

**BUILDING CHILDREN’S CHARACTER
THROUGH EVERYDAY LANGUAGE USE
AND COMMUNICATION STYLE**

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Abstract

This study highlights the matters of how everyday language use and communication style build the children’s character. It is a conceptual study based on library research. The findings show that everyday language use and communication style are strongly effective to build the children’s character as long as they are carried out by considering the principles and the guidelines of interacting with children. The everyday language use must be child-centered, child-friendly, age-appropriate, and contain positive and polite language attitude and moral value including politeness in speaking, behaving, thinking, and harmoniously interacting with others. Additionally, the communication style must focus on healthy ways, use of creative and positive model, fun and inspiring. It must be delivered in positive verbal and non-verbal, good and polite ways, appropriate diction and intonation. It also should be checked and re-checked to ensure the inclusion of good safety practices and avoid any kind of violence. Therefore, the positive attitude in using everyday language interaction and communication style surely has big impact in promoting the positive children’s character.

Keywords: everyday language use, communication style, children’s character.

A. INTRODUCTION

Character is a matter which has become popular in recent years. It has drawn more and more increasing attention from society in most countries all over the world including parents, teachers (educators), and government. In fact, it is something that can be used to recognize someone either positively or negatively. It is usually related to moral, behavior, and personality.

Good character including moral and behavior is always expected to be owned by everyone, including children. It becomes very important to instill good character in their lives from an early age since they are in a critical stage of life and have good ability to easily absorb everything happens around them. Since character is not inherited, it needs to be built upon them as early as possible in order to be people with great personality. Therefore, children need to be taught how to treat other people and how to serve their community in good way.

In contrast to positive character, many alarming phenomena occur related to negative behavior lately. Ironically, some of them are shown by children. It can be done by those who are in their home, as well as in the wider environments of the society and the culture around them. In other words, some of the cases are even

acted by those who are either in a family environment or have started to get involved in social life such as at children community around the neighborhood, the playground, or even at school. Just say in simple example, we can find the uses of vulgar expressions uttered by the children. Besides, attitude of not respecting adult people or parents also becomes a matter of concern that must be considered. Additionally, it is often found physical violence and verbal abuse in daily interactions. These are kinds of negative characters that need to be anticipated, prevented, and found a solution because negativity and any kind of abuse should not be tolerated and meet appropriate consequences. In the end, it is hoped that the children will grow into good personality figures as a reflection of the ones having good character.

Among the cases relating to the negative character performed by the children allegedly happen because of the bad influences from the surrounding environment namely society, adults, TV, computer, mobile phone, internet, books, magazine, and etc. Relating to these matters, the use of language becomes an inseparable supporting element. Through the people and media surrounding the children, they can be exposed to the rude and the impolite way of communication. Thus, ones responsible for building and developing the children's character are everyone who are in contact or interact with their lives. They are the parents, the teachers (educators), the relatives, and the society. They must show good examples in words and deeds so that they will be good role models for them. In addition, they have to provide the children assistance in undertaking their everyday lives.

Children are good imitators. This is why, they notice what their role models do, say, tolerate, and how they handle challenges in everyday activities. In other words, good characters are not easily accepted in form of advice or lectures, but are more easily recognized in form of real and applicable examples. By these exemplary actions, they do not only learn the concepts but also foundation which can be built for becoming upstanding adults. Character building aiming at promoting excellent behavior of the children can also be done proactively through planned actions and activities within the children's environment. These will encourage them to develop and adopt quality ethical principles and behaviors that can last far beyond their lives.

Being aware of the problems stated above, especially the one related to the use of language in the children's daily interaction, it is recommended to convey daily communication, both verbal and non-verbal, politely and appropriately. It is aimed at establishing positive attitude in the children's social interaction and also expected to be able to promote good habit in their daily lives so that they will have great personality. This is emphasized since carrying out daily activities cannot be separated from the language use and communication style.

B. DISCUSSIONS

1. Character

Character is the combination of traits and qualities distinguishing the individual nature of a person; a summary or account of a person's qualities and achievements, as well as a description of a person's attributes, traits, or

abilities¹. In other word, it is all the mental or moral qualities that make a person, group, nation, and etc. different from others². Additionally, it is a complex quality of ethical and mental (positive/negative) of which they form oneself in thinking, behaving, and acting³. Therefore, character implies a certain behavioral norms where an individual will be judged. It is a personality that is evaluated normatively. It is always related to moral and behavior both good and bad. It can be measured by what one will do if no one is looking. True character is instilled at a deep level so that positive behavior is automatic. Ultimately, it reflects one's good personality.

