

A CASE STUDY OF LANGUAGE COMPETENCE IN PRIMARY SCHOOL

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ABSTRACT

Language skills are a fundamental aspect of learning at the elementary school level, including listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills. These four skills are interrelated and are important in supporting students' success in understanding and conveying information effectively. This study aims to analyze the level of language competence of grade V students of SD Negeri 007 Bonai Darussalam because language competence is a key element in language learning that supports students' ability to think, communicate, and socialize effectively. This study uses a quantitative approach with a descriptive method. This study's population is all class V students, totaling 30 people, and the data collection techniques are carried out through tests and performance assessments developed based on curriculum indicators. The data was analyzed using descriptive statistical methods to determine the average score of each aspect of language skills. The results showed that students' language competence in general was in the Sufficient category with an overall average score of 74.8. Reading skills obtained the highest score with an average of 80.5 (Good category), followed by listening skills of 76.4 (Good), 72.3 (Good), and writing 69.2 (Fair). This study concludes that students are superior in receptive skills (listening and reading) to productive skills (speaking and writing). Therefore, it is necessary to strengthen learning strategies oriented towards developing productive skills through contextual, communicative, and collaborative approaches.

Keywords: Language competence, listening skills, speaking, reading, writing, elementary school students

INTRODUCTION

Competence is a noun form of the adjective 'competent', which means capable (knowing). In linguistics, competence means the ability to master the grammar of a language unit abstractly or intrinsically. This is by DP Tampubolon's opinion that language competence is the mastery of language (in this case Indonesian) as a whole, especially grammar and vocabulary, including various meanings and nuances, spelling and punctuation marks, and word grouping. (Nursalim, 2023).

Language is a sound system used in interpersonal communication by humans to express events and processes in the surrounding environment (Nursalim, 2023). So, language competence is a person's ability to master language skills to communicate. Language plays a central role in creating a polite and civilized society. A person is said to be polite or not, determined by their attitude in language, including the tone and meaning conveyed. Using

language that follows standardized rules or is considered standard will give birth to the correct language (Tribana, 2012).

Language and communicative competence are key elements in language learning that support students' ability to think, communicate, and socialize effectively. (Maryana, D., Agustina, 2018). Language competencies provide a foundation for students to understand linguistic structures such as grammar, vocabulary, and phonology, while communicative competencies allow them to use language contextually to convey meaning. These two competencies complement each other in developing students' ability to interact productively in various social and academic situations. (Ningsih, D. A., 2020).

Research shows that mastery of linguistic competence does not always guarantee practical communicative skills. (Giyantika, 2021). Therefore, a learning approach that integrates the development of linguistic skills with communication-based activities is indispensable. (Padmawati et al., 2019). In addition, a study by (Vu Van, 2017) Found that students who had exposure to intensive learning and interaction with native speakers showed significant improvements in their communicative competencies, including discourse and linguistic abilities (Launa et al., 2022). By developing language and communicative competencies simultaneously, students are able to understand the structure of language and use it effectively in daily life. This supports their academic success and prepares them for future social challenges.

Language competence and communicative competence are essential in language learning. (Sarda, F., Effendy, U., 2020), As they help students develop the skills necessary to communicate effectively (Febrina, A. H., Asfitri, Y., Chandra, & Wijanarko, 2022). Language competence includes knowledge of grammar, vocabulary, and linguistic structure, while communicative competence involves the ability to use language in appropriate social contexts. According to (Pratiwi, I. D., & Masrul, 2021), Communicative competence consists of four main components: grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence, and strategic competence. Each component contributes to students' ability to interact effectively in various contexts. (Launa, L., Mudjiyanto, B., Nugroho, A. C., Tawaang, F., & Lusianawati, 2022). Research shows that learning that integrates these elements can improve students' communication ability. (Hidayat, 2022) And understand the social context in which language is used (Fransiska, M., & Listyarini, 2017). Understanding and applying the key elements of language and communicative competencies in learning will make students better prepared to participate in complex and diverse social interactions. (Sarika, G., & Mulyana, 2021). This improves their academic abilities and prepares them for real-world challenges. (Clarita, 2021).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Basic Concepts of Language Competence

Language competence is a set of basic skills that every student must possess to develop the capacity to think, communicate, and learn. Tarigan (2015) It is stated that speaking is the skill of conveying a message through language. This skill is part of the four pillars of language competence: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. These four skills are interrelated and form the foundation for the literacy development of elementary school students.

