atthufulah
Early Childhood Education Journal
10.35316/atthufulah.2026.v7i1.19-30
[Vol. 7 No. 1] | October 2026
P-ISSN : 2745-6838
E-ISSN : 2745-682X

COMMUNICATION SELECTIVITY IN EARLY CHILDHOOD

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ABSTRACT
Communication selectivity in early childhood may occur when children's verbal participation varies across social contexts; therefore, limited speech at school does not necessarily indicate a general language disorder. This study aimed to identify factors associated with communication selectivity and to improve a child's communication performance through structured classroom interventions. Classroom Action Research was conducted in two cycles consisting of planning, action, observation, and reflection. Regular classroom activities involved 21 Group B children at Nurul Huda Galeso Kindergarten, while the individual intervention assessment focused on one child who consistently demonstrated communication selectivity. Data were collected through observation sheets, field notes, and documentation and analyzed using qualitative description and simple quantitative percentages. The intervention included interactive play, small-group communication, an individual teacher approach, open-ended questioning, interactive storytelling, and positive reinforcement. Communication achievement increased from 30% in the pre-cycle to 55% in Cycle I and 75% in Cycle II, thereby meeting the predetermined 75% success criterion. Qualitatively, the child produced longer verbal responses, maintained more stable eye contact, participated more actively in group interaction, and began to initiate brief conversations. The findings indicate that gradual, psychologically safe, and child-centered support can improve context-dependent verbal participation in early childhood classrooms.

Keywords: Communication Selectivity; Early Childhood; Verbal Participation; Classroom Action Research; Learning Intervention

ABSTRAK:
Selektivitas komunikasi pada anak usia dini dapat muncul ketika partisipasi verbal anak berbeda menurut konteks sosial, sehingga keterbatasan berbicara di sekolah tidak selalu menunjukkan gangguan bahasa umum. Penelitian ini bertujuan mengidentifikasi faktor yang berkaitan dengan selektivitas komunikasi dan meningkatkan kemampuan komunikasi anak melalui intervensi pembelajaran yang terstruktur. Penelitian menggunakan Penelitian Tindakan Kelas dalam dua siklus yang meliputi perencanaan, tindakan, observasi, dan refleksi. Kegiatan kelas melibatkan 21 anak kelompok B di TK Nurul Huda Galeso, dengan penilaian intervensi individual difokuskan pada satu anak yang secara konsisten menunjukkan

selektivitas komunikasi. Data dikumpulkan melalui lembar observasi, catatan lapangan, dan dokumentasi, kemudian dianalisis secara deskriptif kualitatif dan kuantitatif sederhana. Intervensi meliputi bermain interaktif, komunikasi kelompok kecil, pendekatan individual, pertanyaan terbuka, cerita interaktif, dan penguatan positif. Hasil menunjukkan peningkatan capaian komunikasi dari 30% pada pra-siklus menjadi 55% pada Siklus I dan 75% pada Siklus II, sehingga mencapai kriteria keberhasilan 75%. Secara kualitatif, anak menunjukkan respons verbal yang lebih panjang, kontak mata lebih stabil, partisipasi kelompok yang meningkat, dan mulai menginisiasi percakapan. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa dukungan bertahap, aman, dan berpusat pada anak dapat membantu meningkatkan partisipasi verbal yang bersifat kontekstual.

Kata Kunci: Selektivitas Komunikasi; Anak Usia Dini; Partisipasi Verbal; Penelitian Tindakan Kelas; Intervensi Pembelajaran

Received: May 05, 2026 *Revised: August 13, 2026* *Accepted: September 01, 2026* *Published: October 20, 2026*

INTRODUCTION

Early childhood education provides an important foundation for cognitive, social, emotional, and language development. Communication competence is particularly important because it enables children to express needs, participate in learning, and establish social relationships. Preliminary observation in Group B at Nurul Huda Galeso Kindergarten showed variation in children's verbal participation during classroom activities.(Hendarmin (1992:11), 2010) Most children responded verbally in routine interactions, while some showed hesitation in large-group situations and needed teacher prompts to speak. One child displayed the most consistent pattern of communication selectivity: the child was reported to communicate actively at home but remained markedly quiet at school, rarely initiated conversation, avoided sustained eye contact, and tended to respond nonverbally or with very short answers. This broader classroom pattern indicates that communication participation is shaped by the interaction between individual characteristics and the social demands of the learning environment.(Ridwan, 2022)

