

# Factors that Impact the Development of Early Childhood's Communication Competence

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This research aims to obtain empirical information about the influence of vocabulary mastery, sentence mastery, and social intelligence on early childhood communication skills; and to know the variables with the greatest impact on early childhood communication skills. This research uses a quantitative approach, a causal associative type with path analysis techniques. The research was conducted on the children of Raudlatul Athfal (Islamic education institute for early childhood) class B in Banyumas Regency, Central Java Province. Multistage sampling technique obtained 179 children for the research sample. The technique of collecting data used an oral test technique. The collected data was analysed by descriptive analysis technique and inferential analysis technique by using path analysis technique. The empirical findings of this study indicate that (1) vocabulary mastery, sentence mastery, and social intelligence have a direct positive effect on the communication ability of the children of age; (2) Social intelligence has the greatest influence on the ability of communicating in early childhood when compared to the influence of vocabulary mastery and mastery of sentence. This suggests that it will improve the communication ability of early childhood and can be done by trying to improve the three variables. The development of social intelligence can become the basis for the development of early childhood communication skills.

**Key words:** *Vocabulary mastery, sentence mastery, social intelligence, communication competence, early childhood education.*

## Introduction

Early childhood education is essentially an effort to stimulate the growth of children in all aspects of development both physically and non-physically. Among the aspects of non-physical development that became the scope of early childhood development relate to its cognitive, emotional, social, and language aspects. In relation to aspects of nonphysical development,



language is the opening of the horizon and the media of actualization of other nonphysical aspects.

Language is needed to show activities related to children's cognitive development such as showing initiative, solving problems, classifying things, sorting things, and mentioning certain symbols in life; language is also required for emotional expression. Similarly, the development of social aspects requires language for socialization and social interaction. Therefore, early childhood education activities play an important role in developing and boosting the social and language potential of children in order to perform the function of communication effectively.

Communication at the early childhood level is an interesting phenomenon. Without "special instruction" on communication, they are able to communicate in a language that other people can understand (adults). Children creatively and naturally develop communication skills.

In everyday life, children in early childhood (Kindergarten) are very active in communicating to the people around them (parents, teachers, and friends). However, there are still children who are unable to communicate. It is ineffective, very limited and not fluent, and the speech is not coherent. It indicates a problem related to communication function in early childhood.

According Lenneberg, a five-year-old child's oral communication skills have been formed completely (Purwo, 1986). Kindergarten children have communication competence in a social context (Pappas, Kiefer, and Levstick, 1995). Speech skills of children aged 5 - 6 years are almost like adults (Papalia, Olds, and Feldman, 2009). In the early childhood education standard on the scope of the development of aspects revealing language in the level of achievement of development of children aged 5 - < 6 years (Kindergarten of class B), children already on the standard can communicate effectively verbally, according to its communication function (Tim Penyusun, 2011).

In relation to the ability of early childhood communication, the question arises: what factors affect the ability of early childhood communication to the degree that there are children who fluently and actively communicate ideas and ideas, while there are also children whose communications are less effective, not coherent, and imprecise. Theoretically, there are many factors that influence the effectiveness of children in oral communication, such as vocabulary mastery, the ability to assemble words in correct sentence arrangement, social intelligence, motivation, courage, experience, social environment, and communication patterns.

The ability to communicate is of course formed through the process of learning in the life and interaction of children with the environment. In early childhood, one is experiencing very rapid development in language and social skills (Semiawan, Setiawan, and Yufiarti, 1990). Early ages are seen as sensitive and critical periods of tremendous growth in communication



(Seefeldt and Wasik, 2008). Similarly, Catron and Allen (1999) stated that one important aspect of early childhood development is the aspect of communication development.

According to Hymes, communication skills (communicative competence) always depend on the knowledge and ability to use language (Widdowson, 1989). According to Hurlock (2010) there are three main tasks for children in learning to communicate: learning to say the word, building vocabulary, and forming a sentence. These tasks describe a series of phases of child language development that starts from pronunciation, mastering vocabulary, and finally forming a sentence. Without mastering the three, children's oral communication skills will not be formed.

Keenan and Evans (2009) stated that there are four things that must be possessed by children to be able to communicate successfully verbally: first, the ability to produce sounds that form the language and convey meaning to others; second, the mastery of words in the language used; third, the knowledge of how to put the words in proper grammatical order to form the correct sentence that others can understand; and fourth, know how to effectively use the language to communicate with others.

