STUDY OF ELEMENTARY SCHOOL CHILDREN'S LANGUAGE ABILITY IN INTERACTING WITH TEACHERS AND FRIENDS AT SDN 1 TAMBUN

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Teachers, Language Skills, Communication, Elementary School, Friends	*An important aspect in communication is language skills that support someone in interacting with ease of perception. This study aims to examine the language skills of elementary school children in interacting with teachers and friends at SDN 1 Tambun. The research method uses qualitative research with data collection techniques in the form of observation and interviews. The findings show that most students at SDN 1 Tambun in communicating with teachers use polite and formal language, while with fellow friends they use casual and informal language. Although there are also students who still have difficulty in choosing a language so that they mix casual language and regional languages when trying to speak formally. The level of student activity in speaking is also quite diverse, there are students who actively ask and answer teacher questions in class but there are also students who tend to be passive and silent in class. In overcoming this, teachers have a strategic role to increase self-confidence and courage among students such as opening discussion spaces, telling personal experiences, informal interactions, or with a personal approach. Thus, with support from the environment and teachers, it can support the formation of students' language skills effectively and optimally.*

INTRODUCTION

Communication is one of the most essential aspects of human life. The process of interaction between individuals requires communication. It is inseparable from human existence and has become an absolute necessity. Without communication, people cannot

interact with their surroundings. Communication represents a contact relationship between humans, occurring among individuals or groups in daily life. From the moment a person is born, communication with the environment already begins. It is an integral part of the societal system and structure. In the communication process, a shared language between the communicator and the communicant is necessary to ensure mutual understanding. Language serves as a medium for humans to communicate so that both parties can send and receive messages or information. Therefore, language proficiency becomes a crucial foundation for every student as a means of communication and preparation for navigating life.

In the development of elementary school-aged children, language skills are an important aspect that must be given attention. Language, as a core tool for communication, expressing thoughts and emotions, and building social interactions (Muliyana & Wardhana, 2022), must be mastered by students to support both classroom learning activities and social interactions in everyday school life. With good language proficiency, students will find it easier to understand learning materials, engage actively in class, and build positive relationships with teachers and peers. Elementary students interact with teachers and fellow students on a daily basis, requiring them to use language effectively in these ongoing interactions. Teachers play a vital role in the learning process, so students are expected to establish good communication with teachers to support understanding and academic success. Classmates also play a direct role in students' lives, making language skills essential for peer interaction, which in turn strengthens social and emotional development and builds students' self-confidence in communication. A student is considered to have good language skills when they are able to speak in a way that others can understand. They are also able to recall and comprehend the information they hear (Udjir & Watini, 2022).

Field observations show that children's language abilities vary widely at the elementary school level. At this stage, many students still struggle to use language effectively to convey information and communicate with both peers and teachers. Not all children are able to communicate fluently due to limited language skills. This is evident from their difficulties in expressing opinions, understanding instructions, and engaging in social interactions. A study by Magdalena et al. (2021) revealed that language proficiency in the school under investigation was not yet optimal. Students struggled with listening, reading, speaking, and writing, particularly with sentences that were difficult to read. Additionally, many students were slow in processing information, showed little enthusiasm for learning Indonesian, and faced various communication barriers with both teachers and classmates. Several factors are believed to influence language proficiency, such as the home environment, communication habits practiced within the family, and the learning patterns implemented at school. Environmental and social factors are considered the two main contributors to children's language development (Muliyana & Wardhana, 2022). Therefore, this issue presents an important and interesting topic for further investigation.

Several relevant studies have been conducted, including research by Muliyana and Wardhana (2022), which focused on improving children's language skills through role-playing methods in early childhood education. This study explored ways to enhance language abilities but did not analyze the actual state of children's language proficiency. Research by Magdalena et al. (2021) examined language skills among elementary school students, with a focus on barriers to language proficiency. However, it did not provide a

detailed analysis of language use in interactions between students and teachers, or among the students themselves. Meanwhile, the study by Anjelina and Tarmini (2020) identified categories of students' speaking skills, but did not delve deeper into broader aspects of language proficiency. These previous studies reveal a research gap, which this study aims to address by providing a more detailed and comprehensive analysis of children's language abilities in the school context.