Early childhood communication develops through meaningful social interaction. From a sociocultural perspective, language is both a tool for thinking and a means of participating in social life. Vygotsky's framework emphasizes that children develop higher communication competence through dialogue with adults and peers and through scaffolding that is adjusted to their current level of ability.(Dian Desmufita Sari, 2023)

In the present context, gradual teacher support is therefore relevant for children who are verbally capable but hesitant to communicate in particular social settings.Communication

selectivity may also be associated with children's emotional regulation, self-confidence, and perceived psychological safety. Children can speak more freely when the interactional context is predictable and supportive, whereas unfamiliar or evaluative situations may increase hesitation. Consequently, communication selectivity should not automatically be interpreted as a language deficit; it may represent a contextual pattern in which verbal participation changes across people and settings.(Sosial, 2019)

The classroom environment can strengthen or reduce such hesitation. Supportive teacher-child relationships, opportunities to communicate in small groups, and non-threatening prompts can facilitate verbal participation. In addition, positive reinforcement can strengthen emerging verbal behavior when it is provided consistently and without pressuring the child.(Siti Aminah & Anita Mauliyah, 2025)

These principles are directly relevant to the intervention used in this study.Participatory learning also provides children with repeated opportunities to use language for authentic purposes. Small-group interaction can reduce the social pressure of speaking before the whole class, while open-ended questions allow children to formulate responses according to their own experiences. Interactive storytelling can further stimulate verbal responses because children can comment on characters, events, and familiar situations.(Indalika & Razak, 2025)

Previous studies have shown that supportive classroom interaction, storytelling, and teacher reinforcement can improve children's speaking participation. However, much of the existing literature discusses language development or communication skills at the group level.(Fanani et al., 2024) Studies that focus on a child whose verbal participation differs markedly between home and school contexts and that document change through reflective classroom action remain limited. This gap is important because teachers need context-sensitive strategies that can be adjusted according to the child's responses during everyday learning.(Muna & Ridwan, 2025)

Accordingly, this study focuses only on intervention components that were actually implemented: interactive play, small-group communication, an individual teacher approach, open-ended questioning, interactive storytelling, and positive reinforcement. The study does not evaluate music-based or formal role-play interventions. This alignment between theoretical rationale and classroom action is intended to provide a clearer explanation of how the intervention may support communication participation.(Parasdyapawitra, 2020)

The novelty of this study lies in the cyclical integration of these low-pressure, classroom-based strategies for communication selectivity in an authentic early childhood education setting. Rather than merely identifying contributing factors, the study uses teacher reflection across two action cycles to modify the learning environment and document behavioral change in a focal child while maintaining the natural peer context of the class.(Wala & Herlin Misliani, 2025)

Based on this gap, the study addresses two questions: (1) what individual and contextual factors are associated with communication selectivity in the focal child at Nurul Huda Galeso Kindergarten, and (2) how does the child's communication performance change after structured classroom interventions are implemented across two action cycles?(Susanti, 2018)

The objectives of the study are therefore to identify the factors associated with communication selectivity in the focal child and to improve the child's communication performance through structured, supportive, and reflective classroom interventions. The findings are expected to provide a practical reference for early childhood teachers in responding to context-dependent communication difficulties without prematurely labeling them as general language disorders.(Idamayanti et al., n.d.)

METHOD

This study employed Classroom Action Research using the cyclical model of planning, action, observation, and reflection. The study was conducted in Group B at Nurul Huda Galeso Kindergarten. (Faris & Lestari, 2016)Twenty-one children aged five to six years participated in the regular classroom activities, while the intervention and individual communication assessment focused on one child who consistently demonstrated communication selectivity. The remaining children functioned as the natural peer environment during the intervention.(Lanita Enggarati, 2025)

The study consisted of a pre-cycle assessment and two action cycles. In Cycle I, the teacher implemented interactive play, small-group communication, an individual approach, and open-ended questioning to reduce communication pressure and increase opportunities for verbal response. (Musthofiyyah et al., 2025)Reflection on Cycle I indicated that verbal participation had improved but remained dependent on teacher prompting. Therefore, Cycle II strengthened the previous strategies by adding interactive storytelling and more consistent

positive reinforcement. All actions were embedded in routine classroom learning so that the child remained in a familiar and natural setting.(Dini & Buton, 2026)