There are 18 values as the result of empirical study which is done by Center for Curriculum applied in Indonesia⁴. Those values are sourced from religion, *Pancasila*, Culture, and the National Education Objectives (*UUD* 1945). They are (1) religiosity, (2) honesty, (3) tolerance, (4) discipline, (5) hard work, (6) creative, (7) independent, (8) democrat, (9) curiosity, (10) the national spirit, (11) nationalism, (12) respect for the achievements, (13) friendly/communicative, (14) pacifism, (15) love to read, (16) environmental care, (17) social care, and (18) responsibility. Those eighteen characters are derivatives of 5 main characters namely religious, nationalist, integrity, independent, and mutual help. Further, the government emphasized that character education must be implemented in all areas of life and started as early as possible. In this case, for instance, the portion of character education at primary school is 70% which implies how essential it is to be applied in the primary education.

2. Children's Character

Children are one of the targets to get the character building focus. They are the major "social capital" of every society concerned with change for a better today and for the future of its members. They can be categorized into three major age groups namely the early years (the early years of birth to 6 or 7 years old), the middle years (6 or 7 to 10 years old), and early adolescent

¹ Adi, S. S. Character Building in Language Learning: Immersion Principle in the Implementation of Responsible, Fair, and Care Values in Developing EFL Classroom Activities. *National English Language Teachers and Lecturers (NETAL) Conference*. Indonesia: State University of Malang. 2013.

² Hornby, A. S., *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995, p. 186.

³ Pohan, E. Character Building in Language Learning and Teaching. *Proceedings of the 3rd UAD TEFL International Conference 2014 "Materials Development in Asia and Beyond: Directions, Issues, and Challenges"* September 17—18, 2014, Yogyakarta, Indonesia Organized by English Education Department, Universitas Ahmad Dahlan ISBN: 978-602-18907-1-4. 2014.

⁴ Jalal, F. et. al. *Panduan Pelaksanaan Pendidikan Karakter*. Jakarta: Kementerian Pendidikan Nasional: Badan Penelitian dan Pengembangan Pusat Kurikulum dan Perbukuan, 2011.

years (10 to 14 years old)⁵. Here, it is focused on those who are in the school-age years that are in around 6 – 12 years old. A very important part of growing up is the ability to interact and socialize with others. During the school-age years, parents will see a transition in their children as he or she moves from playing alone to having multiple friends and social groups.

During middle years, children gradually develop into more independent and separate human beings who are capable of exploring the world around. They use more sophisticated language; learn a tremendous amount of new information; and acquire a host of new skills, including literacy, formal school studies, and knowledge about the world and people in it. What children in middle years see and hear at home, in their school, their community and in media, influences their behaviors, attitudes, and world views.

Here are the main developmental characteristics of Middle Years (6 through 12 years) in some aspects. From the cognitive aspect, they can better distinguish fantasy and reality, understand inner motivation of characters, understand causality (that ‘one thing leads to another’), use more sophisticated language, develop problem-solving and critical thinking skills, and develop the ability to understand television and other media codes and conventions (use of camera shots and editing, sound, and music cues, etc.); in behavioral/physical, they gradually become more independent in taking care of daily needs such as personal hygiene, feeding, taking care of possessions, learn to follow rules of play and interactions, more interested in taking part in drama and playing sports, more concerned about body image and appearance, and taking more responsibility for their own actions; in social/emotional, friends gradually taking a more central role in their lives, they continue to need supportive adults and positive role models, clearly prefer same-sex friends, learn about right and wrong and making moral choices, and developing exclusionary and stereotyping behaviors; at last, for the communication needs, they nurture positive feelings about themselves, others and the larger world, explore and test their own ideas, skills and talents, be guided in using their potential in positive ways, have their feelings and worries understood and respected.

While every child is unique and will develop different personalities, the following are some of the common behavioral traits owned by children in these ages. 6- to 7-year-old children are able to cooperate and share, jealous of others and siblings, like to copy adults, like to play alone, but friends are becoming important, play with friends of the same gender, may have occasional temper tantrums, modest about body, and like to play board games; 8- to 9-year-old like competition and games, start to mix friends and play with children of the opposite gender, modest about body, enjoy clubs and groups, such as Boy Scouts or Girl Scouts, become interested in boy-girl relationships, but does not admit it; for 10- to 12-year-old children, friends

⁵ Kolucki, B. & Lemish, D. *Communicating with children: Principles and Practices to Nurture, Inspire, Excite, Educate and Heal*. United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF). 2011. p 16.

are very important (may have a best friend), increased interest in the opposite gender, like and respects parents, enjoy talking to others.

Some of research findings show that the primary students' language abilities in communication are as follow: 6 years old children have vocabularies that can be communicated, able to absorb 20000-24000 words, able to make simple sentences, able to produce complete sentence (in particular stage); 8 years old are able to communicate using the words they have, able to express their ideas and thought; 10 years old are able to speak in longer time, able to comprehend conversation; and 12 years old are able to absorb 50000 words, and able to use language as adults.

