

The role of teachers in the development of verbal communication in elementary school students

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Abstract: *This study evaluates students' verbal communication skills, identifying the efforts and roles of teachers at SDN Cijambe Tengah. Using a qualitative case study, data were collected through observation, semi-structured interviews, and documentation involving 6 teachers and 36 students selected purposively. Data were analyzed using the Interactive Analysis Model. Findings indicate that students' verbal communication skills vary widely, reflecting diverse family socioeconomic backgrounds. Teachers stimulate these skills through emotional approaches, storytelling, small group discussions, and equitable support to eliminate the dominance of active students. In conclusion, findings indicate that teachers fulfill important roles as facilitators, motivators, counselors, and humanistic role models. Their efforts demonstrate the potential to transform communication anxiety into self-confidence, while aligning language development with the formation of students' moral character both at school and at home.*

Keywords: *teacher role; verbal communication; elementary school*

Introduction

The development of digital technology and globalization has significantly impacted the morals and attitudes of elementary school students. Fundamentally, elementary school age is a critical period for developing verbal communication skills, the ability to convey ideas, emotions, and social etiquette through spoken language, which requires active guidance from teachers as humanistic role models. However, social media is now easily accessible to children and has become an integral part of their lives (Irawati et al., 2026). Elementary school students today are very dependent on the internet, where they tend to spend their time with gadgets, thus shifting children's activities from studying to just playing (Agung et al., 2019). Exposure to digital content that is not properly filtered will certainly trigger poor verbal communication between teachers and students (Akar & Yapıcıoğlu, 2025). This condition is made worse by the economic factors of families in the research area which are prone to triggering aggressive behavior, as well as the pedagogical approach of teachers in schools which tends to be monotonous and insensitive to psychological, cultural and frame of mind obstacles of students (Putri et al., 2025). Based on the results of observations at SDN Cijambe Tengah, the majority of students in both upper and lower grades consistently use coarse Sundanese language in communication activities and interactions with peers and when speaking with their teachers and parents.

The existing literature on student communication development generally falls into three distinct categories. First, much research focuses primarily on the effectiveness of learning methods or models in improving general speaking skills (Elvira et al., 2020; Hernawati, 2025; Yani & El Widdah, 2025). Second, substantial research has investigated the isolated impact of digital devices and social media on children's social interactions (Difa & Suriani, 2024; Mujazi et al., 2025).

Third, few sociolinguistic studies have examined local language preservation without linking it to modern digital vulnerabilities. Consequently, a significant academic gap remains, as empirical evidence rarely integrates the role of elementary school teachers as sociolinguistic curators who contribute to the decline in communication quality under three simultaneous pressures: social media exposure, family economic constraints, and a shift in dominance toward coarse regional language registers. The scholarly novelty of this article lies in conceptualizing teachers' adaptive strategies to mitigate these diverse verbal communication barriers through a contextual communicative approach, specifically focusing on the distinct socio-cultural characteristics of elementary school communities in suburban areas (Nanan & Atanan, 2025; Setren, 2025).

Based on these critical issues, the primary research problem explores specific interventions needed to mitigate students' linguistic degradation in a suburban setting. This study is guided by two primary research questions: (1) How do teachers at SDN Cijambe Tengah strategically conceptualize and implement their roles to address poor verbal communication and the widespread use of coarse Sundanese among digitally challenged and economically vulnerable students? and (2) What socio-cultural barriers do teachers face during these interventions? Answering these questions is urgent; leaving unmonitored digital exposure and socio-economic pressures unchecked during primary education risks normalizing aggressive communication behaviors, which can permanently hinder students' academic integration and moral development in the future. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to analyze and describe the adaptive roles and intervention strategies of teachers in fostering students' verbal communication at SDN Cijambe Tengah, while simultaneously identifying actionable solutions to the socio-cultural barriers encountered in the field (Armita, 2023).

