

## **The Role of Parents and Teachers in Communication Skill Development of Students with Intellectual Disability and Speech Delay (A Case Study at State Elementary School Junrejo 02 Batu)**

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**Abstract:** Parent and teacher hold an important role in children's communication development. Both of them have a time to spend with the children, parent almost take a whole time with their children in the home while teacher has a mean time in the school. The method used is qualitative methods of case study research. Collecting the data, doing an interview, observing, and documenting was used as main instrument. The steps to do a data analysis was reducing data, presenting data, and drawing the conclusions. Meanwhile, the data validation used the triangulation technique (technique triangulation and source triangulation) and member check. It showed that parent and teacher's effort were to provide a two-way communication stimulus in the end.

**Keywords:** parental efforts, teacher's role, intellectual disability, speech delay, communication

### **INTRODUCTION**

Intellectually disabled people are individuals whose intelligence levels are significantly below the average intelligence level of normal children in general. This kind of condition leads the intellectually disabled individuals to lack two or more adaptive skills, such as social skills, communication skills, self-care skills, daily life, and so forth. The American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (AAIDD, 2012) defined mental retardation as significant limitations, both in intellectual functioning and in adaptive behavior, which cover many social and practical skills in daily life. According to the 4th edition of Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorder (DSM-IV), there are three criteria of intellectual disability, namely intellectual ability below average (IQ<70), impaired adaptive function, and occurs before the age of 18.

According to Kustawan (2016), children with intellectual disability has intelligence level that is significantly below the average, and generally, they are unable to adapt and control their behavior during development phase. Below-average intelligence level leads the individuals to have academic barriers in such a way that they require curriculum modifications to suit their conditions and needs. According to Efendi. (2009), a person is considered to be intellectually disabled if: (a) lacks social skills, (b) is mentally disordered, (c) his intelligence development is obstructed and not doing well (since birth or at a young age), and (d) immature.

From the description above, it can be concluded that a person is considered to be intellectually disabled

if his intellectual development is below the average of normal children. In general, he also lacks adaptive skills, such as communication skills, self-care skills, social skills, and so forth.

Children with speech delay cannot learn to speak at the age when they are supposed to be able to speak and have significantly below-normal communication skills compared to children of his age (Leung, 2010). Speech delay might commonly occur in children, but it can also be a disruption in their skill development. Speech delay might be a symptom of various conditions, such as intellectual disability, hearing loss, expressive language disorders, psychosocial deficiency, autism, elective mutism, receptive aphasia, and cerebral palsy. Speech delay might be lifelong and lead to a communication disorder in the future (Campbell, et al, 2003). Speech delay will have a serious impact on the personal, social and academic development of children if they did not get proper early intervention.

All parents and teachers have to be aware that the aspects of communication that must be emphasized to children are not only speaking; children need to know, get used to and apply all aspects of communication as early as possible, especially children with speech delay. There is a possibility that they will lose their verbal communication skills. Parents and teachers are microsystems that are very essential in children's development. According to Santrock (2015), microsystems are a strong and very influential system for the development of children; they consist of parents and teachers as well as the quality and quantity of parenting.

Humans are social beings who cannot live alone and always want to interact or relate to other people. Every human being has their own curiosity, especially about their surroundings; therefore, humans need to interact and communicate with others to satisfy their curiosity. By having interaction and communication with others, humans try to realize what is in their thoughts, feelings, and to fulfil their needs with the outside world. It can be done well if humans give and capture messages during the communication process.

According to Santoso (2006), social communication consists of two or more individuals who have had sufficiently intensive and regular social interactions; therefore, among the individuals, there is already a division of tasks, structures, and certain norms. Social communication occurs since we were born and continues, as said by Adler & Rodman (1985), "... communication is truly continuous, an ongoing process". Certainly, the communication process that occurs between babies, children, and adults is not the same because they have the respective stages.

Regardless of their level of development, the types and degrees of barriers they have, for all children, interaction and communication are fundamental things that they should have in order to learn and develop their skills. Good language skills are one of the main preconditions for success in school (Mamisevic, 2013). Development occurs simultaneously in all areas of development which are interrelated and influence each other.