The opinions of experts described above provide an understanding that among the aspects of language that determine the success or ability of a child's communication is the mastery of vocabulary and sentence mastery. It is, therefore, to be expected that the mastery of the aspects of language (vocabulary and sentence) affects the communication skills of early childhood.

According to Papalia, Olds, and Feldman (2009), the ability to communicate is influenced by the ability of the child to adjust his words for the audience's point of view, which is called a social word, that is, a word intended to be understood by the listener. The ability to adjust words with the perspective of a speech partner requires the ability to understand others and their context. The ability to understand others is what is called social intelligence. According to Keenan and Evans (2009), for children to communicate successfully, they must know how to effectively use language to communicate with others. An understanding of how to use the right language in communicating is, of course, part of the social dimension and occurs only within the context of social interactions.

Furthermore, according to Nunan (1998), in oral interaction or oral communication, the child needs the ability to articulate the phonological features of language comprehensively: management of stress, rhythm, intonation patterns, level of fluency in speech, transactional and interpersonal skills, speaking skills alternating between short and long talk, skills in interaction management, skills in meaning negotiation, listening skills, conversation, knowing the purpose of negotiation for conversation, and the ability to use the right conversation formula. The



Nunan (1998) view shows that the ability of oral communication is influenced by social intelligence (interpersonal intelligence).

The development and learning process of communication occurs in a social context: i.e. in a community full of people who interact with children. According to Vygotsky (in Catron and Allen, 1999) adults can help children in many ways. Vygotsky's thoughts and concepts on the social aspects of learning are called ZPD (Zone of Proximal Development). Vygotsky uses ZPD to give meaning to the level of intelligence. In his view, intelligence should be measured by what a child does with the right help; for example, by improving the way people interact with more mature people, such as parents, nearby people, teachers, and others.

In the view of Buzan (2002), socially intelligent people will use all of their strengths to communicate with and to read others. They should get an attitude that encourages others to grow, create, communicate and make friends, and they should know how to make and to keep friends.

Lwin, et.al. (2008) defines interpersonal intelligence as the ability to connect with the people around one. It is further said that interpersonal intelligence or what is termed "social intelligence," is the ability to understand and predict the feelings, temperaments, moods, intentions, and desires of others and respond appropriately. That intelligence allows one to build closeness, influence, leadership, and build relationships with society. The statement contains an explanation that communication competence is influenced by interpersonal intelligence (social intelligence).

According to Wells, social intelligence is the ability of cooperation and negotiation. The ability to be a determinant of communication success, especially oral communication is conducted through talking activities (Pappas, Kiefer, and Levstik, 1995). Communication is a social event and occurs when humans interact with other humans. Communication, as a social process, involves people and interactions. Thus, social intelligence becomes the determining factor of communication activity.

Based on the above description, this study will be focused on three variables may impact the communication competence of early childhood: vocabulary mastery, sentence mastery, and social intelligence. This study aims to know if there is correlation between influence factors and communication competence, and what variables have the greatest impact on early childhood communication competence.

## Methodology

This research uses the quantitative approach with causal associative research type. The method used was a causal model with path analysis technique. The research was conducted on the children of Raudlatul Athfal/RA (read: an Islamic educational institution for early childhood) Class B in Banyumas district of Central Java. The population of children in RA Class B is 4390 children spread over 135 RA in 21 subdistricts. Using multistage cluster sampling technique, 179 children of class B grade R as a research sample were obtained. Multistage sampling is usually used when the population is scattered over a wide area (Chauvet, 2015).

Data collection techniques use oral test techniques to obtain data about communication competence as a variable dependent, and vocabulary mastery, sentence mastery, social intelligence as independent variables. The instrument used has been qualified as a valid and reliable research instrument after thorough empirical validation. The validity and reliability values of the instruments used are 0,556 and 0,715 in mastery of vocabulary, 0,635 and 0,777 in social intelligence, 0,461 and 0,631, and communication competence 0,490 and 0,658. The researcher uses inferential analysis that is path analysis to test the significance of correlation between variables.

## Discussion

### Result

Data gained from the test was then analysed descriptively. Here is the result of descriptive analysis from the test instrument.