Communication performance was observed using five indicators: (1) verbal responses to teacher questions, (2) participation in group discussion, (3) willingness to speak before the class, (4) eye contact during communication, and (5) initiative in starting a conversation. Each indicator was rated on a four-point scale, producing a maximum total score of 20.(Bustomi, 2024) Field notes and documentation were used to complement the observation sheet and to describe changes in classroom behavior across the cycles.(Tukly et al., 2025)

Data were analyzed using descriptive qualitative and simple quantitative techniques. Qualitative analysis was used to interpret changes in verbal behavior, interaction, confidence, and participation based on observation notes and classroom documentation.(Fitriani & Yuliani, 2016) Quantitative achievement was calculated using the formula: achievement percentage = (obtained score / maximum score) × 100. The pre-cycle, Cycle I, and Cycle II percentages were then compared to identify the magnitude and direction of improvement.(Nurkharisma et al., 2021)

The success criterion for the classroom action was set at a minimum communication achievement of 75%. (Bahri, 2018)The action was considered successful when the focal child's total score across the five communication indicators reached at least 75% and the qualitative observations showed more consistent verbal participation with reduced dependence on direct teacher prompting. Data credibility was strengthened through triangulation of the observation sheet, field notes, and documentation.(Hasanah & Sumarni, 2025)

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings show a progressive improvement in the focal child's communication performance across the pre-cycle and two action cycles.(Trisiah, 2019) The quantitative achievement increased from 30% in the pre-cycle to 55% in Cycle I and reached 75% in Cycle II. Thus, the overall gain from the initial condition to the end of Cycle II was 45 percentage points, and the predetermined success criterion of 75% was achieved.(Kemampuan et al., 2026)

Qualitative observations supported the quantitative pattern. In the pre-cycle, the child rarely initiated conversation, frequently relied on nodding or head shaking, used very short verbal responses, and showed limited eye contact. (Risyidah, 2016)These behaviors were

most evident in teacher-led or whole-class situations, although information from the family indicated more active communication at home. The contrast reinforces the contextual nature of the communication difficulty.(Inten, 2017)

In Cycle I, interactive play, small-group communication, an individual teacher approach, and open-ended questions were introduced. The child began to answer questions verbally and participated occasionally in peer discussion. Eye contact became more consistent, but the voice remained soft and responses still required encouragement. These changes corresponded with an increase in achievement to 55%, indicating meaningful progress but not yet meeting the success criterion.(Adi et al., 2022)

Cycle II retained the supportive strategies and added interactive storytelling together with consistent positive reinforcement. The child began to answer in simple sentences, raise a hand on some occasions, maintain eye contact for longer periods, respond to peers, and initiate brief conversations. The achievement percentage reached 75%, meeting the action-research success criterion.(Sulhijjah et al., 2025)

Table 1. Communication Skill Achievement across Research Stages

Research Stage	Achievement Percentage
Pre-Cycle	30%
Cycle I	55%
Cycle II	75%

The progression from 30% to 55% and then 75% suggests that improvement occurred gradually rather than immediately. (Nurhaliza et al., 2025)The 25-percentage-point increase in Cycle I indicates that reducing social pressure through small-group interaction and individualized teacher support created an initial sense of safety for verbal participation. The additional 20-percentage-point increase in Cycle II indicates that interactive storytelling and consistent reinforcement helped stabilize and extend the child's verbal responses.(Psikologi et al., 2024)

These findings are consistent with a sociocultural view of language development in which communication competence is strengthened through guided social interaction.(Oxianus Sabarua & Mornene, 2020) The teacher's gradual prompts and the presence of peers provided scaffolding that enabled the child to participate beyond the level shown during the pre-cycle. The result also supports the use of positive reinforcement as a means of strengthening

emerging verbal behavior when it is applied in a supportive rather than coercive manner.(Lucy Ardiati, 2021)

The improvement observed during interactive storytelling is also consistent with research showing that storytelling can support children's speaking skills by providing meaningful content for verbal response (Hasanah & Sumarni, 2025). Similarly, participatory communication in small groups provides opportunities for children to express ideas with lower social pressure than whole-class interaction (Bustomi, 2024). In this study, these strategies were effective because they were combined and adjusted reflectively across the two cycles rather than applied as isolated activities.(Wahyudi et al., 2024)