Speech delay will lead intellectually disabled children to have difficulty in conveying what they feel or think. Communication obstacles which are experienced by children with intellectual disability include delays in the emergence of initial language, lack of vocabulary, lack of ability to compose sentences, phonological disorders, low frequency of communication, lack of language goals, and barely using language as they are playing.

Speech delay obstructs children's sensory-motor development and perceptual-motor skills as well, because speaking and language skill is closely related to the motor system, which is regulated by the central nervous system. Children who experience speech delays at an early age should get intervention as soon as possible in the form of therapy. This is a preventive action during their growth and development stage.

Child development is influenced by several factors, including genetic factors, health status or nutrition, interactions between parents and their child, as well as interactions between environment and child. Children's growth and development in the golden age period will determine their learning skills in the future (Baker-Henningham & Boo, 2010). According to Martini (2012), the golden age period is critical for children's development, which includes physical development,

cognitive development, emotional development, and also social aspects. Language development begins gradually, which occurs during the first 3 years of life (Kolb and Bryan, 2009).

Intellectually disabled children with speech delay requires more stimulation than the normal ones, especially early stimulation. Early stimulation is a series of activities that stimulate the basic development of children to provide early experience so that children can grow up well (Christiari, et al, 2013). In developing countries, there are four risk factors that affect children's development, namely chronic malnutrition, iron deficiency anemia, iodine deficiency, and lack of early stimulation or absence of early stimulation (Baker-Henningham & Boo, 2010).

Based on a preliminary study which was conducted at State Elementary School Junrejo 02 Batu, the shadow teachers and class teachers revealed that there is one intellectually disabled student with speech delay, so that he had difficulty in communicating. The results of the assessment that had been carried out by the school, assisted by several professionals, showed that SMH (8 years old) had mild intellectual disability with speech delay due to prenatal causes (caused by abnormalities during his mom's pregnancy). Prenatal causes include congenital infections, such as cytomegalovirus, toxoplasmosis, herpes, syphilis, rubella and human immunodeficiency virus, prolonged maternal fever in the first trimester, exposure to anticonvulsants or alcohol, and untreated maternal phenylketonuria (PKU) (Stromeme & Hagberg, 2007).

SMH, who is currently in grade II, can already say a few words well even though it is a little unclear, such as 'mom', 'sister', and 'eat'. Previously, SMH never convey his wishes by mentioning it, but now he starts to say what he wants; for example, when he is asking for milk, SMH will say 'u u'. However, his cognitive abilities are still extremely low; he does not know and memorize letters and numbers well. His motor skills, both gross motor skills and fine motor skills, are also still very low. His wrists, both left and right, are stiff (spastic) so that it is difficult for him to use his hands; for example, to write, wear shoes, sweep the floor, wipe the table, and so forth.

When the researchers conducted preliminary studies at SMH's home, SMH's parents explained that SMH does not only lack communication skills, but also in other aspects, such as cognitive and motor development. SMH has been obese since he was baby, and he gained weight drastically every month. He started to lose weight when he started to learn walking, approximately when he was 2.5 year old.

Even though he had several obstacles, SMH is highly motivated in learning. He always gets excited when going to school and learn reciting Quran.