Method

This qualitative research employed a case study design to analyze the roles and adaptive strategies of teachers in developing students' verbal communication skills at SDN Cijambe Tengah, Sukabumi Regency, Indonesia. Purposive sampling was used to select participants who directly understand and implement moral and linguistic development at the school, comprising 6 teachers and 36 students from grades 1 to 6. Data were collected through non-participant classroom observations, semi-structured interviews in private settings, and documentation of the learning process. To ensure the trustworthiness of this qualitative research, the researcher established credibility through source triangulation and cross-checking data from observations, interviews, and documents, as well as member checking with participants. Reliability and confirmability were maintained through a detailed

audit trail of the raw data, research journals, and discussions with colleagues to avoid personal bias.

Following the Interactive Model by Miles and Huberman, data analysis proceeded simultaneously through three interrelated phases: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. In the reduction phase, raw field notes from observations and interviews were selected, focused, and categorized based on themes relevant to teachers' roles, economic influences, and communication barriers. The reduced data were then presented using descriptive narratives and a thematic matrix to map interaction patterns. Finally, tentative conclusions were formulated and continuously verified against triangulated data sources to generate robust and contextually valid insights into how teachers mitigate the degradation of verbal communication and the use of offensive language in digital environments (Punch & Oancea, 2014).

Results and Discussion

Field data collected at SDN Cijambe Tengah outlines how the school environment and teachers interact with students' pre-existing verbal backgrounds. Based on non-participant classroom observations, the verbal communication skills of the 36 students sampled showed significant variation across grades 1 through 6. This variation manifested itself in their ability to express opinions, fluency of articulation, and responsiveness during learning activities. Observations and interviews with classroom teachers indicated that domestic and family socioeconomic backgrounds were the primary contributors to suboptimal verbal skills and the widespread use of offensive Sundanese. Teachers noted that students from economically disadvantaged households or home environments lacking positive language filtering tended to adopt more aggressive or offensive communication habits. A lower grade teacher (Teacher A) shared this challenge during an interview:

"Students in the lower grades often enter class using offensive language they hear at home or from social media on their gadgets. Their vocabulary is very limited, and some struggle with clear articulation due to the lack of reinforcement of polite language at home."

In contrast, upper-grade students face different communication barriers, primarily rooted in social anxiety and peer influence. An upper-grade teacher (Teacher B) noted:

"In higher grades, the challenges shift. Students don't necessarily lack vocabulary, but they fear being judged by their peers. They often use slang or vulgar language commonly used by peers to gain social acceptance, and they struggle to formulate reasoned arguments when asked to speak formally."

To address these multiple barriers, teachers at SDN Cijambe Tengah implemented several interrelated teaching strategies focused on interactive communication. First, teachers used storytelling to enrich vocabulary and practice pronunciation. Second, the implementation of small group discussions was observed to distribute communication opportunities more evenly.

Furthermore, classroom teachers integrated the concept of scaffolding by actively intervening to break the conversational dominance of highly vocal students over passive students. Observations showed that teachers intentionally distributed speaking opportunities

to passive students while providing direct and non-threatening guidance. These structural efforts were carried out in conjunction with personal and social counseling, employing an emotional approach to foster a receptive learning climate. Teachers also use positive reinforcement, such as praise and direct appreciation, whenever students attempt to communicate honestly and respectfully

At the institutional level, these teacher-led strategies are reinforced by a structured school culture program. Within the framework of elementary school guidance, teachers function beyond delivering instruction, operating as counselors, facilitators, key collaborators with parents, and humanistic role models whose daily communication styles are constantly observed by students.

