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Analysis of 21st Century Communication Skills of Elementary School Students

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Abstract: This study analyzes the communication skills of elementary school students in the 21st century learning context, where communication is recognized as one of the most essential competencies for academic and social success. The research was conducted with sixth-grade students in a private elementary school in Bandung during the 2023/2024 academic year. This study employed a quantitative descriptive method. Data were collected through a 25-item questionnaire developed from five indicators of communication skills: Respect, Empathy, Audible, Clarity, and Humble. The instrument was tested for validity and reliability, yielding strong results (average r-value = 0.683; Cronbach's alpha = 0.94). The findings show that most students (40%) are in the medium category, with 25% in the high and very high categories, and 35% in the low and very low categories. These results indicate that while many students possess functional communication skills, a significant portion still faces difficulties in clarity, audibility, and confidence when interacting. The study concludes that systematic and student-centered approaches are required to strengthen communication skills. Strategies such as role-playing, project-based learning, and structured feedback are recommended to support students across different proficiency levels and to foster more effective learning environments.

Keywords: Communication skills, Elementary education, 21st-century learning, Student-centered learning, Indonesia

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia faces various 21st-century challenges in science and technology development, which influence many aspects of life, including education. In response to these changes, the education sector must prepare students from an early age, particularly at the elementary school level, to be capable and ready to face emerging challenges. One of the fundamental competencies is communication, as it serves as the foundation for students to interact and live harmoniously with others (Yildiz, 2014). In the context of elementary education, Alismail (2015) emphasizes that students need to master essential skills to thrive in the 21st century, among which communication is central (Lamb, 2017). Developing these competencies allows students to optimize their learning potential while enhancing the abilities they already possess.

Communication has been widely recognized as a crucial skill in contemporary education. Effective communication, alongside collaboration, critical thinking, problem-solving,

creativity, and innovation, represents essential competencies in the modern era (Arnyana, 2019). Communication can be understood as an act in which a source conveys a message to a recipient with the intention of influencing behavior (Littlejohn, 2011). Furthermore, communication skills encompass the ability to express information both orally and in writing, which in turn increases students' confidence (Arnyana, 2019; Emanuel, 2011; Fitriah, 2020). Research by Duta (2015) highlights that strong communication skills significantly influence an individual's success in academic, professional, and social contexts. Similarly, Pratiwi (2022) found that students with well-developed communication skills demonstrate greater confidence when presenting arguments, contributing to the formation of an active and participatory learning environment.

In 21st-century learning, communication skills are not only vital for conveying ideas orally and in writing but also for supporting broader educational objectives. These skills include active listening, providing constructive feedback, and expressing opinions clearly and politely. However, classroom observations often reveal that many elementary school students struggle with expressing themselves confidently, systematically, and openly. Indicators of this problem include teacher-dominated interactions, limited student participation in discussions, and students' difficulty responding constructively to peers Contributing factors include learning approaches that are less dialogue-oriented, insufficient opportunities to practice communication in supportive settings, and the limited use of interactive media.

As the educational paradigm shifts toward student-centered learning, communication skills become increasingly essential. Analyzing the current state of elementary students' communication abilities is therefore necessary to identify challenges and inform the development of learning models that foster these skills effectively. This study aims to evaluate the communication skills of elementary school students in classroom contexts. Specifically, it focuses on aspects such as active listening, peer and teacher interaction, and idea expression. The findings are expected to support the design of sustainable and comprehensive strategies that enhance communication competencies.

Supporting theories also highlight the significance of communication. Kardiansyah and Qodriani (2018) explain that the word communication originates from the Latin term *communicare*, meaning to share or create mutual understanding. Mannan (2019) adds that communication is the process of conveying intentions and ideas between individuals at any time. According to Rusu (2023), communication involves interactions between a communicator and an audience. Importantly, communication is considered a key competency in the workplace, with the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) survey in the United States (as cited in Losey et al., 2018) identifying it as a primary requirement in industry, business, and education. Geurts (2019) further elaborates five indicators of communication skills: Respect, Empathy, Audible, Clarity, and Humble.

Table 1. Communication skills indicators and instruments

Indicator	Statement Item
Respect	I listened to my friend as they talked without interrupting the conversation. I show attention when the teacher or friend speaks, for example by nodding. I respect the opinions of all the members of the group, even if I disagree. I listened to friends while they were talking in a group discussion. I responded politely to a friend's different opinions.
Empathy	I always listen attentively to my friends as they speak. During group discussions, I give all my friends a chance to talk. If my friend makes a mistake, I don't get angry right away but try to understand why. When there is a difference of opinion, I still respect and do not impose my opinion. I can respond to friends in a polite way and not hurt their feelings.
Audible	I spoke in a fairly loud voice when expressing my opinion in class. My friends can hear clearly when I speak in groups. I feel confident speaking at the appropriate volume in a class or group.

