

Teacher Strategies in Developing Early Childhood Speaking Skills A Qualitative Study

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Abstract: This study aims to analyze teacher strategies for fostering the speaking skills of 5–6-year-old children and to explore factors that support and constrain their implementation. A qualitative descriptive design was used. Participants consisted of the school principal and two Group B teachers who were directly involved in learning activities with 20 children. Data were collected through participatory observation, structured interviews, and documentation of learning plans and classroom activities. Data were analyzed through data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. Credibility was strengthened through technique triangulation by comparing interview, observation, and documentation evidence. The findings indicate four interrelated themes: planned learning preparation, interactive and child-centred implementation, supporting and constraining factors, and continuous observation-based evaluation. Teachers combined conversation, open-ended questioning, storytelling, singing, role play, picture-based books, visual media, and positive feedback to create opportunities for children to speak. Children were observed to participate more actively in the speaking activities, while some still needed individualized support. The findings suggest that the contribution of teacher strategy lies not simply in the variety of methods, but in how teachers create meaningful opportunities for children to produce language, respond to children's utterances, and adapt activities to individual needs.

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INTRODUCTION

Speaking ability is an important part of children's language development because it allows children to convey ideas, experiences, feelings, and needs, as well as build social relationships. In the context of early childhood education, language development is not only related to vocabulary growth, but also to the ability to use language functionally in interaction. Vygotsky's socio-cultural perspective places social interaction and assistance from more competent others as an important part of language development (Amseke, et.al 2021) . Thus, the quality of teacher-child interaction becomes one of the relevant contexts to examine when discussing the stimulation of speaking skills.

At the age of 5–6 years, children are expected to be increasingly able to engage in two-way conversation, express experiences, answer and ask questions, and convey ideas in increasingly clear sentences. Teachers can provide these experiences through conversation, open-ended questions, storytelling, reading picture books, role play, singing, and play activities that give



children room to use language. Previous national studies have also reported the use of storytelling, role play, singing, conversation, show and tell, and visual media as part of practices for stimulating children's language (Karim et al., 2022; Yulianti et al., 2023; Barus et al., 2022; Putri, 2023; Safriani et al., 2022; Sofwina & Dwiyantri, 2023; Kristiani et al., 2024; Sum & Taran, 2020; Zainollah, 2025; Saripah, 2022).

International literature reinforces the importance of the quality of teacher language, not merely the frequency of talk. Dickinson and Porche (2011) showed a relationship between language experiences in preschool classrooms and subsequent language and literacy achievement. Hadley et al.'s (2022) meta-analysis identified teacher language practices such as interactive talk, responsive talk, questions and elicitations, and conceptual talk as important patterns in the early childhood classroom language environment. Hadley et al.'s (2023) systematic review also showed that teacher language practices need to be adapted to the context of the activity, for example the use of conceptual talk during shared book reading and elicitation during play and small-group activities. On the other hand, research on shared book reading shows that dialogic interaction can support language development, although the size of the effect varies according to the design and conditions of the intervention (Mol et al., 2008; Noble et al., 2019; Dowdall et al., 2020).

These findings show that previous research has extensively identified methods that can be used to support children's language. However, a contextual understanding is still needed of how teachers combine various strategies in daily activities, how teachers' responses to children's language production are given, how strategies are adapted to differences in children's needs, and how observation results are used to determine follow-up actions. In other words, the research gap lies not merely in the type of method used, but in the process of integrating strategies and teacher responses within learning practice.

Preliminary observations in this study indicated that some Group B children still had difficulty answering questions directly, recounting simple experiences, and expressing opinions in front of peers. Preliminary observations also showed that speaking opportunities were not always evenly distributed, as interaction in some activities was still largely teacher-led. These preliminary findings formed the basis for examining teacher practice in greater depth,

without treating these initial conditions as a measure of the effectiveness of any intervention.

Based on this gap, this study aims to analyze teacher strategies in stimulating the speaking skills of children aged 5–6 years and to explore the factors that support and hinder their implementation. This study is expected to contribute to the understanding that language stimulation strategies in early childhood need to be viewed as a series of interactional practices, not merely a list of teaching methods.

METHOD

This study used a qualitative descriptive design to obtain a contextual picture of teacher practice in stimulating children's speaking skills. This design was chosen because the focus of the study is to understand the strategies, interactions, and learning processes as they occur in a natural context, rather than to test the effectiveness of, or a causal relationship arising from, a treatment.

The research participants consisted of the school principal and two Group B teachers with the initials EW and MSP. Both teachers served as the main informants because they were directly involved in planning and implementing learning activities, while the principal served as a supporting informant to provide an institutional perspective. The observation context involved 20 Group B children aged 5–6 years. The identities of the institution and informants were disguised in the presentation of findings to maintain confidentiality.

