

LANGUAGE SKILLS IN EARLY CHILDREN

1st Kasmianti¹, 2nd Oyan D. Taufiq Keseng², 3th Rusli Takunas³
{kasmiatiridha78@gmail.com¹, oyan@uindatokarama.ac.id², ruslitakunas@gmail.com³}

Datokarama State Islamic University, Palu, Indonesia¹²³

Abstract. Language skills have an important role in early childhood language development. This research was conducted with the aim of identifying and explaining language skills in early childhood. The research method used is documentation, namely reviewing and researching theoretical documents that discuss early childhood language skills. From this document study, language skills in early childhood can be discovered and studied. The results of the research are that language skills in early childhood include language skills in listening, speaking, reading and writing. Each skill possessed by young children has its own characteristics according to the language abilities of young children themselves.

Keywords: skills, language and early childhood.

INTRODUCTION

Various studies explain that children or babies can hear well from the womb (Dardjowidjodo, 2015). It's not surprising that many parents have built communication through talking and telling stories to their unborn children. Not infrequently, after telling a story, the child or baby in the womb reacts with movements that express the child's or baby's reaction to their parents' conversation. As birth approaches, the child or baby's movements in reacting to conversations and stories become more intense. Until the peak, when the child or baby is born, in the Islamic religion, the parents then utter the call to prayer in the ear of the child or newborn baby. The child or baby then reacts with happy movements and cries (Getman, 2016).

In this process of growth and development, parents then intensely invite their child or baby to be actively involved in talking and telling stories. Regardless of whether the child or baby knows or not what their parents are saying or expressing. But what is clear is that children or babies are very happy with the language their parents say (Lilliard, 2019). It's not surprising that children or babies often smile to themselves and move their hands and feet when they hear stories from their parents. In fact, as the child or baby ages, the child will definitely respond to their parents' stories with cute babbling sounds. And over time, the babbling turns into a composition of simple syllables and words that have meaning and purpose. That's when people realize that children or babies always react to their parents' stories with movements and words (Montessori, 1995).

When a child turns two years old, the child can then say simple words. That's when parents usually start introducing reading books and doodling. It turned out that the children really liked it, to the point that, without our knowledge, the children were automatically able to read and write at the age of 4 – 5 years. From this, we can then identify four important children's language skills in sequence: (1) listening skills which occur when the child is still in the womb, after birth, and during the early stages until adulthood; (2) the child's speaking skills when the child is able to react to the story with babbling which then turns the babbling into language utterances that can be understood well; (3) reading skills when children are often read to intensively, in turn children can read by themselves; and (4) writing skills which start with scribbling lines until then being able to write in simple language units. From these four skills, young children then perfect their language skills. The question then is how these language skills are possessed by young children.

RESEARCH METHOD

This type of research is descriptive qualitative with a focus on document research, namely research carried out by reviewing written documents (Albi, A., & Johan, S, 2018). The documents studied and researched are reference sources that discuss language skills in early childhood. Data collection was carried out using reading and note-taking techniques (Moleong, 2021). The reading technique is carried out by reading intensively on the text or document being studied. From the document data source, after reading it, important data that will be discussed is recorded, namely data related to early childhood language skills (Muhadjir, 2020). The data that has been collected is then studied, analyzed or discussed based on theory and research results. The results of this discussion later became important findings in this research.

RESULT AND ANALYSIS

Every child definitely has different language development (Montessori, 2013). Even though they are different, children's language development always goes through four language skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing skills. These four skills will be discussed in this discussion. The language skills mastered by young children are appropriate to their stage of development:

1.1 Listening Skills

Early childhood listening skills begin when the child is still in the womb, especially in the final months before birth. Until the child is born at the age of 0-6 months, early childhood listening skills are limited to listening to speech sounds in language whose meaning cannot be understood properly (Montessori, 2016). Until the age of 12 months, children begin to understand that the language they hear has a purpose and meaning. At that time, children's listening activities are not only focused on the sounds of language speech, but begin to involve thinking activities in understanding the goals and meaning of the language they are listening to. In an effort to understand the intent and meaning, children pay close attention to the language spoken, the expressions that accompany it, and even the movements or actions that are created. This is where the listening activities carried out by children are complex and involve the child's thinking abilities (Otto, 2015).