	I pronounce the words clearly during the discussion in front of the class. If I can't be heard, I immediately fix my voice volume.
Clarity	I explain back in a simpler way if my friend doesn't understand. I give an example when explaining an idea or answer to a friend. I avoid words that are difficult to understand when explaining things. I convey my opinions in a clear order during the group discussion. I use easy-to-understand words when talking to my classmates.
Humble	I want to admit that I was wrong in the group discussion. I am not ashamed to ask questions if I do not understand while studying together. I give credit to a friend who gives me a good idea during group work. I invite all members of the group to express their opinions. I don't impose my opinion on friends in discussions.

Despite the recognition of communication as a crucial 21st-century skill, evidence from classroom practices in elementary schools shows that these competencies are not yet optimally developed. Prior studies have mostly emphasized the general importance of communication in higher education or workplace contexts (Duta, 2015; Emanuel, 2011), while research specifically targeting communication skills in elementary school students remains limited. Furthermore, existing studies in Indonesia, such as those by Pratiwi (2022), primarily highlight the role of communication in fostering active learning environments but do not provide a detailed assessment of specific indicators such as respect, empathy, audibility, clarity, and humility in classroom interactions. This research attempts to address that gap by evaluating elementary students' communication skills using measurable indicators, while also identifying obstacles that hinder their development. Through this approach, the study aims to generate insights that can guide the creation of student-centered learning strategies and provide practical contributions for improving communication competencies in primary education.

METHOD

This research employs a quantitative descriptive method to analyze the communication skills of sixth-grade students at a private elementary school in Bandung during the 2023/2024 academic year. The subjects consisted of 20 students selected using a saturated sampling technique, where the entire population was included due to its small and homogeneous nature (Arikunto, 2013; Sugiyono, 2017). Data were collected using a questionnaire consisting of 25 statement items based on five indicators of communication skills: respect, empathy, audibility, clarity, and humility, measured with a 4-point Likert scale. Instrument testing showed that all items were valid, with an average r-value of 0.683 (greater than 0.444), and reliable, with a Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.94, indicating high internal consistency.

The research procedure included the preparation and distribution of the questionnaire via Google Forms, followed by data collection, verification, and analysis. The data were analyzed using descriptive quantitative techniques, with categorization based on the mean (78.45) and standard deviation (9.23). The classification of communication skills was as follows:

Table 2. Categorization of Communication Skill Scores

Category	Formula	Score Range	Interpretation
Very High	$X > \text{Mean} + 1.5\ SD$	$X > 92.3$	Far above average; exceptional ability
High	$\text{Mean} + 0.5\ SD < X \leq \text{Mean} + 1.5\ SD$	$83.07 < X \leq 92.3$	Above average; outstanding performance
Medium	$\text{Mean} - 0.5\ SD \leq X \leq \text{Mean} + 0.5\ SD$	$73.85 \leq X \leq 83.05$	Average; sufficient performance
Low	$\text{Mean} - 1.5\ SD < X < \text{Mean} - 0.5\ SD$	$64.65 < X < 73.85$	Below average; poor performance
Very Low	$X \leq \text{Mean} - 1.5\ SD$	$X \leq 64.65$	Very low; indicates lack of ability

Through this categorization, the findings can be systematically interpreted to describe the distribution of students' communication skill levels.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study assessed elementary students' communication skills using five indicators—Respect, Empathy, Audible, Clarity, and Humble—operationalized across 25 items. The categorical distribution of total scores is shown below.

Table 1. Distribution of Students' Communication Skills

Category	Sum	Percentage (%)
Very High	3	15
High	2	10
Medium	8	40
Low	6	30
Very Low	1	5

Results

The distribution indicates a modal category of Medium (40%) and a majority at Medium-or-above (65%), suggesting that most students possess adequate communication skills to support routine classroom learning. At the same time, 35% fall into Low-or-below, signaling a substantial at-risk segment. Interpreting these bands with the study's benchmarks (Mean = 78.45; SD = 9.23) places Medium within 73.85–83.05, High within 83.07–92.30, and Very High > 92.30, while Low 64.65–73.85 and Very Low ≤ 64.65 (categorization per mean–SD criteria; see Azwar, 2017). Thus, the cohort skews toward the middle, with a lower-tail that warrants attention.