In addition, Halliday's functional theory provides a broader perspective on the function of language in social life. According to Halliday, language is a semiotic system that contains meaning and is used in social interaction. Santoso (2015) Writes that language is not just a means of communication, but a system of meaning constructed by language users based on social and cultural contexts. Thus, language competence includes mechanical aspects (such as the use of grammar) and the ability to understand and use language in various social contexts.

Listening and Speaking Skills

In language learning in elementary school, listening and speaking skills often receive less balanced attention than reading and writing skills. Verbal skills are an important part of effective communication. Brown (2007) Emphasized that listening skills in learning are critical because listening significantly influences speaking skills. In the communication process, listening is the first skill that develops and is the basis for developing speaking skills.

However, in learning practice, students are often more directed to memorize or answer written questions, so the experience of active listening and speaking freely becomes limited. This impacts the lack of students' ability to express opinions coherently and logically. In line with that, Ningsih and Hartati (2020) Stated that language learning that does not emphasize the oral aspect causes students to experience difficulties building two-way communication. Therefore, language learning should allow students to practice active listening and speaking in a real context.

The Influence of Mother Language on Indonesian Language Skills

Environmental factors and students' linguistic backgrounds also affect the development of formal Indonesian language skills. In regional contexts such as Rokan Hulu, students often live in a bilingual or multilingual society, where the regional language or mother tongue is used daily. Lubis and Hasibuan (2022) Revealed that children who grow up in a bilingual environment tend to experience differences in mastery of Indonesian structure and vocabulary compared to children who grow up in a monolingual environment.

This phenomenon is a challenge in learning Indonesian in elementary school. Often, students experience mother tongue interference when speaking or writing in Indonesian, both in sentence structure, vocabulary, and pronunciation. Mulyadi (2021). It was also mentioned that a strong regional language can slow down formal Indonesian mastery if the school environment is not strengthened. Therefore, teachers need to understand these dynamics and develop adaptive and contextual language learning strategies.

Integration of Literacy in Language Learning

One approach currently promoted in language learning in elementary schools is strengthening literacy. Literacy is not only interpreted as the ability to read and write but also includes the ability to think critically, understand information, and express oneself effectively. The Ministry of Education and Culture (2020) The school literacy program aims to foster a reading culture and improve reading comprehension skills in all subjects. This indicates that literacy is a shared responsibility, not only for Indonesian teachers.

Oktavia and Permatasari (2021) Examined the integration of literacy in thematic learning in elementary school and found that this approach can improve student learning outcomes, especially in reading, comprehension, and writing. They mentioned that contextual reading materials and regular reading-summarizing activities improve students' interest and language skills. Integrating literacy in language learning, especially from an early age, is critical to form students who can communicate verbally and in writing.

METHODOLOGY

This study uses a quantitative approach, which is a type of quantitative descriptive research. This approach was chosen because it is suitable for describing and analyzing the language competence of grade V students objectively through numerical data. Quantitative descriptive research aims to provide a factual, systematic, and accurate picture of students' listening, speaking, reading, and writing abilities. This approach also allows researchers to measure the extent of students' mastery of language competence through standardized and measurable instruments.

The population in this study is all grade V students at SD Negeri 007 Bonai Darussalam, Rokan Hulu Regency, for the 2024/2025 school year, totaling 30 students. Since the population is relatively small and fully accessible, the sampling technique is saturated. With this technique, all population members are used as research samples, so the results are expected to be more representative of the actual conditions.

Data was collected using two types of instruments: language competency tests and observation sheets. The test measured four aspects of language skills: listening, speaking,

reading, and writing. In the listening test, students were asked to listen to short stories from recordings and answer multiple-choice questions. For speaking skills, students are asked to orally tell stories based on pictures of the series, which are then recorded and graded. In reading, students are asked to read the text and answer comprehension questions. Meanwhile, in writing skills, students are asked to write paragraphs based on predetermined themes. Before use, the instrument is first tested for validity by two experts, and its reliability is calculated using the Cronbach's alpha formula with a minimum criterion of 0.70.