Relating to those characteristics, most children are capable of responding to positive communication, and of developing to their full potential. The role communication plays in improving the lives of children worldwide. While younger children may be able to comprehend very simple language and concrete images, older children are able to process more complicated linguistic and visual⁶. It focuses not on the child's deficit in comparison to other children and adults, but on the different ways children interact with their environments and how these interactions change over time. Greater emphasis is now put on the context in which children grow and develop both in the micro-environment of their home, as well as in the more macro-environments of the society and the culture around them.

3. Everyday Language Use

Language as the basic right of children is the most important thing to build their characters that required from their closest environment, family⁷. It is one of the most essential pillars of character building, especially for the students of primary school. Children seem to pick up language quickly, just by exposure without teaching for it is easy to see examples of bad behavior, as it is easily seen on TV, or online in this current time. That is why parents or teachers say it is now more important than ever before to educate children or students on the importance of character.

In line with the statements above, the importance of language is essential to every aspect and interaction in our everyday lives⁸. It is used to show feelings, desires, and questions. People communicate effectively using words, gestures, and voice tone. Thus, language is not merely an exhibiting

⁶ Kolucki, B. & Lemish, D. *Communicating with children: Principles and Practices to Nurture, Inspire, Excite, Educate and Heal*. United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). 2011.

⁷ Rosyada A. & Retnomurti A. B. The Use of Positive Language on Children Education to Build Children's Positive Behaviour. *Journal of English Language Teaching*. Volume 01, Number 01, September 2016. p-ISSN: 2541-0326. e-ISSN: 2541-0334. 2016. p.1.

⁸ More, V. R. The Role of Language in Personality Development. *Proceedings of the National Seminar @Shri Shivaji College, Parbhani (MS) India on 18th January 2014*). Published by Dr. Balasaheb Jadhav. ISBN 978-81-925458-3-7. 2014, p. 136.

behavior but also an impact upon man's perceptions, mental functions, relationships with others, beliefs, and meanings.

Focusing on the communication needs, it for sure cannot be separated from the use of language. It requires consideration of different abilities and needs at different ages, and thus must be child-centered and age-appropriate. Language which is taught to the children must contain the positive moral value that supports their education and their character development⁹.

Individual's character can be acknowledged by the use of the language. Reflexively, the use of language will be the specific sign of one's character¹⁰. Language is used to express moral message. Especially for the children who are at an early stage to interact with the world around.

4. Communication Style

In performing the daily language interaction, communication skills are the essential abilities that must be possessed by the speaker and the listener. They include the verbal and non-verbal communication. Verbal communication is about language both written and spoken. It includes spoken, written, and sign language. Many people mistakenly assume that verbal communication refers only to spoken one. In fact, it also covers written one. In general, verbal communication refers to our use of words. On the contrary, non-verbal communication refers to communication that occurs through means other than words, such as body language, gestures, and silence. Non-verbal communication skills, also called sign language or silent language, include all behaviors performed in the presence of others or perceived either consciously or unconsciously. Under non-verbal communication, some other patterns were used. For example: emotive, team work, supportive, imaginative, purposive, and balanced communication using speech, body, and pictures. It is recommended that attention to non-verbal communication skills can make a positive change in the future of the children's life. Positive verbal and non-verbal communication will raise good response as well. If they are delivered in a good and polite way, appropriate diction and intonation, they will bring positive response. In conveying non-verbal communication as well, there are things to be considered, such as using warm eye contact, face expression, shaking hand, body posture, distance, and body moving.

It is important to make sure that our communication shows and tells children what we want them to do, rather than what we do not want them to do. Portraying the negative, visually and verbally, can lead to sometimes dangerous and unintended negative results. It is safer and more appropriate to show positive actions and solutions. Communication, especially for young

⁹ Rohullah R. 2011. Pengaruh Perilaku Bahasa dalam Masyarakat terhadap mutu Pendidikan dan Perkembangan sikap/karakter pada anak usia dini. *The 1st education and language international conference proceedings center for International language development of Unissula*. ELIC. 2017.

¹⁰ Astuti, T. Peranan Pembelajaran Bahasa dalam Pembentukan Karakter siswa. *Proceeding Seminar Nasional Bulan Bahasa UNIB 2015*. 2015: 339.

children, should also be checked and re-checked to ensure the inclusion of good safety practices, and to avoid name-calling or any kind of violence, even in jest.

It is important to ensure that communication focuses on healthy ways children can cope with a range of fears and emotions. When presenting conflict or emotions, such as anger, we must do it verbally and in as short a time as necessary. Push the boundaries and expand the use of creative and positive models that do not frighten, but that offer solutions¹¹. Make the communication fun and inspiring: children will be more likely to return to such stories and repeat the lesson.

