systematic, and well-structured, which directly hinders their communication ability (Fatimah, 2006, p. 102).

Language is a means of conveying ideas or thoughts. Likewise, we use language to understand the ideas or thoughts of others. The process of conveying and understanding the meaning of ideas and thoughts is an abstract thinking process. The inability to grasp the meaning of language accurately can result in deficiencies in the thinking process, leading to inaccurate outcomes. Such inaccuracies may stem from weaknesses in language ability (Fatimah, 2006, p. 102).

Reading and writing skills are essential and serve as prerequisites for mastering the content of learning materials taught by teachers during the learning process. Reading instruction in schools emphasizes understanding the entire text, where students must recognize words, phrases, and sentences, involving thought, emotion, and alignment with the reading theme (Harianto, 2020, p. 1). It can be said that reading is an activity to find specific information in written text (Ritonga et al., 2023, p. 103). Limitations or delays in children mastering reading and writing skills can lead to learning difficulties, ultimately hindering the achievement of expected academic performance (Riksa, 2009, p. 151). Reading skills are crucial in education and community life because they enable students to expand their knowledge, learn other subjects, communicate ideas, and express themselves (Suparlan, 2021, p. 1). Reading is a receptive written language skill that strengthens thinking, broadens insights, and serves as a vital foundation for further learning, thus requiring special attention from teachers early in education (Putri et al., 2023, p. 52).

The ability to communicate allows children to feel connected and become part of their community. Children are psychologically ready to participate in learning when they feel safe and comfortable and have friends. Children can also demonstrate their capacity through expressions, ideas, and thoughts. Mastering spelling, vocabulary, and grammar is part of language skills that support the ability to communicate effectively.

## **CONCLUSION**

Language ability develops throughout the school years. Students become increasingly skilled in understanding and interpreting communication, whether verbal, written, or through body language, which helps them both comprehend and be understood by those around them. The main focus of language development in elementary school is on pragmatic aspects, namely the use of language in practical situations for communication. Communication is the process by which someone conveys and receives information, contact, or interaction between two or more individuals, where the sender sends a message or information to the receiver. Communication can occur through verbal (oral) and non-verbal (written and body movement) language. Language develops with diverse characteristics in different cultural environments.

The need to communicate drives the development of information technology that facilitates personal interactions wherever individuals are. Communication is essential in every relationship, and open, precise, and sensitive communication fosters natural and harmonious relationships.

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