The data collection process lasted two weeks, and the test was implemented in stages. Each skill is tested at a different time so that students' focus can be maintained, especially in listening and speaking skills that require special attention. For speaking skills, voice recording is used so that the assessment can be carried out more objectively by considering pronunciation clarity, fluency in speaking, and content suitability.

The data obtained was analyzed using descriptive statistical techniques, namely by calculating mean scores, standard deviations, maximum and minimum scores, and describing the level of achievement of student competencies based on specific categories. The category scales used include: Very Good (86–100), Good (76–85), Adequate (60–75), and Less (<60). Analysis was also carried out separately for each aspect of language skills to determine which parts were most and least mastered by students. The analysis results are presented in tables and diagrams to facilitate visual understanding and interpretation of the data.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

This study aims to analyze the language competence of grade V students of SD Negeri 007 Bonai Darussalam, Rokan Hulu Regency, which includes four main skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Data is collected through tests and observation sheets based on validated instruments. Here is an overview of the instruments used:

Table 1. Language Competency Research Instrument

| No. | Language Aspects | Instrument Type | Indicators Assessed | Test Form |
|-----|------------------|-----------------------|--|-----------------------------|
| 1 | Listening | Multiple-choice tests | Understand the story's content, sequence of events, characters, and moral message. | Audio stories + questions |
| 2 | Speak | Observation sheet | Fluency, accuracy of vocabulary, sentence structure, and expression | Oral series picture stories |
| 3 | Read | Multiple-choice tests | Main idea, details, conclusion, meaning of words | Short readings + questions |

| | | | | |
|---|-------|-------------|--|-----------------------------|
| 4 | Write | Description | Paragraph structure, grammar, spelling, and idea development | Writing thematic paragraphs |
|---|-------|-------------|--|-----------------------------|

After the data collection, the researcher analyzed the scores of the four skills. The results are presented as descriptive statistics to describe the overall profile of students' language competence.

Table 2. Average Language Competency Score of Class V Students

| Skill Aspect | Highest Score | Lowest Score | Average | Category |
|----------------------|---------------|--------------|-------------|---------------|
| Listening | 90 | 65 | 76,4 | Good |
| Speak | 85 | 60 | 72,3 | Enough |
| Read | 92 | 70 | 80,5 | Good |
| Write | 81 | 58 | 69,2 | Enough |
| Total Average | 92 | 58 | 74,8 | Enough |

The table shows that overall, the average score of students' language competence is 74.8, which is included in the "Sufficient" category. This shows that the ability of grade V students to use Indonesian as a means of communication still needs strengthening, especially in the productive aspect, namely speaking and writing.

Table 3. Recapitulation of Observation Scores

| Language Aspects | Average Score | Category |
|----------------------|---------------|---------------|
| Listen | 3,2 | Good |
| Speak | 2,8 | Enough |
| Read | 3,4 | Good |
| Write | 2,7 | Enough |
| Total Average | 3,03 | Enough |

The results of language competency observations of 30 grade V students of SD Negeri 007 Bonai Darussalam showed that the students' Indonesian language skills were reasonably sufficient, with different tendencies in each aspect of skills. In the listening aspect, students obtained an average score of 3.2. In general, the majority of students can understand the content of the audio story and recognize the sequence of events, characters, and moral messages contained in the story. However, some students show a decrease in concentration when the audio duration exceeds three minutes, impacting their ability to answer follow-up questions precisely.

The average student score in speaking was 2.8. Even though students can tell stories orally, they still have doubts about speaking. Common mistakes include incomplete sentence

structure, limited vocabulary, and a lack of expression and intonation in delivering stories. Only a small percentage of students show fluency in speaking in a communicative style.

Meanwhile, reading showed the highest achievement, with an average score of 3.4. Students can identify the main idea of the reading text, answer comprehension questions, and conclude the reading content correctly. Difficulties are only found in some students who are not yet fully able to interpret the meaning of difficult words in the text, but overall, reading ability is relatively good.

