CHILDREN'S LANGUAGE ABILITY IN PRIMARY SCHOOL FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF SOCIOCULTURAL THEORY

Iis Komariah[1*], Silvi Wulan Munggaran[2], Ani Siti Anisah [3], Sopa Siti Marwah[4]
[1, 2, 3, 4]Teacher Education of Madrasah Ibtidaiyyah, Garut University, Garut, Indonesia
email: silvi@uniga.ac.id, sitianisah@uniga.ac.id

Abstract: Language skills in elementary school children play a crucial role in their cognitive and social development. Various language development theories have been proposed to explain how children acquire and develop their language abilities. One approach that provides valuable insight into this context is the sociocultural theory introduced by Lev Vygotsky. This theory emphasizes the importance of social interaction in children's language development, with a particular focus on the role of social and cultural environments in shaping their language skills. This article reviews the language abilities of elementary school children from the sociocultural theory perspective, referencing recent literature (2020-2025) to provide a deeper understanding of the dynamics of language in the context of children's education.

INTRODUCTION

Language is one of the fundamental aspects of a child's development, particularly in the context of education. The language abilities of elementary school-age children have a significant impact on all aspects of learning, including skills in reading, writing, speaking, and listening (Yusuf, 2022). In the process, the development of a child's language abilities is not only determined by cognitive factors but also by the social and cultural context in which the child grows and learns (Syihabudin & Ratnasari, 2020). One theory that comprehensively explains this is the sociocultural theory proposed by Lev Vygotsky.

Vygotsky (1978) explains that language development cannot be separated from social and cultural interactions (Kurniati, 2025). Language develops through social processes involving reciprocal relationships between individuals and their social environment (Undari, 2023). One of the key concepts in this theory is the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which refers to the gap between a child's current ability, which can be achieved independently, and the ability that can be developed with guidance from an adult or a peer. In this context, the strategy of scaffolding, which involves providing temporary support tailored to the child's needs, plays a crucial role in facilitating the development of language skills (Suardipa, 2020).

Moreover, the concept of internalization also serves as an important pillar in sociocultural theory. Vygotsky explains that children internalize knowledge and skills, including language, through meaningful social interactions. Therefore, language learning is not solely focused on linguistic structures, but is also influenced by social processes and the values surrounding them (Hariana, 2021). In the context of education in Indonesia, the language ability of elementary school children is greatly influenced by the social and cultural environments in which they grow. Research indicates that social factors, such as classroom interactions, local culture, and the use of technology, significantly contribute to children's language development. However, in practice, there are still challenges in optimally integrating the principles of sociocultural theory into language learning at the elementary level. In reality, many teachers still emphasize the mechanical aspects of language learning, such as memorization and grammar, rather than meaningful social interactions. This leads to suboptimal language development, especially in multicultural classrooms or bilingual areas (Afifah et al., 2024).

A crucial factor supporting the language ability of elementary school children is social interaction in the classroom. Li (2020) reveals that communication between teachers and students, as well as among students, has a significant impact on language development. Teachers play the role of learning mediators by providing scaffolding through guidance on using language correctly and effectively. In line with this, Wang et al. (2021) found that student engagement in group discussions and cooperative learning enriches vocabulary and language comprehension through peer support.

In addition to the process of social interaction, another determining factor is the influence of culture in language learning, which cannot be overlooked. Pritchard (2020) shows that in collective cultures, such as those commonly found in Asia, children tend to acquire language skills through more intensive interactions with adults and their community. In Indonesia, the diversity of regional languages and local cultures also influences the language development of children in elementary schools. Santoso's (2022) research notes that children raised in bilingual or multilingual environments show a faster improvement in language skills because they are accustomed to interacting in various language systems.

The role of technology in language learning also becomes an important aspect in today's digital era. The use of learning applications, interactive media, and digital platforms provides children with opportunities to access various language resources. Chen's study (2023) shows that the use of interactive applications can significantly improve children's vocabulary and language structure comprehension. However, in line with sociocultural theory, direct interaction must remain the primary component of language learning, as it is through social interaction that children gain meaningful understanding.

The application of sociocultural theory in language learning at the elementary school level has significant implications for educational practices. Teachers need to create a conducive learning environment that is rich in social interactions and cultural values. Some strategies that can be implemented include: (1) facilitating group discussions that encourage the exchange of ideas among students to enrich vocabulary or language comprehension; (2) providing scaffolding tailored to the students' skill levels to promote

independent learning; and (3) appreciating cultural diversity, especially in the context of multicultural classrooms, so that students can understand language in a broader cross-cultural context.

Based on the above discussion, this article aims to analyze the language abilities of elementary school children from a sociocultural theory perspective, focusing on the interactions between children, teachers, peers, and their social and cultural environments. Referring to recent findings, this article identifies key factors influencing children's language development in a social context and its implications for language learning at the elementary school level.