From this, it can be identified that early childhood listening skills are children's skills in understanding speech in language units to identify the meaning and purpose of other people in speaking so that complete information is obtained. From this understanding, three important aspects can be identified in the listening skills of young children. These three aspects are explained as follows.

First, understand language utterance units. In fact, what children hear when listening are language speech sounds produced by the human speech apparatus, the form of which is language units whose combinations are letters, words and simple sentences. For example, when a child hears Mom say, "Want to eat?" So the language units that children listen to are: letter the combination of which includes /m/a/u//m/a/k/a/n/ then the word consisting of /mau//makan/ and the sentence /want to eat?/ These language units are listened to by the child carefully and children understand well so that children also have an understanding of speech sound units (language) (Richard, 2002).

Second, identify meaning and purpose. Of course, what children understand is not only the language units contained in language utterances, but also the meaning of each language unit and the purpose of the utterance expressed. For example, when Dad says, "Come on, play, son!" then the children immediately leave the house and play with their friends, then this shows that the children have understood the meaning of each word: /let's//play//kid/ and the purpose of the words is said with a unified expression. This is where it shows that young children also have the ability to identify the meaning and purpose of language units (words) spoken by someone (Salamah, 2019).

Third, get information. By understanding the units of language utterances and identifying the meaning and purpose of language utterances, overall the child understands information, namely information related to language, goals and expressions that indicate a person's goal in communicating. This is where children's listening activities can be carried out perfectly because

children are able to obtain information that will be stored and processed in children's minds (Salnita, Yulia Eka, et al, 2019).

1.2 Speaking Skills

All information in the form of language and other components will be understood well by children through listening skills. The results of all this information are stored well in the child's subconscious mind which gradually becomes the basis of the child's language competence. From this competency, children then develop speaking skills. This speaking skill begins to perfect when the child is two years old after the speech system is complete and perfect. This happens because speaking requires perfection of the speech organ system in producing language sounds produced by the speech apparatus (Ullmann, 1977).

From here, children's speaking skills contain the meaning of children's ability to pronounce or recite language units (simple words and sentences) to express simple desires and ideas. From this understanding, there are two important things that must be identified in children's speaking skills, namely: pronouncing or reciting language units in the form of simple words and sentences and conveying simple wishes and ideas, both of which will be discussed as follows.

First, pronounce language units. When a child says, "I want to eat!" then the child's speech apparatus produces speech in the form of language unit sounds consisting of the letters /a/k/u/ /m/a/u/ /m/a/k/a/n/ and the word components /aku//want// eat/ and the sentence /I want to eat!/ which is said with a typical expression. This means that when children actually speak, they pronounce language units that have meaning in the simple form of words and sentences. The language units that young children pronounce when speaking are still simple in terms of words and sentences (Marwany & Kurniawan, 2020).

Second, express desires and ideas. The language units chosen to be spoken or pronounced are not empty or meaningless language units, but are language units that have meaning. For example, when a child says, "I want to eat!" then every word that is expressed or pronounced: /I//want//eat/ are words that have meaning. And just saying words that have meaning is not enough because the words said must also be in the right structural combination (Dardjowidjodo, 2005).

Try to compare if the child says, "I want to eat!" then it will have a different meaning. Expressing words that have meaning and in the correct structural arrangement is done in order to express the child's wishes or it could also be the child's simple ideas. So when a child says, "I want to eat!" So the child conveys his desire to eat because he is hungry. But, if the child says, "it should be this picture!" So this expresses the child's simple ideas about a problem that is being solved. This is where speaking is always used as a means of expressing children's simple desires and ideas.

1.3 Reading Skills

Children's understanding and mastery of language units obtained through listening and children's ability to pronounce them are important provisions in developing reading skills. Understanding and mastery of language in listening and speaking are still abstract in the form of speech (language sounds). Through reading, language units in the form of speech are concretized in the form of written symbols (Marwany & Kurniawan, 2020).