The findings should nevertheless be interpreted carefully. Communication performance in early childhood is influenced not only by the quality of social interaction but also by language development, emotional regulation, self-confidence, familiarity with communication partners, and characteristics of the learning environment. Therefore, the increase observed in this study should not be attributed to a single factor. Instead, the intervention appears to have created conditions that allowed the child's existing communication capacity to emerge more consistently in the school context.(Hidayat, 2014)

A practical implication is that teachers should first observe whether a child's limited verbal participation occurs across settings or only in particular situations.(Aileen Carol, 2023) When communication is context-dependent, supportive strategies such as individual rapport, small-group interaction, open-ended questioning, storytelling, and positive reinforcement can be introduced gradually. Teachers should avoid excessive pressure to speak because psychological safety is important for sustained participation.(Anggraini, 2025)

The cyclical action-research process was also important to the intervention outcome because each cycle allowed the teacher to adjust classroom support in response to observed communication behavior. (Zahra et al., 2025)Cycle I established initial willingness to respond through lower-pressure interaction, whereas reflection on the remaining hesitation informed the addition of more intensive storytelling and reinforcement in Cycle II. Thus, the improvement should be understood not merely as the effect of a single activity, but as the result of reflective pedagogical adjustment across cycles. This strengthens the practical contribution of the study by showing how early childhood teachers can use ongoing observation and reflection to tailor communication support to a child's changing needs.(Kemampuan et al., 2025)

The study also has limitations. The individual outcome analysis focused on one child within a single classroom, so the findings cannot be generalized to all children with communication difficulties.(Luthfiyah & Yuliana, 2023) The two-cycle duration also does not establish whether improvement will be maintained over a longer period or transferred to other settings. Future research could involve more focal participants, longer follow-up, and additional measures of language development and social-emotional functioning.(Putra et al., 2024)

CONCLUSION

This study identified communication selectivity as a context-dependent pattern in which the focal child showed substantially lower verbal participation at school than was reported at home. The classroom observations indicated that hesitation was associated with demanding social situations and reduced confidence in verbal participation, while supportive peer and teacher interactions provided conditions for more active communication.

The structured classroom intervention produced a clear quantitative and qualitative improvement. Communication achievement increased from 30% in the pre-cycle to 55% in Cycle I and 75% in Cycle II, representing an overall gain of 45 percentage points. The 75% result met the predetermined success criterion. Qualitatively, the child progressed from predominantly nonverbal or one-word responses toward simple sentences, more stable eye contact, greater participation in peer discussion, and occasional initiation of conversation.

The improvement was associated with the combined use of interactive play, small-group communication, an individual teacher approach, open-ended questioning, interactive storytelling, and positive reinforcement. These findings indicate that communication selectivity can be addressed pedagogically through gradual, low-pressure, and child-centered support. However, children's communication is multidimensional and may also be influenced by language development, emotional regulation, self-confidence, and family and school contexts. Consequently, teachers should use careful observation and individualized support rather than interpreting limited classroom speech as a general language deficit.

Given the single-child focus and the limited duration of the action cycles, the findings should be treated as context-specific. Further studies involving more participants and longer follow-up are recommended to examine the sustainability and transferability of the intervention outcomes.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

All authors made significant contributions to the preparation and completion of this research article, with the following roles and responsibilities: Syarifa Dewi: Responsible for the research conceptualization, the design of the Classroom Action Research (CAR) methodology, the implementation of the main classroom intervention, qualitative and quantitative data analysis, and the writing of the original manuscript draft. Mimit Pakasi: Contributed to the development of observation instruments, provided methodological guidance, and reviewed and edited the manuscript draft. Junaedi: Participated in field data collection, preparation of field notes, analysis of indicator achievement percentages, and the development of data tables and visualizations. Mesrawati Rifai: Assisted in facilitating the learning intervention, analyzing children's psychological perspectives, and identifying relevant theoretical references and previous studies related to communication selectivity. Muh. Aji Saputra: Responsible for data validation through triangulation techniques, supervision of activity documentation, and alignment of the final manuscript with journal guidelines. Rifaidah Mama and Abdul Wahab: Contributed to the English abstract preparation and translation, global language editing, and the identification of relevant international literature for comparison.

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