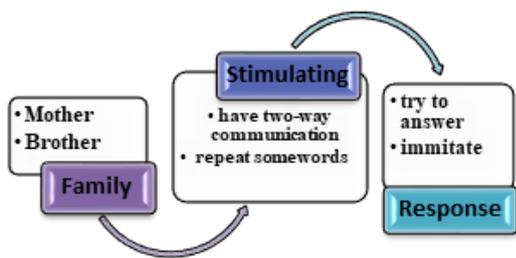


Figure 1. Parents’ effort to stimutale SMH’s communication skills

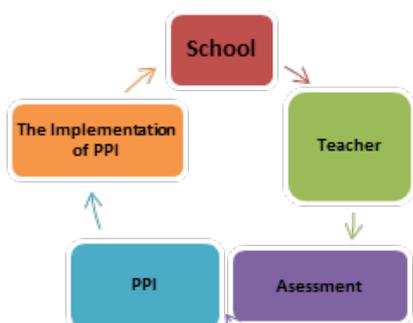


Figure 2. Teacher tasks

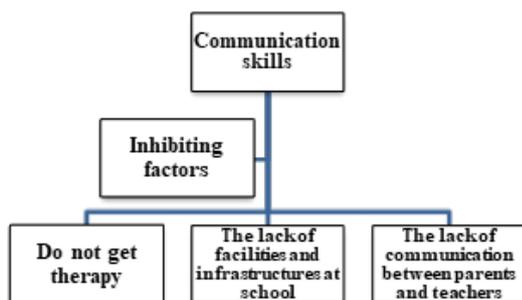


Figure 3. Factors affecting SMH’s communication

He is able to focus his attention for about 5 minutes and understand verbal commands. SMH is more interested in pictures, so it’s easier for him to grab information or learning material that has more pictures.

**METHOD**

This research used qualitative research methods, and the type is case study. Qualitative research is a research method which is used to examine the conditions of natural objects, in which the researcher becomes the key instrument. The data was collected using triangulation method (combination). After all of the data had been collected, it was then analysed inductively. The results of qualitative research emphasize meaning rather than generalization (Sugiyono, 2014). Basically, qualitative research is observing people in their environment or other social phenomena, interacting with them, trying to understand their language, and expressing their opinions about their surroundings.

According to Yin (2015), in general, case study is a method that will be good to be used if the main question of a study is ‘how’ or ‘why’, if the researcher has little opportunity to control the events to be investigated, and if the research focuses in contemporary phenomena (present) in the context of real life.

**FINDING AND DISCUSSION**

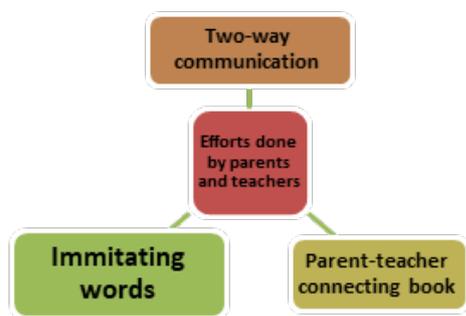
**Finding(s)**

There is not much SMH’s parents can do to help him develop his communication skills. Usually, his parents, especially his mother, stimulate his communication skills even though SMH was only mumbling and answering unclearly, and she ended up guiding SMH to repeat several words after her; for example, ‘mom’, ‘brother’, ‘sister’, ‘eat’ and so forth. Apart from his mother, the one who usually stimulates SMH’s communication skills at home is his brother. They are only 1 year apart, so when they play together, they often fight over toys. More details are presented in the figure 1.

Apart from parents, teachers also have an important role in the development of SMH’s communication skills, because teachers know the conditions and abilities of students. Almost similar to what parents do to stimulate SMH’s communication skills, the teachers also try to have two-way communication with him, encourage him to sing together, ask him to repeat some words after them and pronounce the words correctly. However, previously, the school facilitated SMH to have assessments with professional staff. Based on the results of the assessment, the teachers designed an individual learning program (PPI) which focused on SMH’s communication skills. More details are presented in the figure 2.

Based on the findings, apparently, there are two main factors that lead SMH to lack communication skills. The first one is because SMH did not get the therapy as suggested by the assessment that has been done previously, and the second one is the lack of facilities and infrastructure owned by the school. The lack of communication between parents and the school, especially teachers, is also influential. The factors that lead SMH to lack communication skills are presented in the figure 3.

In order to improve the development of SMH’s communication skills, parents and teachers are frequently stimulating him by asking simple questions and guiding SMH to pronouncing letters or words properly.



**Figure 4. Attempts to improve SMH's communication skills**

## Discussion

Parents have a very important role in the growth and development of children, because the first and foremost environment in a child's education is family, especially parents. According to Solihat (2005), communication in the family is expected to create interaction, exchange knowledge, opinions, experiences and so forth. In family, a child gets affection, build habits, life values, adopts the behavior of his parents, and understands that he is responsible of his behavior.