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative descriptive approach. In this approach, the collected data is presented in the form of narratives or verbal descriptions, rather than numerical data or statistics. The analysis is carried out by presenting the conditions or phenomena being studied in detail and depth through a narrative explanation (Mustafa, 2022; Huda, 2024; Husna, 2024). The method used in this research is a literature review. A literature review is an analytical method conducted by searching for and examining the findings of previous studies. The process of literature source search was conducted through Google Scholar, with the topic limited to the language ability of elementary school children from a sociocultural perspective (Fitri, et al., 2024).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION
Sociocultural Theory and Its Relevance to Child Language Development

As discussed in the 2022 article Education Research International, the sociocultural theory of Vygotsky highlights several key concepts, including the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) and scaffolding. ZPD refers to the gap between a child's current developmental level, specifically their ability to complete tasks independently, and the potential level of development that can be achieved with the assistance of a more competent individual (Campos et al., 2022). Scaffolding, in this context, refers to the flexible and adaptive support provided by teachers, parents, or peers to help learners complete tasks and develop independently. This support is not a fixed structure but is adjusted according to the learner's progress, with the primary goal of guiding them toward independence (Campos et al., 2022).

The concept of scaffolding also includes collaboration among learners of similar abilities, known as collective scaffolding. This approach emphasizes the importance of social interaction as a key mechanism in cognitive development, particularly in second language learning, where interactions between more skilled and less skilled learners, or among peers, form the foundation for higher-level language development (Campos et al., 2022).

According to the article Understanding Socioculturalism in Early Childhood Education: Current Perspectives and Emerging Trends, the sociocultural approach in early childhood education stresses the importance of social, cultural, and historical contexts in children's development and learning. This theory, rooted in Vygotsky's thinking, posits that a child's cognitive processes are shaped through active participation

International Conference on Teaching and Learning Proceeding
Faculty of Education and Teacher Training – Universitas Terbuka
UTCC, South Tangerang, Banten, May 15th 2025
Vol. 1, No. 1, pg. 329 – 336
ISSN: 3046-594X

in social practices and communication with adults and peers (Bernard, 2024).

In this context, the teacher acts as a mediator in creating a collaborative learning environment that is responsive to cultural diversity and rich in meaningful interactions. Learning is viewed not only as an individual process but as a product of social construction influenced by the norms, values, and habits of the community in which the child is situated. Therefore, the implementation of this approach requires educators to understand the cultural backgrounds of their students, build partnerships with families, and integrate inclusive, contextually relevant educational practices (Bernard, 2024).

Sociocultural theory, as explained in the context of education, emphasizes that learning and cognitive development do not occur separately from the social and cultural environments in which children grow. This theory, rooted in Lev Vygotsky's ideas, stresses the importance of social interaction, language, and cultural practices as the foundation for children's knowledge formation (Zhou, 2024). Children are viewed as active individuals constructing their understanding through participation in meaningful social activities, with support from more competent adults or peers through the mechanism known as scaffolding. The Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) is central to this approach, where the most effective learning occurs when children are guided to complete tasks they cannot yet do independently (Zhou, 2024).

In practice, educators play the role of facilitators, designing a collaborative learning environment that is sensitive to cultural contexts and encourages active child engagement through dialogue and exploration. Therefore, the sociocultural approach not only acknowledges the cognitive potential of individuals but also values the contributions of the social and cultural environment in supporting a holistic learning process (Zhou, 2024).

Language Ability of Elementary School Children

The language development of elementary school children cannot be separated from the social and cultural context in which they grow and interact. Language is not merely a symbolic system; it is also a primary tool in the process of internalizing social and cultural values that shape children's thinking and behavior (Fitri et al., 2024). The sociocultural theory proposed by Lev Vygotsky (1978) emphasizes that cognitive and language development occurs through social interaction, where children acquire knowledge through dialogue and guidance from more competent individuals. In this regard, social interaction becomes the primary means for children to gradually build language structures through the zone of proximal development (ZPD) and scaffolding strategies (Fitri et al., 2024).

Children who actively interact with adults and peers will develop listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills more quickly because they are exposed to the varied and meaningful use of language in real-life situations (Fitri et al., 2024). Furthermore, culture plays a role as a framework of meaning that shapes the content and direction of language use. Communication patterns within a culture—both verbal and nonverbal—affect how children understand sentence structure, vocabulary, and speaking styles. In a study by Fitri, Neviyarni, and Zen (2024), it was found that local cultural context has a significant influence on children's language development. Children raised in cultures that support verbal expression and value dialogue tend to have better language competence than those growing up in more verbally restrained cultures. Therefore, language development is not

only due to biological or cognitive factors but also the result of cultural socialization processes that occur in daily life (Fitri et al., 2024).