Based on the previously described background, this study aims to conduct an in-depth analysis of the language abilities of elementary school students in their interactions with teachers and peers at SDN 1 Tambun. The study seeks to explore students' activeness in speaking and communicating, with a specific focus on their language proficiency at the elementary level. The findings of this research are expected to provide an overview of language skills among elementary students and serve as a basis for developing policies related to Indonesian language instruction, particularly in communication skills.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study adopts a qualitative research approach. In qualitative research, the focus is placed on the meaning behind phenomena, emphasizing quality over quantity. Using this approach, the researcher seeks to explore students' language abilities in their interactions with teachers and peers. The research was conducted at SDN 1 Tambun, located in Tambun, Baolan, Toli-Toli, Central Sulawesi. The primary data sources in this study were obtained directly from research participants through data collection techniques, namely observation and interviews. Observations were conducted by observing students' activities during interactions. Meanwhile, interviews were carried out through structured interviews with the research participants, consisting of the fifth-grade teacher and four fifth-grade students at SDN 1 Tambun. The research findings were analyzed using the framework of Miles & Huberman, which consists of four stages: data collection, data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of the interview with the fifth-grade teacher at SDN 1 Tambun, who has been teaching the students for over a year, revealed that children demonstrate diverse language characteristics, ranging from polite speech to the use of informal, everyday language. The language abilities of students at SDN 1 Tambun also vary. The findings show that some students are able to use language effectively in communication. It is well understood that every individual must master language skills, as strong language abilities help students communicate more easily with others. Language is a key component of the Indonesian language curriculum, which is introduced at the elementary level to foster students' communication skills using language according to its functions. Language skills at the elementary level include four core areas: listening, writing, reading, and speaking. These skills must be acquired by students so that they can communicate with various parties, particularly through speaking (Anjelina & Tarmini, 2020). This study focuses on students' language abilities, particularly in how they interact with their teachers and peers at school. A study by Fernandes et al. (2024) shows that the development of listening and speaking skills in the context of English as an Additional Language (EAL) in Indonesia has a significant impact on enhancing students' critical thinking and interpersonal communication. This reinforces the importance of systematically teaching the four language skills as a foundation for 0effective communication from early education levels.

This is reflected in students who speak politely to teachers, while using informal language when interacting with their peers. However, some students still struggle to regulate their language use—for example, they may frequently lapse into regional dialects or speak casually when conversing with teachers.

Language ability is often demonstrated through students' ease in expressing their ideas and thoughts, such as during active participation in class discussions or when sharing personal experiences. Active students tend to show higher motivation to learn, as evidenced by their willingness to ask questions or respond to them.

These findings are supported by a study by Corella (2020), which revealed that variations in classroom language use, including a mix of formal and informal language, reflect students' indexical sophistication in selecting speech styles appropriate to the context. The use of regional dialects or casual styles does not necessarily indicate a lack of knowledge; rather, it may represent part of the students' linguistic identity and a way of spontaneously expressing ideas.

From this, it can be understood that students' speaking styles can change depending on whom they are speaking to. With teachers, students tend to speak politely and in a structured manner, while with peers, they are more relaxed and expressive. This is also supported by previous research (Hl, 2021), which found that in interpersonal relationships at school, students engage in formal interactions with teachers, whereas interactions with peers are more casual.

Polite utterances with respectful language are typically used by students in certain situations, such as when answering questions in class. In social relationships, students are indeed expected to use language appropriately according to the relationship with their interlocutor. This indicates that students must not only understand the language itself but also the communication norms that apply within the school environment.

In terms of gender differences and expression, it was found that at school, female students tend to be more active in answering teachers' questions, while male students are generally more boisterous but less expressive when responding. Some male students are also active in asking questions, although they occasionally go off-topic. This finding is supported by Karmila et al. (2022), who stated that gender influences learning processes, with female students showing greater confidence in asking and answering questions compared to male students.