In writing, students obtained an average score of 2.7, the lowest achievement among the four skills. Observations show that students still have difficulty composing coherent and cohesive paragraphs. Many incomplete sentences, errors in spelling, and paragraph structures that are not suitable are found. The ideas developed also tend to be simple and do not reflect the ability to think critically in writing.

It can be concluded that the observational results support the quantitative data, indicating that the language competence of grade V students is in the sufficient category, with receptive skills (listening and reading) tending to be better than productive skills (speaking and writing). This shows the importance of reinforcement in learning that focuses on practicing oral expression and writing skills through a more communicative and contextual approach.

Discussion

The results showed that the language competence of grade V students of SD Negeri 007 Bonai Darussalam was generally in the intermediate or adequate category, with a striking variation in abilities between receptive skills (listening and reading) and productive skills (speaking and writing). In the listening aspect, the average score of 76.4 reflects that most students can understand the story's content in general, such as characters, settings, and the flow of events. Audio media use has proven to be effective in honing students' active listening skills. This interpretation is in line with Brown's (2007) Theory, which asserts that listening is an active process in understanding and interpreting the speaker's verbal message.

In the speaking aspect, the results showed an average score of 72.3, which indicates a challenge in the accuracy of sentence structure and vocabulary usage. Field observations revealed that many students appeared nervous and lacked confidence when speaking to peers. This is reinforced by the findings of Lubis and Hasibuan (2022), This shows that the dominance of regional languages in the daily environment can hinder formal Indonesian mastery. These findings do not refute, but rather expand on previous findings, by emphasizing the importance of a more adaptive and contextual approach to oral learning in bilingual communities.

The reading aspect occupies the highest position with an average score of 80.5. Students show good ability to identify main ideas, understand explicit and implicit information, and conclude the content of the reading. This success cannot be separated from implementing the consistently running school literacy program. A study from the Ministry of Education and Culture (2020) supports this finding by stating that reading habits from an early age increase students' reasoning power and cognitive ability. Thus, the results of this study affirm the contribution of literacy programs to critical text understanding skills.

On the other hand, the writing aspect is the lowest skill mastered by students, with an average score of 69.2. Students still struggle to compose paragraphs in sequence, use proper spelling, and develop main ideas into coherent paragraphs. These findings reinforce the research results of Oktavia and Permatasari (2021), Writing learning will be more effective if it is associated with students' personal experiences and is carried out gradually. Thus, contextual approaches, such as image media or collaborative writing (co-writing), can be used as an alternative to learning to write more meaningfully.

Overall, the findings of this study contribute to the development of a comprehensive evaluation of language competence at the elementary school level, particularly in distinguishing between students' receptive and productive skills. These results provide important implications for teachers and curriculum developers to emphasize further strategies for improving students' productive abilities through structured speaking exercises, small group discussions, and varied and contextual writing assignments. The study also shows that strengthening listening and reading skills should remain a foundation in the overall development of language competence, as both have proven to be gateways to improving more complex communication skills. Thus, thoroughly assessing the four language skills is essential in detecting students' individual learning needs and designing appropriate pedagogical interventions.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the research, it can be concluded that the language competence of grade V students of SD Negeri 007 Bonai Darussalam as a whole is in the sufficient category, with an average score of 74.8, which reflects the need for improvement, especially in the aspects of speaking and writing. These findings show that although students have demonstrated relatively good abilities in receptive skills such as listening (76.4) and reading (80.5), they still face challenges in productive skills, namely speaking (72.3) and writing (69.2), especially in terms of sentence structure, vocabulary, paragraph coherence, and confidence when expressing ideas orally or in writing. Based on this view, improving language competence should focus on

implementing contextual, interactive, and practice-oriented learning strategies, such as group discussions, creative writing exercises, and speaking skill modeling, simultaneously strengthening reading and listening skills as a foundation. Therefore, this study emphasizes the importance of an integrated approach in language learning that measures comprehension and encourages students' ability to communicate ideas effectively and confidently, so that students' Indonesian language competencies can develop comprehensively and sustainably.

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