The researcher served as the main instrument, with interview guidelines, observation guidelines, and documentation formats as supporting instruments. The interview guidelines covered learning planning, strategy implementation, supporting and inhibiting factors, and evaluation. The observation guidelines were used to record forms of teacher-child verbal interaction, children's speaking opportunities, the use of questions, media, methods, feedback, and children's responses. Documentation included teaching modules/daily lesson plans (RPPH), annual programs (Prota), semester programs (Prosem), and other relevant evidence of learning activities.

Data were collected through three techniques. First, passive-participation observation was conducted by observing learning activities without

taking over the teacher's activities. Second, structured interviews were conducted with the principal and the two Group B teachers. Third, documentation was used to check the consistency between learning plans and the observed practice. Technique triangulation was carried out by comparing findings from these three sources.

Data analysis followed the stages proposed by Miles and Huberman, namely data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. The coding process was carried out in stages. First, the researcher repeatedly read the interview transcripts and observation notes. Second, data segments related to teacher strategies were given initial codes. Third, codes with similar meanings were grouped into categories. Fourth, categories were compared across informants and across data-collection techniques. Fifth, consistent categories were developed into research themes. This process produced four main themes: planning of learning strategies, strategy implementation, supporting and inhibiting factors, and evaluation of and response to the development of speaking skills Abdussalam (2021) .

Data credibility was strengthened through technique triangulation and checking the consistency of findings across informants. This study did not use the Content Validity Ratio (CVR) because it did not employ that quantitative instrument-validation procedure. To strengthen dependability and confirmability, the researcher maintained an analytical audit trail in the form of coding notes, category groupings, and the links between interview, observation, and documentation data.

Table 1. Research Analysis Flow

Research Focus	Participant selection	Observation Interview Documentation	Catagorization	Triangulation Verification	Interpretation of Findings
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The research flow shows the relationship between the research focus, data collection, the coding process, category formation, triangulation, and interpretation. The chart confirms that the research themes were not established directly from the outset, but were built through a process of analyzing the field data.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Themes from the Coding Results

The coding results from the interviews, observations, and documentation produced four main themes. These themes were not treated as evidence of strategy effectiveness, but as a description of teacher practice and children's responses observed during the activities.

Table 2. Coding Result

Theme	Data source	Code/category	Summary of findings
Planning	Principal, EW, MSP, documents	SPP: objectives, methods, media, environment	Teachers prepared learning tools, media, and activities that provided opportunities for children to speak.
Implementation	EW, MSP, observation	PSP: questions and answers, conversation, storytelling, songs, role play, feedback	Teachers used verbal interaction and media to elicit children's responses.
Supporting & inhibiting factors	Principal, EW, MSP, observation	FP: media, environment, parents; FH: differences in children's needs	The availability of media and environmental support helped; some children needed more intensive support.
Evaluation & follow-up	EW, MSP, documents	EHP: observation, notes, guidance	Teachers observed children's language production and used the observation results to determine guidance.

Planning of Learning Strategies

The data show that teachers prepared speaking activities through teaching modules/daily lesson plans (RPPH), the selection of methods and media, and the arrangement of the classroom environment. Media found in the documentation and observations included picture storybooks, picture cards, educational play tools, hand puppets, and audiovisual media/smartboards. Planning also incorporated conversation, question-and-answer sessions, storytelling, singing, and role play. Thus, planning did not merely contain activity targets, but also provided a context for children to use language.

This finding is in line with Sum and Taran (2020) regarding the importance of teachers' pedagogical competence in the planning and implementation of early childhood learning. However, the findings of this study add an interactional aspect: the meaningfulness of planning for speaking skills depends on whether the activities genuinely provide room for children to produce language, rather than merely listing methods.

Strategy Implementation and Verbal Interaction

Observations showed that teachers used conversation, open-ended and graduated questions, storytelling, singing, role play, reading picture books, and activities in which children recounted their experiences. Teachers gave children turns to speak, listened to their responses, reinforced their answers, and gently corrected their language. This practice showed a combination of elicitation, modeling, and feedback.

These findings are consistent with the international literature. Hadley et al. (2022) showed that interactive talk, responsive talk, questions/elicitation, and conceptual talk are important groups of teacher language practice. Hadley et al. (2023) emphasized that such practices need to be adapted to the context of the activity. In this study, teachers' questions and responses appeared to serve as the link between the methods used and children's opportunities to speak.

Reading and storytelling activities also showed potential for dialogic interaction. Mol et al. (2008), Noble et al. (2019), and Dowdall et al. (2020) showed that shared/dialogic book reading can support children's

language, although the results of experimental research cannot be directly used to conclude the effectiveness of a strategy within this qualitative study. Therefore, the findings of this study merely show that reading and storytelling practices served as a context that teachers used to elicit children's language production.

Supporting and Inhibiting Factors

The supporting factors found included teacher readiness, the availability of learning media, a conducive classroom environment, and cooperation with parents. Media such as picture cards, storybooks, hand puppets, and educational play tools were used to spark conversation. A safe environment helped children express their answers and experiences without pressure.