Tabel 1. Summary of Findings: Theoretical and Practical Implications of the Role of Teachers at SDN Cijambe Tengah

Discussion Theme	Main Findings	Supporting Theory/Research	Implications
Social Environment and Verbal Communication	Students' verbal communication is influenced by social environment, family background, and sociolinguistic competence. Teachers shape students' communication habits and character through modeling.	Sociolinguistic competence helps students adapt language appropriately in social interactions. Teachers act as role models influencing students' behavior and communication patterns.	Positive school and home environments contribute to better verbal communication and character development.
Teacher as Communicator	Teachers play an essential role in developing students' speaking skills through interaction and guidance. Good verbal communication supports self-expression and social acceptance.	Demirkol & Aytaş (2023) explain that verbal communication enables children to express needs and gain social acceptance.	Teachers' communication practices directly influence students' speaking confidence and moral behavior.
Influence of Socioeconomic Factors	Students from low educational and economic backgrounds tend to show weaker verbal communication skills.	Abdul-kareem Kadhim & Sahib Mehdi Mohammed (2021) highlight the relationship between social class and communication quality.	Teachers need to provide additional communication support for students from disadvantaged backgrounds.
School Culture Programs	School culture programs help instill positive verbal communication habits and social adaptability.	Guidance services in elementary schools emphasize personal, social, learning, and career development.	Classroom teachers become facilitators, counselors, and evaluators of student behavior and communication growth.
Emotional Approach in Counseling	Teachers address communication problems through emotional and social counseling approaches.	Stevens (n.d.) states that emotional relationships create positive classroom climates and openness among students.	Emotional support increases students' confidence in expressing opinions

Discussion Theme	Main Findings	Supporting Theory/Research	Implications
			and improves teacher-student relationships.
Variation in Verbal Communication Skills	Students' verbal communication abilities vary across groups depending on articulation, fluency, and responsiveness.	Vygotsky's sociocultural theory and Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) emphasize social interaction in cognitive and verbal development (Massa, 2024; Sage, 2022).	Active teacher guidance is necessary to stimulate verbal communication development in elementary students.
Family and Home Environment	Aggressive home environments and poor language culture negatively affect students' communication. Positive parenting enhances communication fluency.	Riggio (2024) explains that communication skills are socially constructed and influenced by environmental interaction.	Collaboration between school and parents is essential to support communication development.
Storytelling Strategy	Teachers use storytelling to improve articulation, vocabulary, listening, and moral understanding.	Storytelling supports language development and communication skills (Kurudayioğlu et al., 2021; Yekeler Gökmen, 2025).	Storytelling is an effective strategy to stimulate students' verbal participation and moral character.
Small Group Discussion	Group discussions encourage active student-centered communication and idea exchange.	Siegel et al. (2024) found that collaborative learning improves communication competence.	Interactive learning activities increase confidence and verbal interaction among students.
Teacher as Agent of Change	Teachers function as facilitators, mediators, counselors, motivators, and role models.	Social learning theory by Bandura explains that students imitate behaviors observed from teachers (Feri & Husna, 2022).	Positive teacher behavior contributes to the development of polite and empathetic communication habits.
Scaffolding in Communication Development	Teachers provide feedback, guidance, and equal speaking opportunities for students.	Scaffolding theory emphasizes guided support in skill development (Ghadiri et al., 2024).	Equal participation reduces dominance among active students and develops passive students' confidence.
Challenges in Developing Communication	Lower-grade students face vocabulary and articulation issues, while upper-grade students struggle with confidence and argumentation.	Positive reinforcement encourages repeated positive verbal behaviors (Mantasiah et al., 2021).	Humanistic and interactive teaching approaches help reduce communication anxiety and improve confidence.
Character and Communication Development	Verbal communication development is closely linked with moral and character education.	Teachers' consistent modeling shapes students' empathy, politeness, and social behavior.	Effective teacher roles produce cognitively intelligent students with strong moral character both at school and at home.