Here, early childhood reading is a child's ability and skills in pronouncing sound symbols (language) to understand the meaning and information of a simple text. From these limitations, it can be identified that reading for early childhood is an activity that involves five important components, namely: pronouncing, symbols of language sounds, language meaning, reading information, and text as a reading resource. These five aspects are core components in understanding and positioning the reading abilities and skills of early childhood (Getman, 2016).

Of course, the reading ability of early childhood, which is often referred to as basic reading ability, is different from the reading ability of children, which is often referred to as advanced reading ability, when viewed from the five aspects above. Reading for older children is understanding sound symbols in the heart to understand and understand the meaning and knowledge of a complex text or often called discourse.

This is where reading for young children must be placed in proportion to the child's abilities. Don't let reading for young children be as demanding as for older children, who of course

have different understanding and abilities. For this reason, based on the table above, it is necessary to identify the components of reading in early childhood. The explanation is as follows.

First, pronounce language symbols. Pronunciation is an activity of saying language in the form of sound symbols. The process of a child's ability to pronounce language sound symbols will be preceded by hearing language pronunciations spoken by people around him, where the language symbol pronunciations that the child hears will be stored in the child's language conscious mind. After being stored in the child's conscious language mind, it will slowly be actualized through imitating or reciting activities by the children (Kurniawan, 2019).

For this reason, children's ability to pronounce is determined by three important things: good sense of hearing and good speech instruments, good linguistic awareness, and good language speech instruments too. This happens because the ability to pronounce language symbols is formed through the process of listening through the sense of hearing, storing the sounds of language symbols in the child's conscious language mind, and pronouncing them again using the speech apparatus.

From this, even though pronouncing language symbols is an activity of sounding written language symbols, the process will be preceded by children's ability to store language sounds. Children who often hear the sounds of language A will have the ability to easily pronounce the sounds of language A. An example can be taken, even though children can read Indonesian letters, syllables and words, if the child is asked to read foreign words, for example, English, even if you can read the arrangement of the letters, you will have difficulty pronouncing them completely. This happens because children never or rarely hear it spoken, so the pronunciation of the word has not been stored in the conscious language mind (Montessori, 1995).

Second, simple language symbols. After children have the skills to pronounce spoken language symbols obtained from the process of listening and listening well, then young children are introduced to written language symbols. Here, the pronunciation of written language symbols by young children will always start from the smallest language symbols called letters. Starting from pronouncing letters, children then begin to pronounce syllables and simple words. From these words, children can then pronounce simple word arrangements or simple sentences. From here, young children then have the ability to pronounce sound symbols as basic abilities and skills in reading. The ability to pronounce is a basic ability for young children. If young children have memorized letters, their ability to read syllables, words and even simple sentences will increase. From here, early childhood children can progress to further reading abilities (Montessori, 2013).

Third, understand the meaning of lexical language. At first, of course, letters, syllables and (written) words are pronounced or spoken by children. The symbols or symbols of written language are also perceived by children as empty language sounds. It is considered to have no meaning so children only say it. Or it could be that young children already understand that every written language symbol that is spoken has a meaning, but children cannot reach the intended meaning of the words that are pronounced. From here, either through introductions made by people around them or by direct observation, children then understand that written language symbols that are known and can be pronounced (read) simply actually have meaning. Verbally the people around him often indicated that, "Here, Dad!" "Here, Mom" or "Here, food!" From this introduction to spoken meaning, children then understand and comprehend that the language is written and can be spoken or pronounced (Otto, 2015).

Meanwhile, children understand and comprehend the meaning of the written language that is pronounced, which comes from introductions made by the people around them or through direct learning in activity books that introduce reading words with pictures, so that children understand, for example, the word "cake" followed by a picture of "cake" next to it. From here children understand and understand the meaning of words. At this stage, young children, when they have the ability to pronounce simple words, the first thing the child understands or understands is the meaning of the word, especially for concrete nouns. For adjectives or term concepts, children often have difficulty so that when they are able to read the words, children will ask, for example, "what is learning?" "what is the promise" and so on. This is where adults then help explain so that children understand the meaning of simple words.