On the other hand, differences in children's characteristics and needs were a factor affecting the smoothness of strategy implementation. Not all children responded in the same way or at the same pace. Because of this, teachers provided individual guidance, simpler questions, repetition, positive reinforcement, and more speaking opportunities for children who were still passive. This finding supports the idea that language strategies need to be adaptive to the context and characteristics of learners.

Evaluation and Observed Child Responses

Evaluation was carried out through observation of children's ability to answer questions, recount experiences, express opinions, interact with peers, and use vocabulary. Developmental records were used as material for reflection in determining subsequent activities and forms of guidance.

During the observed activities, most children appeared to participate actively in conversations and verbal activities, while some children still needed individual support. This finding is not used to claim that speaking ability improved causally, because the study did not employ a pretest-posttest or longitudinal design. A more accurate statement is that children showed more active participation and language production during the observed activities, whereas long-term developmental change would require a different research design.

Overall, the findings show that teacher strategy is a series of interrelated practices: planning provides the context, verbal interaction opens opportunities for language production, media helps generate topics of conversation, and evaluation is used to adjust support. This pattern is more informative than simply stating that teachers use many methods. Compared with national studies, the findings regarding storytelling, role play, singing, conversation, and visual media are consistent with Karim et al. (2022), Yulianti et al. (2023), Barus et al. (2022), Putri (2023), Safriani et al. (2022), Sofwina and Dwiyanti (2023), Kristiani et al. (2024), and Sum and Taran (2020), Lulu and Purnamasari (2025). This similarity shows that varied verbal activities are a recurring pattern in early childhood education practice. However, this study emphasizes the process of integrating methods and teachers' responses to children's language production as a more specific finding.

From an international perspective, the findings of this study are closer to research on teacher-child interaction than to studies on the effectiveness of a single method. Dickinson and Porche (2011) demonstrated the importance of classroom language experiences, while Hadley et al. (2022) grouped teacher practices into language patterns that include responsive talk, questions and elicitations, and scaffolding. Dickinson et al. (2014) showed that teachers' language use varies according to the context of the activity and the type of book being read. Cabell et al. (2013) also showed that the quality of instructional interaction varies according to setting and activity. The field findings in this study show a similar pattern: teachers' questions and responses were used to extend children's responses, while picture books and role play served as contexts for conversation. Shared book reading provides a more specific example of how media can become a context for interaction. Mol et al. (2008) reported the added benefit of dialogic reading for vocabulary, while Noble et al. (2019) and Dowdall et al. (2020) showed that the effect of shared book reading on children's language is relatively small to moderate and is influenced by the design and dosage of the activity. This literature

strengthens the pedagogical rationale for using books and storytelling, but does not justify a causal claim in this study.

The novelty of this study lies in interpreting strategy as an integrated practice linking planning, speaking opportunities, teacher responses, media use, and evaluation. Within this framework, the quality of a strategy is not measured by the number of methods listed, but by how teachers create meaningful speaking opportunities, use questions that invite elaboration, give time and attention to children's responses, and adjust support for children who need more intensive help. This finding is sharpened by Deshmukh et al. (2019), who showed that certain question forms can be related to the length of children's responses, making the quality of questions an important part of the strategy.

Research Implications

The practical implication of this study is the need for teachers to prioritize the quality of verbal interaction. Strategies can be directed toward open-ended questions, providing adequate wait time, elaborating on children's responses, experience-based conversation, dialogic storytelling, and more evenly distributed speaking opportunities. Media should function as a conversation starter, not merely a visual aid. Observation results also need to be used to determine individual follow-up.

Research Limitations

This study has several limitations. First, the research context was limited to a single institution and two teachers, so the transferability of the findings needs to be considered carefully. Second, the observation context involved 20 children, but the study was not designed to measure changes in each child's ability longitudinally. Third, the main data came from the researcher's interviews and observations, so the possibility of observer bias remains. Future research could involve more institutions, longitudinal observation, video recordings of teacher-child interaction, and data from more informants to strengthen understanding of the language stimulation process.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that teacher strategies in stimulating the speaking skills of children aged 5–6 years take place as a series of practices comprising learning planning, child-centred verbal interaction, the use of varied methods and media, environmental and parental support, and continuous evaluation. Teachers used conversation, open-ended questions, storytelling, singing, role play, picture books, visual media, and positive feedback to create opportunities for children to use language. During the observed activities, children showed active verbal participation, although some still needed individual guidance. The main contribution of this study is to show that the quality of a strategy is not determined solely by the variety of methods used, but by teachers' ability to integrate various activities with meaningful speaking opportunities, responses to children's language production, and the adjustment of support based on individual needs. Because the research design is qualitative descriptive without before-after measurement, these findings are not intended as causal evidence of improved ability.

Statement on Generative AI and AI-Assisted Tools

In preparing this manuscript, the authors employed an AI-powered language tool to refine the clarity, grammar, and readability of the text. Afterward, the authors thoroughly reviewed and revised all content and assume complete responsibility for the published version. Generative AI was not involved in data collection, analysis, or interpretation.

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