Regarding speaking expression, teachers observed that expression is largely influenced by the students' individual characteristics. Cheerful students tend to be talkative, while shy students speak softly. Students who are socially involved in certain peer groups tend to interact and talk more than those who are more isolated in the classroom. In general, shy students often lack self-confidence in building communication and require additional support. In a supportive learning environment, these shy students begin to speak more actively when they receive encouragement from peers, such as applause or when discussing topics they are interested in (Puspitasari, 2019).

Therefore, teachers must consider appropriate personal approaches when addressing these challenges. Additionally, research by Usart et al. (2023) revealed that a positive emotional climate and collaborative learning are crucial for fostering speaking confidence, especially among students who are less socially active.

It can thus be concluded that students' speaking skills are influenced by several factors, namely self-confidence, personal character, and social environment. This is in line with the study by Putri et al. (2023), which states that the supporting factors for

students' speaking skills include three main aspects: self-confidence, home environment, and students' daily social interactions with peers.

Furthermore, another study by Siti & Ain (2024) revealed that speaking skills are influenced by both internal and external factors. Internal factors include motivation, interest, self-confidence, concentration, cooperation, and overall language proficiency, all of which have been shown to affect students' speaking abilities. External factors include the environment, social context, use of the mother tongue, and family support—all of which play a significant role.

Therefore, various research findings confirm that aspects such as self-confidence, student character, and social surroundings do indeed influence students' ability to communicate and interact at school. These findings are further supported by Almayez et al. (2025), who stated that self-efficacy and self-regulation are closely related to students' speaking confidence, while digital and social environments significantly contribute to the development of students' communication skills.

Difficulties or obstacles in the development of children's language skills generally do not stem from major issues in verbal communication, except in relation to the use of regional languages. This challenge is not necessarily due to a lack of language ability, but rather a matter of self-confidence in speaking. Some students tend to be passive because they are afraid of making mistakes when speaking.

For quiet students, teachers apply specific strategies, such as adjusting their seating position and giving them extra attention to help boost their confidence. Another effective strategy is placing these students at the front of the class and encouraging them to speak regularly, which has proven helpful.

According to Insani (2025), an effective strategy to support the language skills of shy young learners is through the application of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) theory. Shy children often struggle with speaking and experience language development delays because they are less active during learning activities. Therefore, teachers need to create a supportive space that encourages these students to feel more comfortable and confident in communication.

Additionally, Irshad et al. (2021) emphasize that social support from teachers, based on the principles of ZPD, can help shy children surpass their current capabilities and gradually develop their language skills in a safe and supportive environment.

In efforts to further enhance elementary school students' language abilities, teachers are required to take an active role in the learning process. Teachers play a vital role in creating a safe space and fostering students' confidence in speaking. They must encourage and train students to speak and to be brave in expressing their opinions in public.

Subjects such as IPAS (Integrated Science and Social Studies) and Indonesian language can serve as active platforms to build communication among students—for example, by prompting them to share personal experiences. To support student participation in speaking activities, teachers can also facilitate discussions or apply a personalized approach. Informal interactions during playtime are also important moments for language development.

Furthermore, Minh & Anh (2025) state that teachers who consistently provide support and positive responses can significantly increase students' willingness to speak and promote the use of more structured sentences during classroom interactions.

Interviews were also conducted directly with fifth-grade students to examine their

language abilities in interacting at school, both with teachers and peers. The findings from these student interviews are presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Results of Student Interviews

Nama	Keaktifan Bicara	Pelajaran Favorit	Kesulitan Komunikasi	Topik Favorit
Narasumber 1	Aktif menjawab pertanyaan, sudah tidak malu lagi berbicara	Matematika & Bahasa Inggris	Pernah malu, tapi sekarang percaya diri	Idola, segala hal saat bermain
Narasumber 2	Aktif bertanya, tidak takut bicara	PJOK & Bahasa Indonesia	Tidak ada kesulitan	Sepak bola
Narasumber 3	Cenderung pasif, takut salah	Bahasa Indonesia	Sering malu, lebih suka diam	Game online
Narasumber 4	Aktif bertanya, ketua geng	Bahasa Indonesia & Penjas	Pernah gugup tapi terus mencoba	Sepak bola, game, pelajaran

Based on the research findings, students demonstrated varying levels of activeness in speaking. Some students were active in answering questions and showed no hesitation in speaking, while others tended to be passive and afraid of making mistakes. This variation in language ability indicates that while some students are already fluent in speaking, others are still hesitant to speak.