The empirical findings from this case study demonstrate that elementary school students' verbal communication skills are not simply a product of biological or innate development, but are fundamentally developed through systematic interactions with their social environment. The marked variations in communication quality observed across student demographics underscore the profound impact of family socioeconomic status and domestic language culture on early childhood linguistic competence. Suboptimal verbal habits and the adoption of aggressive or abusive language registers among disadvantaged student groups align with the pragmatic framework identified by Abdul-kareem Kadhim and Sahib Mehdi Mohammed (2021), who link socioeconomic vulnerability and lower parental education levels with a higher prevalence of aggressive linguistic choices. This domestic basis is further exacerbated by unmonitored digital exposure and reliance on gadgets, which shift children's habits from structured learning to uncontrolled media consumption (Agung et al., 2019; Kurudayıoğlu et al., 2021)

Therefore, developing sociolinguistic competence—the ability to distinguish and use appropriate language registers depending on the conversation partner and context—requires deliberate pedagogical intervention. As Demirkol and Aytaş (2023) point out, professional verbal communication is crucial for children to express their needs, formulate their identities, and gain broader social acceptance. At SDN Cijambe Tengah, the classroom teacher's strategic implementation of an emotional approach through personal and social counseling appears to have significantly reduced these barriers. This strongly aligns with the principles of social-emotional learning outlined (Stevens, n.d.), who argues that fostering an empathetic teacher-student dynamic creates a safe psychological climate, encouraging students to overcome communication anxiety and express their opinions more openly.

Viewed through Lev Vygotsky's sociocultural learning theory, variations in students' verbal abilities reflect their distinct placement within the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), where cognitive and linguistic development is highly dependent on structured social interactions (Massa, 2024; Sage, 2022). Elementary school students' verbal abilities first emerge at the interpersonal level through social communication before becoming internalized components of individual thinking (Panggalo et al., 2026). In this study, the active implementation of storytelling and small group discussions served as operationalizations of these social interactions. Storytelling provides a strong linguistic foundation by expanding vocabulary and refining articulation while instilling moral values (Kofinti, 2025; Kurudayıoğlu et al., 2021; Yekeler Gökmen, 2025), while peer-centered small groups optimize collaborative competence and natural dialogue (Siegal et al., 2024).

Furthermore, observations of teachers practicing equitable scaffolding by intentionally distributing speaking opportunities address a key challenge in elementary school language education: the dominance of active students' conversations over passive ones. By providing targeted cues, feedback, and structural modeling, teachers effectively support passive students' linguistic participation (Ghadiri et al., 2024; Kongthanajindasiri et al., 2025). This strategy is closely related to the consistency of positive reinforcement. When teachers consistently use praise or validation for polite communication, these positive verbal behaviors are associated with a higher likelihood of repetition and retention (Mantasiah et al., 2021).

Ultimately, this research demonstrates that the role of teachers in elementary school culture extends far beyond simply imparting knowledge. By utilizing expressive and instrumental social capital, teachers function as direct agents of change (Marshman & Opheim, 2025). This transformative process is profoundly explained by Albert Bandura's social learning theory, which states that children acquire broad behavioral and linguistic structures through continuous observation and imitation of models in their immediate environment

(Feri & Husna, 2022). When teachers consistently demonstrate gentleness, care, and sociolinguistic rigor, students absorb these behavioral frameworks (Rahman et al., 2023). Therefore, the development of verbal communication is closely linked to the development of character and morals, resulting in a lasting linguistic shift that students carry from the school environment back home.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this qualitative case study at SDN Cijambe Tengah demonstrates that the verbal communication skills of the 36 sampled students exhibit significant variation. These communicative capabilities do not develop automatically; rather, they are profoundly shaped by social environmental stimulation, individual backgrounds, domestic parenting patterns, and students' developmental positioning within the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). To address this diversity, classroom teachers regularly implement consistent, interactive interventions. These include storytelling methods to enrich vocabulary, small group discussions to stimulate the exchange of ideas, and the application of a fair scaffolding framework to mitigate the conversational dominance of active students over passive ones. Furthermore, integrating emotional approaches through personal and social counseling, reinforced by positive feedback, appears to play a vital role in transforming students' communication anxiety into self-confidence. Ultimately, these repeated, structured interactions foster positive linguistic habits, indicating that verbal communication development in elementary school students seamlessly aligns with the holistic formation of their moral character and identity.

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