Third, understand Simple Information. When children already have simple reading skills, and in reading children already understand the meaning of the words they read, then when they read words in a sentence system, children can also understand the information. The information is in the form of the meaning of simple sentences that provide a new understanding, which will then increase

language, "Mom is tired, I've worked all day." Early childhood children will gain an understanding of that this mother was always tired after working all day. This information will then be connected to children's direct experiences, so that through reading children will gain a lot of experience. From here, young children who already have the ability to pronounce written language (simple sentences) will be able to understand simple information (Richard, 2002).

Fourth, simple text reading sources. The question then becomes, "What do children read?" Of course the answer is "text". What kind of texts are appropriate to read for young children who are learning to read? The answer, of course, is simple text that suits children's interests and abilities. Texts like this are then referred to as simple reading sources, which are usually built in the following composition:

- 1.3.1 Simple words and sentences, consisting of one to five sentences on each page.
- 1.3.2 Each page is filled with pictures or illustrations that explain the meaning and information of each word or simple sentence.
- 1.3.3 The size of the letters is large to make it easier for young children to read them (Salamah, 2019).

With this simple and interesting text reading resource, young children are then interested in learning to read with the guidance of their parents or teachers until they can. When this is possible, children will then start to access information and experiences from simple text reading sources which will help young children improve their ability to read. These four components can be used as a basis for assessing children's reading abilities, and can also be used as a basis for developing appropriate reading methods for young children. So in the next chapter we will discuss the development of reading methods for early childhood children.

1.4 Writing skills

After reading, the language skills that fall into the written language variety are writing skills. Writing skills for young children are still basic, namely the ability to write symbols of language units (letters, words and simple sentences) with the aim of copying and conveying simple wishes or ideas. This is where early childhood writing skills refer to three important things, namely writing the symbols of language units, for copying purposes, and as a means of conveying children's experiences, desires or ideas. For greater clarity, these three things will be explained as follows.

First, write down the symbols of language units. For young children, writing is the ability to inscribe (write) symbolic units of language in the form of letters, words and simple sentences. When young children learn to write, they will learn to write letters which then form words and then simple sentences. This activity of writing language unit symbols is still basic and introductory before progressing to advanced writing skills. For this reason, the activity of writing the symbols of language units usually takes the form of simple lines which are then arranged or formed to write letters. From writing letters then the child will progress to writing syllables and words. From writing syllables and words then progressing to writing simple sentences. This is the skill of writing language unit symbols that is mastered by young children (Salnita, Yulia Eka, et al, 2019).

Second, to copy writing. Writing activities carried out by young children are usually carried out as copying or imitation activities, namely rewriting existing writing with the aim of training and getting children used to writing. Because it is imitation and practice, this copying activity is carried out repeatedly until the child has the skills to be able to write. Here it shows writing as an exercise to be able to write, not writing to convey ideas. This is where writing for early childhood is often referred to as basic or initial level writing, that is, writing for habit, not as a means of communication activities. Writing to copy is also an important means for young children to introduce writing skills. This copying activity is usually done by copying in writing and in speech (dictation). With this copying activity, children can master basic or initial writing skills well. This writing activity for copying is usually done at school and at home (Ullman, 1977).

Third, convey experiences, desires and ideas. After the child has the ability to write through copying activities, the child's writing ability will then be upgraded to writing skills to convey experiences, desires or ideas. After children are able to write linguistic symbol units well (simple words and sentences), young children are then conditioned to be able to write as a means of communication in conveying ideas in the form of experiences, desires and ideas. In the form of experiences, children can write down their simple experiences. Children also express their desires

in written language to convey to other people. If children have simple ideas, they can also convey them in writing. The writing written by young children is of course still very simple, namely just writing simple words or sentences (Ullman, 1977).

CONCLUSION

Children's language skills are always passed through four language skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing skills. Early childhood listening skills are related to internal abilities to understand language utterance units; identify meaning and purpose; and get information. Speaking skills in early childhood consist of pronouncing language units and expressing desires and ideas. Early childhood reading skills are pronouncing language symbols; simple language symbols; and understand the meaning of lexical language; and simple text reading sources. Writing skills which include writing language unit symbols; to copy writing; convey experiences, desires and ideas.

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