As communicating with his family members, both with his mother and sibling, he frequently acts as a respondent rather than the initiator of a communication. If he is stimulated to communicate verbally, SMH gives a good response by trying to answer, although he is only trying to speak unclearly and using body language, such as nodding and shaking his head. When he initiates communication or conversation, SMH will hold the person he is talking to and saying 'aa aaa' or showing something.

The results of a research which was conducted by Mainizar (2013) concluded that family members, especially parents, play a very important role in fostering and developing children's language skills, so that children will be able to communicate actively and effectively in their school life, both with their friends or fellow students and teachers. In order to support children's language development, parents can pioneer and laying language foundation for children, give motor training, get their children used to communicate using language, maintain, supervise children's language, prevent their children from talking disrespectfully, and develop their children's language skills.

According to Usman (2010), teaching and learning process contains a series of actions conducted by teachers and students on the basis of reciprocal relationships that take place in educational situations to achieve certain goals. The reciprocal relationship between teachers and students is the main requirement for teaching and learning process to take place.

At school, SMH frequently acts as respondents rather than initiator of communication, both with teachers and with friends or fellow students. Even his seatmate frequently initiates communication with SMH compared to the class teachers, for example by greeting, raising questions, and singing together, or even just high five. SMH respond any form of communication well; he is always trying to answer verbally, even though it is not clear. Occasionally, SMH initiates communication with the teachers when submitting assignments, and when his friends do not pay attention to him because they are working on assignments, SMH will say 'aa aa'.

The results of a research which was conducted by Khoiriyah, Ahmad, and Fitriani (2016) showed that parents should follow the stages of child development, so that they can detect speech delay symptoms occur in their children, and teachers can find the right strategy in overcoming speech delay.

The communication skills of SMH cannot develop well because his parents in did not frequently stimulate SMH to have verbal communication, and his school lacks supporting facilities and infrastructure; for example, the source and learning media that can help and support teaching and learning process. Those are the factors that made the services provided by the school are not optimal. In addition, the communication skills of SMH cannot develop well due to the lack of communication between his parents and teachers regarding the development of his skills, so that his parents do not have knowledge of his progress at school, and his teachers do not know his progress at home.

The efforts made by teachers at school will not have maximum result on the children if it is not implemented by parents at home, and vice versa. According to Graham-Clay (2005), communication with parents is one of the six forms of parents' involvement in order to encourage parents to cooperate well with teachers. Communication between the school and parents is highly required to involve students in the learning and teaching process. Meanwhile, according to Symeou, Roussouni and Michaelides (2012), parents and teachers usually share information and ideas of student development, both at school and home.

The involvement of parents in the teaching and learning process can increase and improve children's grades, attendance at school, build good attitudes and behavior. It is in line with the finding of a research which was conducted by McCarthy, Brennan, and Vecchiarello (2011) which shows that when teachers and parents have a good relationship or cooperate well, the children's academic and social achievement will improve.

In order to foster their children's communication skills, parents and teachers should try to stimulate

children to have two-way communication frequently. The quality of communication between parents and teachers can be improved by making use of parent-teacher connecting books. This book records the activities and skill development of children at school; therefore, it is expected to help parents and teachers have good communication.

Parents and teachers have an equally important role in the development of children's communication. They should have good communication and synergy. Palts and Kalmus (2015) stated that communication creates social systems that form networks to support students.

A research which was conducted by Palts and Kalmus (2015) proved that communication between parents, teachers and community (such as other family members, school employees, etc.) plays an important role and leads to progress in the academic and social skills of elementary school students. Meanwhile, a research which was conducted by Suryadi (2010) found that children's communication with parents and teachers in their respective environments has a positive effect on the development of their creative thinking skills.

Parents and teachers need to respect each other. Parents should be open-minded and willing to accept suggestions from teachers, and vice versa. According to Padmonodewo (2003), teachers who consider parents as partners, who are important in children's education, will appreciate parents, be more open, and cooperate well. By having a good relationship with parents, it will be easier for teachers to prepare the learning programs that suit the conditions and needs of the child.

## CONCLUSION

Parents and teachers have a very important role in the development of children's communication skills, because parents and teachers are the most influential and the people to children. Therefore, parents and teachers also need to have good communication to discuss children's conditions and design the most suitable and appropriate learning programs for the children, especially for the development of their communication skills.

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