Two practical readings follow. First, the Medium cluster (40%) typically shows functional abilities—clear enough oral expression, basic active listening, and participation in group work—yet remains inconsistent under higher cognitive or social demands (e.g., defending ideas or synthesizing peer input). Second, the Low (30%) + Very Low (5%) segment exhibits difficulties that commonly manifest as hesitancy in public speaking, limited clarity and audibility, and underdeveloped turn-taking in group tasks. Although subscale scores are not reported, the symptom pattern is most consistent with gaps in Audible (voice audibility/pronunciation) and Clarity (organization and explicitness), which directly affect whether messages are received as intended (Littlejohn, 2011) and, downstream, students' confidence (Duta, 2015; Emanuel, 2011; Fitriah, 2020).

Discussion

These findings align with literature positioning communication as a core 21st-century competence alongside collaboration, critical thinking, creativity, and innovation (Arnyana, 2019). The 65% Medium-or-above supports the view that many students have attained baseline functional competence, consistent with classrooms where communication is practiced but not yet systematically strengthened. Conversely, the 35% Low-or-below underlines a practice gap: without targeted opportunities for structured talk, feedback, and modeling, students struggle to convert basic skills into consistent, context-appropriate performance—particularly in whole-class discussion or problem-focused tasks. This interpretation aligns with evidence that active, dialogic learning environments build confidence in presenting arguments and increase participation (Pratiwi, 2022), a key mechanism for moving learners from Medium into High bands.

In terms of the study objective, the results answer the research problem by providing an evaluative profile: communication skills are generally sufficient (mode = Medium) but not yet

optimal, with a non-trivial lower segment requiring support. Pedagogically, the data justify tiered interventions:

1. For Low/Very Low (35%): scaffolded speaking frames, think-pair-share, micro-presentations with immediate formative feedback, and voice/clarity drills to strengthen Audible and Clarity while protecting psychological safety (Fitriah, 2020; Littlejohn, 2011).
2. For the Medium majority (40%): structured academic controversy, role-play, and problem-based learning to demand clearer organization, precision, and responsive listening—approaches known to enhance confidence and participation (Arnyana, 2019; Pratiwi, 2022).
3. For High/Very High (25%): peer tutoring/mentoring roles to diffuse effective discourse norms across groups, which also builds leadership without sacrificing equity in talk-time.

Overall, the pattern suggests that systematic, student-centered, and dialogic pedagogy can shift the distribution rightward—raising the Medium cluster into High and shrinking the Low tail—thereby advancing the broader 21st-century skills agenda where communication underpins collaboration and problem solving (Arnyana, 2019; Littlejohn, 2011). Continuous monitoring using the same indicators will allow teachers to track cohort movement across bands and fine-tune scaffolds over time, keeping the focus on durable gains in clarity, audibility, respectful turn-taking, and empathic response—competencies central to effective learning and social participation (Duta, 2015; Emanuel, 2011; Fitriah, 2020; Pratiwi, 2022).

These findings generate actionable insights to design student-centered learning strategies by tiering supports to learners' current proficiency: targeted speaking frames, think–pair–share, micro-presentations, and voice/clarity drills for Low/Very Low; structured academic controversy, role-play, and problem-based learning for Medium; and peer tutoring/mentoring for High/Very High. Grounded in dialogic pedagogy, these recommendations provide practical contributions to improving primary students' communication competencies and to shifting the cohort distribution toward higher performance (Arnyana, 2019; Fitriah, 2020; Littlejohn, 2011; Pratiwi, 2022).

CONCLUSION

The results of the communication skills questionnaire administered to elementary school students in one of the schools in Bandung indicate that most students (40%) are in the medium category, suggesting that their communication skills are adequate for daily learning but not yet optimal. Only 25% of students are in the high and very high categories, while 5% fall into the very low category, signaling the need for targeted support. These findings confirm that students' communication skills still require systematic improvement through more interactive, student-centered, and responsive teaching approaches.

Based on these results, schools and teachers are advised to adopt collaborative learning models such as problem-based learning, role-playing, and project-based learning, which can foster active interaction, discussion, and confidence in expressing opinions. Special support must be provided to students with low communication skills through individualized guidance, constructive feedback, and the establishment of a supportive classroom climate. Regular evaluation of communication performance should also be conducted to monitor effectiveness and ensure alignment with students' developmental needs. In addition, schools are encouraged to design enrichment programs that cultivate modern communication competencies, such as presentation training, debates, and extracurricular activities that promote interpersonal interaction. These efforts are expected to contribute significantly to improving communication competencies in primary education and to provide practical implications for the broader development of effective learning strategies.

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