Sociocultural Context and Its Influence on Language Development

The language development of elementary school children is not solely determined by biological aspects, but is significantly influenced by the social and cultural context in which the child grows. Social interactions between children, teachers, and peers play a central role in the formation and acquisition of language. Teachers, as the primary facilitators of learning, not only transfer language knowledge but also provide a communication environment that enables children to explore language structures functionally in various academic and social situations. Meanwhile, peers contribute through spontaneous, natural, and contextual everyday communication, which indirectly trains children to use language in various forms and for different communication purposes (Dalimunthe et al., 2024).

In this regard, the Indonesian language serves as a primary tool for building interpersonal relationships, conveying ideas, and solving problems collaboratively. A study by Dalimunthe et al. (2024) emphasizes that the success of language mastery is highly influenced by the active role of the environment, particularly in the school context, where children interact socially. Interaction with teachers provides a good and structured language model, while interaction with peers strengthens the pragmatic understanding of language (Dalimunthe et al., 2024). Both roles work in tandem to support the development of abstract and logical thinking in children, which, in turn, enhances their ability to understand and use language in a complex and effective manner. Therefore, teachers and peers are not only communicators but also social agents who contribute to the linguistic and cognitive maturation of children within the cultural framework and values of their environment (Dalimunthe et al., 2024).

In the sociocultural context of elementary education in Indonesia, the bilingual approach has proven to be an effective strategy in developing language skills, particularly in English, for elementary school students (Afifah et al., 2024). For example, research conducted at SDN Sumberrejo Banyuwangi demonstrates that the integration of the first language (L1), which is Indonesian, with a structured bilingual approach, combined with the use of technology as an interactive learning medium, can improve students' learning motivation and English language proficiency (Kurniati, 2025). Technology, such as learning apps, interactive videos, and online learning platforms, expands children's opportunities to be exposed to various languages, enrich their vocabulary, and understand language structures in a contextual and enjoyable manner (Safira, 2023).

Implications and Strategies for Sociocultural-Based Language Learning

There are challenges in the implementation process, particularly regarding the contrast between mechanistic versus interactive learning approaches. In practice, language learning in elementary schools still predominantly relies on a mechanistic approach focused on memorization and repetition. This approach tends to overlook the essential social and cultural contexts in the development of children's language competencies (Erviana & Mustadi, 2016). In contrast, the interactive approach, which emphasizes students' active participation in their social and cultural environments, has

proven to be more effective in enhancing language skills. According to research by Erviana (2018), the use of socioculturally based learning tools significantly improves student learning outcomes compared to traditional approaches (Erviana & Mustadi, 2016).

To address these challenges, it is necessary to implement learning strategies that integrate group discussions, scaffolding, and local culture. Group discussions allow students to interact and share perspectives, enriching their understanding of language content. Scaffolding, or gradual support from the teacher, helps students overcome learning difficulties and achieve a deeper understanding. The integration of local culture into language learning not only enriches the content but also enhances student engagement. This suggests that using learning materials based on local wisdom through language games can increase students' interest and speaking skills in elementary schools (Komalasari et al., 2018).

Recommendations for Teachers in Elementary School Classrooms

Teachers play a central role in implementing sociocultural-based language teaching strategies. Several recommendations for teachers include developing contextualized learning materials, where teachers are encouraged to design instructional content that is relevant to the social and cultural environment of the students, thus making learning more meaningful (Purnawanto, 2022). In addition, teachers are advised to apply interactive teaching methods, such as group discussions and language games, to promote active student participation (Nurul Adha et al., 2025). Integrating local wisdom into language learning is also crucial, as it can enhance student engagement and understanding (Salshabilla Humayra et al., 2025). Furthermore, teachers should provide appropriate scaffolding, offering support tailored to students' needs to help them overcome difficulties in language learning (Sarudipa, 2020

CONCLUSION

The language ability of elementary school children cannot be separated from the social, cultural, and interactive contexts that occur in their daily lives. From the perspective of the sociocultural theory proposed by Lev Vygotsky, children's language development heavily depends on meaningful social interactions through the mechanisms of scaffolding and the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). Interactions with teachers, parents, and peers serve as the primary foundation in developing language competence, which includes listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills. Socioculturally based language learning emphasizes the critical role of teachers as facilitators, cultural mediators, and creators of a collaborative and contextual learning environment. Learning activities that integrate group discussions, scaffolding, and local cultural elements have been shown to enhance student motivation, engagement, and language skills. Recent studies indicate that interactive, real-world-based learning strategies are more effective than the mechanical approaches that are still dominant in some elementary schools. Thus, the application of a sociocultural approach in language learning at the elementary level significantly contributes to both linguistic and cognitive development. The practical implications suggest that educators must understand students' cultural backgrounds, develop contextualized teaching materials, and create learning environments that

facilitate dialogue, exploration, and collaboration among students. This aligns with the goals of language education, which not only focuses on mastering linguistic structures but also fosters the development of critical thinking skills, empathy, and effective communication competencies in a multicultural society.