**Table 1:** Descriptive Statistics for Variable Data

Variables	$X_{Min}$	$X_{Max}$	$\bar{X}$	Me	Mo	S.D
Vocabulary mastery	45	61	54,4	54,50	56,00	3,80
Sentence mastery	8	20	13,9	14,00	15,00	3,32
Social intelligence	26	42	34,8	85,00	34,00	4,20
Communication competence	53	78	69,1	69,00	69,00	5,04

Based on the result of the standard deviation obtained, the data of sentence mastery is more homogeneous compared with the vocabulary mastery and social intelligence. These three factors affect communication competence, which is more heterogeneous than the independent variables. This is indicated by a larger standard deviation value. Furthermore, after the prerequisite test analysis shows normal and linear data distribution, analysis can use inferential statistical.

Based on the calculation results with the help of SPSS program version 18 obtained correlation coefficient between variables namely:  $r_{12} = 0.009$ ;  $r_{13} = 0.209$ ;  $r_{1Y} = 0.320$ ;  $r_{2Y} = 0,280$ ;  $r_{3Y} = 0.416$ .

### Calculation of Path Coefficient

Based on the calculation results with the help of SPSS program version 18, the obtained results of path coefficient calculation are presented in the following table:

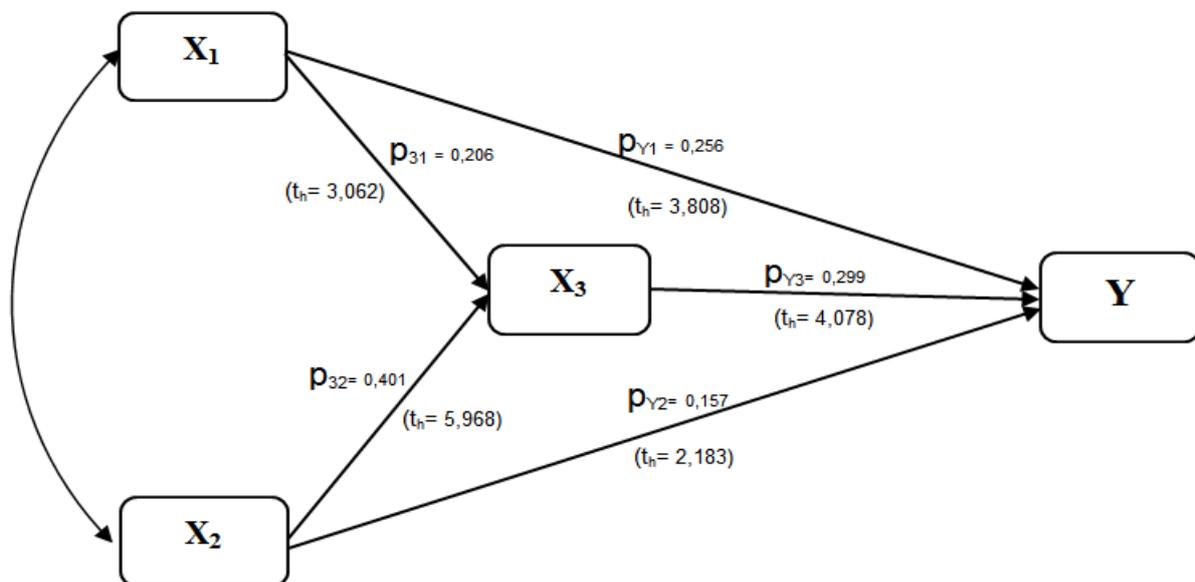
**Table 2:** Calculation Results of Substructure 1 Path Coefficient

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	34,808	5,111		6,810	,000
	X1	,339	,089	,256	3,808	,000
	X2	,238	,109	,157	2,183	,030
	X3	,359	,088	,299	4,078	,000

a. Dependent Variable: Y

The final structural model of the effect of independent variables on dependent variables with path analysis is obtained as figure 1. Based on figure 1, research got information that social intelligence (X figure 1, research got information that social intelligence (X<sub>3</sub>) have the highest impact on the communication competence  $p_{Y3} = 0,299$ , which is followed by vocabulary mastery (X<sub>1</sub>)  $p_{Y1} = 0,256$ , and then sentence mastery (X<sub>2</sub>) 0,157. Here is a results table of hypothesis test that have be done.

**Figure 1.** Final Structural Model



Based on the calculation result obtained, the path coefficient  $X_1$  to  $Y$  ( $p_{Y1}$ ) is equal to  $= 0,256$  with  $t_{count} = 3,808$  and  $t_{tabel}(\alpha = 0,05) = 1,960$ . Thus, the value of  $t_{count} (3.808) > t_{table} (1.960)$  which means  $H_0$  rejected and  $H_1$  accepted. This means there is a direct positive influence vocabulary mastery of the ability to communicate early childhood.