The study also found that some students were able to use appropriate vocabulary and sentence structures, whereas others tended to use everyday language or regional dialects.

Regarding communication difficulties, several students admitted that their main obstacle in communication was a lack of self-confidence. Students who feel shy tend to remain silent rather than express their opinions. According to Insani (2025), children with shy personalities face challenges in developing language skills because they struggle to socialize effectively in their environment. Shyness creates a barrier that limits children's active participation in both social and learning contexts, thus becoming a hindrance to their language development.

The findings also revealed that some students did not experience difficulties in communication or were actively trying to overcome their shyness and nervousness by gradually building confidence in speaking and communicating. This indicates that each student faces different levels of difficulty in developing speaking skills, with self-confidence being the main contributing factor.

Putri et al. (2023) emphasized that the core challenge in students' speaking proficiency lies in their self-confidence. When students possess confidence while speaking, they are less likely to experience anxiety or hesitation when asked to present in front of the class or express their opinions, ideas, and thoughts. They also tend to speak more calmly and comfortably during classroom interactions.

Therefore, from an early age, students should be guided to develop courage and

self-confidence in order to build adequate speaking skills that support effective interaction in social settings. In addition, a study by Sülter et al. (2022) demonstrated that virtual reality-based training through the SpeakApp-Kids! program significantly reduced speech anxiety in children and increased their confidence in presentations and public speaking activities.

Efforts to encourage students to communicate and speak more actively with both teachers and peers can be carried out by engaging them in conversations about their favorite topics. Interview results with students showed that they were more enthusiastic when talking about topics of personal interest, such as their idols, football, online games, and others. These favorite topics allow students to speak at length about what they know, thereby enhancing their speaking skills.

In addition to favorite topics, certain preferred school subjects were also found to increase students' enthusiasm and engagement. Students who enjoy learning subjects such as Mathematics, English, Physical Education, Indonesian, or other subjects tend to be more interested when discussing their favorite lessons.

Furthermore, Chiu et al. (2023) emphasized that students' interest in topics aligned with their personal preferences can foster communication engagement and strengthen their academic identity through meaningful learning experiences.

Students' speaking skills and activeness must be supported by strong language proficiency. Students need to possess adequate language abilities in order to speak confidently in front of the class and communicate effectively with teachers and peers. Good language skills can serve as a foundation for developing effective speaking abilities.

The scope of language proficiency—including listening, reading, writing, and speaking—can enrich students' communication experiences. This is further emphasized by Ettenauer et al. (2025), who stated that language activities that incorporate visual and cultural elements can enhance both students' oral and written expression. Ultimately, this supports students in building effective interactions with others, both in educational settings and in broader social environments.

CONCLUSION

Language proficiency is an essential skill that should be developed by students from an early age, starting in elementary school, to build effective communication with others. In general, students at SDN 1 Tambun are able to choose appropriate language use when interacting with teachers—using polite and formal language—while they tend to use casual and informal language when speaking with peers. However, some students still struggle to distinguish between formal and informal language, and occasionally mix in regional dialects during communication.

At the elementary level, students' activeness in speaking also varies. Some students are highly active and communicate without difficulty, while others tend to be passive, shy, and lack self-confidence when speaking. Therefore, teachers play a strategic role in encouraging students' language development, particularly in building their confidence and courage to speak.

Teachers can create opportunities for students to tell personal stories, engage in discussions, and use personalized approaches by incorporating topics of interest—whether related to school subjects or non-academic themes. Through these efforts, students are expected to improve their communication and language skills more effectively.

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