REFERENCES

Adha, N, S., Akbar, H., & Gusmaneli, G. Jurnal Pendidikan Dan Bahasa. Efektivitas Penggunaan Strategi Pembelajaran Dalam Meningkatkan Kualitas Pembelajaran di Sekolah Dasar. 2(2):145-155.

Afifah, L. nur, Pradana, D. A., Anwar, S., & Pambayun, R. N. (2024). Integrating A Bilingual Approach To Improve Second Grade Students' English Language Scores At Sumberrejo State Elementary School. English Language Teaching Methodology, 4(2), 254–262. https://doi.org/10.56983/eltm.v4i2.1535

Bernard, M, D. (2024). Journal of Coulture, Society and Development. Understanding Socioculturalism in Early Childhood Education: Current Perpectives and Emerging Trends. 73: 16-29.

Dalimunthe, J., Rahmadani, N., Dzaki, A., Kurtanto, E., & Sholeh, M. (2024). Jurnal Ilmiah Pendidikan Dasar. Analisis Faktor-Faktor Pendukung Pemerolehan Bahasa Pada Anak. 09(04):321-333.

Erviana, V. Y., & Mustadi, A. (2016). Pengembangan Perangkat Pembelajaran Tematik-Integratif Berbasis Sosiokultural Bagi Siswa Kelas 1 Sd Serayu. Jurnal Prima Edukasia, 4(2), 222. https://doi.org/10.21831/jpe.v4i2.8970

Fitri, E, T., Neviyarni, N., & Zen, Z. Jurnal Ilmiah Pendidikan Dasar. Perkembangan Bahasa Anak Sekolah Dasar: Kajian Literatur. 9(3): 95-108.

Hariana, K. (2021). Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory Constructivism in Art Education. In EJ: Education Journal (Vol. 2, Issue 1). http://jurnal.fkip.untad.ac.id/index.php/eduj

Kurniati, E. (2025). Teori Sosiokultural Vygotsky untuk Anak Usia Dini (Vol. 1, Issue 1).

Purnawanto, T, A. (2022). Jurnal Ilmiah Pedagogy. Perencanaan Pembelajaran Bermakna dan Asesmen Kurikulum Merdeka. 20(1): 75-94.

Safira, R. (2023). Student Scientific Creativity Journal. Dampak Kemajuan Teknologi Pada Pendidikan Bahasa Indonesia. 1(3):54-62.

Salshabilla Humayra, N., Futry Ananti, H., & Murdianingsih, A. (2025). Integrasi Teori Pembelajaran Bahasa untuk Penguatan Pembelajaran Abad ke-21 dalam Konteks Pendidikan Bahasa Indonesia. 5(1), 2808–148. https://doi.org/10.54082/jupin.549

Sarmiento-Campos, N. V., Lázaro-Guillermo, J. C., Silvera-Alarcón, E. N., Cuellar-Quispe, S., Huamán-Romaní, Y. L., Apaza, O. A., & Sorkheh, A. (2022). A Look at Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory (SCT): The Effectiveness of Scaffolding Method on EFL Learners' Speaking Achievement. Education Research International, 2022. https://doi.org/10.1155/2022/3514892

Suardipa (2020). Proses Scaffolding Pada Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) dalam Pembelajaran. 4(1):79-92.

Syihabuddin, A, S & Trisna Ratnasari. (2020). Jurnal Belaindika. Model Pembelajaran Bahasa Indonesia Yang Efektif Pada Anak Usia Sekolah Dasar. 1(1): 21-31.

Undari, M., Neviyarni., & Desyandri. Jurnal Ilmiah Pendidikan Dasar. Perkembangan Bahasa, Intelektual, Emosi, dan Interaksi Sosial Pada Anak Sekolah Dasar. 9(1):1412-1429.

Wulandari, E., Putri, A, I., & Napizah, Y. (2022). Jurnal Tonggak Pendidikan Dasar. Multimedia Interaktif Sebagai Alternatif Media Pembelajaran Berbasis Teknologi. 1(2):109-115.

Yusuf (2016). Perkembangan dan Pemerolehan Bahasa Anak. 11(1): 40-60.

Zhou, X. (2024). Sociocultural Theory in Early Childhood Education. Lecture Notes in Education Psychology and Public Media, 51(1), 190–196.