Based on the calculation result obtained, the path coefficient  $X_2$  to  $Y$  ( $p_{Y2}$ ) is equal to  $= 0,157$  with  $t_{count} = 2,183$  and  $t_{tabel}(\alpha = 0,05) = 1,960$ . Thus, the value of  $t_{count} (2.183) > t_{table} (1.960)$ , which means  $H_0$  rejected and  $H_1$  accepted. This means there is a direct positive influence between mastery of the sentence on the ability of communicating early childhood.

Based on calculation result obtained, the path coefficient  $X_3$  to  $Y$  ( $p_{Y3}$ ) is equal to  $= 0,299$  with  $t_{count} = 4,078$  and  $t_{table}(\alpha = 0,05) = 1,960$ . Thus, the value of  $t_{count} (4,078) > t_{table} (1,960)$ , which means  $H_0$  rejected and  $H_1$  is accepted. This means there is a direct positive influence of social intelligence on the ability to communicate early childhood.

The results of the first hypothesis test show that vocabulary mastery ( $X_1$ ) has a significant effect on the ability of communication ( $Y$ ) in early child, which is proved by the statistical test result. Increased vocabulary mastery will lead to increased communication competence in early childhood. The findings of this research empirically support and strengthen some theories or opinions of experts about the influence of vocabulary mastery on communication skills. The important role of language aspects, such as word vocabulary mastery in oral communication is expressed by Hymes and Rivers (Widdowson, 1989). In particular the urgency of vocabulary mastery in communicative activity is expressed by Finocchiaro and Brumfit (1983), Hill (2010), Clark and Clark (1977), and it is expressly stated by Achmad and Abdullah (2009) that the ability of communication is influenced by the degree of vocabulary mastery.

Furthermore, the view of the word as the centre of ideas that have to be absolutely mastered in order to communicate effectively verbally was put forward by Clark & Clark (1977), and Reardon (Liliweri, 1991). While related to many others, vocabulary will determine the quality of communication as expressed by Harris (1983), and Keraf (2007). Communication is also determined by the competence of a child in using the vocabulary expressed by Papalia, Olds, Feldman (2009), and Nunan (1998).

The findings of this study provide confirmation of the importance of the program developing the vocabulary of children from an early age. The development of a child's vocabulary adequately will have a positive effect on the child's communication skills. Therefore, the stimulation of children's vocabulary development should be done by parents and educators at institutions of early childhood education through various menu activities.

### ***The Influence of Sentence Mastery on Communication Competence***

Results of testing the second hypothesis shows that the mastery of sentences (X2) has a significant effect on the ability of communication (Y) as evidenced by the results of statistical tests. Increasing the mastery of sentences will result in an increase in the ability to communicate early childhood. The findings of this research empirically support and strengthen the theory or opinion of experts on the influence of mastery of sentences on the ability of communicating early childhood.

According to Hymes, communication competence develops depending on the knowledge and ability to use language (Widdowson, 1989). The aspects of oral communication that must be controlled by children described by Hill (2010), including syntax, is the way words join and form a sentence. The same opinion is found in Finocchiaro and Brumfit (1983), who state that in the language subsystem one of them is related to the sentence or syntax (word order). Papalia, Olds, Feldman (2009) states that the competence of children in using language to communicate is determined by their mastery of syntactical aspects. Similarly, Nunan (1998) states grammatical knowledge becomes the determinant in oral communication so it must be mastered. The same view is put forward by Reardon, who states that the process of effective communication is influenced by one's understanding of the rules of language as a communication tool embodied in the string of sentences (Liliweri, 1991). Reinforcing this point, Paulston and Brider (1976) state that language skills are determined by the mastery of sentence structures.

According to Hoff, oral communication not only requires the child to learn the words, but also learn the rules of word formation and sentence (Slavin, 2011). According to Keenan and Evans (2009) the knowledge of how to put words in the correct grammar way so as to form the correct sentence that can be understood by others will make a child able to communicate successfully. In clear language, Hurlock (2010) states that the activity of children in communication is determined by the ability to form a sentence.

### ***The Influence of Social Intelligence on Communication Competence***

Results of testing the third hypothesis shows that social intelligence (X3) has a significant effect on the ability to communicate (Y) as evidenced by the results of statistical tests. Increased social intelligence will lead to an increased ability to communicate in early childhood. The findings of this study empirically support and strengthen the theory or opinion of experts on the influence of social intelligence on the ability of communicating early childhood.

Papalia, Olds, and Feldman (2009) state that communication skills are influenced by the ability of the child to adjust his words from the audience's point of view, which is called social speech,

that is, a word intended to be understood by the listener. The ability to adjust words with a partner's point of view requires the ability to understand others and their context. The ability to understand others is what is called social intelligence. According to Keenan and Evans (2009), children can communicate successfully if they know how to effectively use language to communicate with others.

According to Nunan (1998), the oral communication activities of children require transactional and interpersonal skills (social intelligence). This is because communication is a form of social interaction and takes place in discourse and sociocultural contexts (Tarigan, 2009). In the view of Vygotsky's theory, which is also known as sociocultural theory, it is said that learning a language is a social process (Keenan and Evans, 2009). Children learn language through their interaction with adults and friends (Catron and Allen, 1999). According to Hurlock (2010) communication can't be separated from social contact because contact without communication has no meaning.

Furthermore, according to Reardon, effective communication is also influenced by grammar or language rules, as well as the ability to know others. According to Liliweri (1991) knowing others means the ability to understand the people, which involves good communication related habits, behaviours, and pleasures. In the view of Buzan (2002) socially intelligent people will use all their own strengths to communicate with and to 'read' others.

Devito said the quality of communication requires an awareness of what others do while communicating. According to Wells social intelligence means the ability of cooperation and negotiation. The ability to be a determinant of communication success, especially oral communication is conducted through talking activities (Pappas, Kiefer, and Levstik, 1995). Communication as a social process involves people and interactions.

According to Keenan and Evans (2009) one of the earliest skills that children should get in order to communicate effectively is the ability to have conversations with others. There are two requirements for an effective conversation that is the ability to attract the attention of the listener and the ability to respond appropriately to the feedback given by the listener. This opinion clearly affirms the influence of social ability for communication success. The more knowledge that can be obtained from the social interaction will increasingly develop child communication skills. Social intelligence, as a basic element of social interaction, is very influential on the ability of oral communication of children.

The final findings of the constellation model of this research are the theory of the acquisition of the language of children, learning theory or behaviourism theory initiated by Skinner, more specifically social learning theory (one of the types of learning theory of children learning theory). In addition, it also fits with the theory of social language acquisition of Bruner's social

interactionist theory (Gleason and Ratner, 1998), and Vygotsky's theory called sociocultural theory (Keenan and Evans, 2009).

In the view of the social learning theory, children acquire and develop communication skills as a result of observing and imitating others. Children learn to speak (communicate) from the observation and imitation of the people around them (social learning) (Gleason and Ratner 1998). Meanwhile, according to the social interactionist theory, involving children in social interaction becomes a vehicle for the acquisition of language which means development of oral communication skills of children. Bruner proposed the term LASS (language acquisition socialization system), as a socialization system of language acquisition. According to sociocultural theory, as stated by Vygotsky, the learning is a social process, and children gain the ability to communicate through interacting with their environment (Jackman, 2009). These three theories both emphasize the important role of socialization and social interaction in the development of early childhood communication.

Based on the above concepts, centres for social socialization and social interaction should be optimized for use in early childhood education. Social centres of socialization and social interaction such as the following should be designed and utilized optimally for the development of social intelligence-based communication skills, namely: (1) Family activities; including learning activities, studying, eating together, playing with family members, storytelling; (2) Activity in school; including in activities in play centres, play/study groups, playing in school grounds, visiting sick friends, giving assistance to orphanages, outdoor learning, roaming around school and village surroundings; (3) In the neighbourhood; including through play activities with friends around the residence, visits to friends' homes, visiting neighbours, visiting family homes, sending gifts or food to neighbors and relatives; (4) Activities in places of worship; such as congregational prayer activities in the mosque, the celebration of religious festivities.

Especially for formal institutions of early childhood education (kindergarten), there is a need to design a menu of activities (curriculum), learning strategies, media play, and a learning environment that can optimize socialization and social interaction of children. All activities are done with the principle of child learning, that is, learning while playing and playing while learning. The world of children is a world of play.

## **Conclusion**

Based on the results of data analysis, hypothesis testing, and discussion obtained the research conclusions, vocabulary mastery, sentence mastery, social intelligence directly positive effect the ability to communicate in early childhood. Social intelligence has the greatest influence on communication competence in early childhood when compared to the influence of vocabulary



mastery and sentences mastery. The implication of these findings is that early childhood communication competence can be improved by increasing vocabulary mastery, sentence comprehension, and optimizing the potential of children's social intelligence.

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