Age-appropriate and child-friendly are the principles and guidelines for interaction with children are¹² as can be explained below:

1. It must be based on the children's needs and interests.
Children are inspired to be more attentive and to participate. The communication is designed to be interactive. It is meant to nurture, inspire, excite, educate, and heal. It is also supported by a positive example that is both practical and applicable in many different cultural contexts, and includes geographic, age, gender and media diversity.
2. It should address the children holistically
It gives attention to all their developmental needs namely physical, social, emotional, and cognitive development. The adults targeted by these communications include parents, other family members, teachers, health-care workers, child protection officers and others.
3. Should be positive and strengths-based.
It focuses on portraying and nurturing the strengths and potential in every child rather than focusing on the deficits or problems. The goal is not only to teach but also to develop resilience and the capacity to cope.
4. Should address the needs and abilities of all, including those who are most disadvantaged
It allows all children to hear and see them reflected positively, as opposed to communication that focuses on marginalization, shame, or negative or patronizing portrayals. Good communication includes positive portrayals of children from different cultures and ethnic groups and all socio-economic backgrounds, those with disabilities, and children who have or are experiencing trauma, grief or living through emergencies.

5. Building Children's Character through Everyday Language Use and Communication Style

¹¹ Kolucki, B. & Lemish, D. *Communicating with children: Principles and Practices to Nurture, Inspire, Excite, Educate and Heal*. United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). 2011.

¹² Kolucki, B. & Lemish, D. *Communicating with children: Principles and Practices to Nurture, Inspire, Excite, Educate and Heal*. United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). 2011.

Children's character and personality can be developed through the use of language in daily interaction since it is a means of communication used in human interaction to convey message¹³. Further, it is stated that character development depends more on the use of language which can be spoken or written. Our attitude that people mostly like is shown by our language use as well. It can be concluded that the positive or negative opinion on ones' character is much led by the language.

The positive or polite language attitude influences the children's character development relating to the building of good moral value, politeness in speaking, behaving, thinking positively, and interacting with others, and vice versa, the negative or impolite language will lead to impoliteness in speaking, rude behavior, negative thinking, and interactions which are less harmonious with the surrounding¹⁴.

The forming of linguistic politeness can develop the children's intelligent characters. They become accustomed to employing polite vocabulary or expression that can improve their spiritual and emotional development, the aim of which is to lead to intelligence, primarily emotional intelligence¹⁵.

Reviewing the conditions above, positive language and communication are necessary to be considered and applied in the children's daily interaction. It is suggested to use as polite and appropriate as language to support the children good attitude. Soft and polite language will make polite and respectful personality¹⁶. Good and appropriate use of language to the children improve honor attitude and train the children to control emotions and temper. On the contrary, by using rude language, indirectly, teaches children to have emotional, temperament, rude, and stimulate children to be act violently. Thus, the role of language, especially for the primary students or children is very essential in uttering words nicely, both spoken and written, so it is able to help children to build their character.

¹³ Muflihah. Pentingnya peran bahasa dalam pendidikan anak usia dini (paud). *Thufula* Vol 2, No 2, Juli-Desember 2014. 2014. p. 333.

¹⁴ Rosullah R. 2017: 702. Pengaruh Perilaku Bahasa dalam Masyarakat terhadap mutu Pendidikan dan Perkembangan sikap/karakter pada anak usia dini. *The 1st education and language international conference proceedings center for International language development of Unissula*. ELIC. 2017.

¹⁵ Mariani, N. Developing Students' Intelligent Character through Linguistic Politeness: The Case of English as a Foreign Language for Indonesian Students. *English Language Teaching*; Vol. 9, No. 1; 2016. Published by Canadian Center of Science and Education. ISSN 1916-4742 E-ISSN 1916-4750. 2016.

¹⁶ Kanwate, V. S. & Kadam, K. R. Important of Language in Personality Development. *Proceedings of the National Seminar @Shri Shivaji College, Parbhani (MS) India on 18th January 2014*). Published by Dr. Balasaheb Jadhav. ISBN 978-81-925458-3-7. 2014. p. 25.

C. CONCLUSION

Character building should be integrated in language use in everyday activities. The use of language to its speakers is able to improve their character. The language used in children's daily life imitates much of the family and community environment. For this reason, parents must be able to communicate in a proportional language in front of the children. They must realize that the words they say will be recorded and be used by them one day. Language is a mirror of a person. It means that through language he/she can be known the personality or character. It is an important aspect in building one's character.

Communication done with children must be arranged in such a way. It deals with the use of correct choice of words, the smoothness of language, the intonation, and the politeness in delivering the speech. It is expected to be able to raise positive attitude for the children and for their personality. The older children will teach their younger siblings the way of using polite and appropriate language because they learn from the parents and the surrounding the way to use language. So, the youngest ones will be used to communicating politely as well. Being accustomed to using language politely and appropriately will have implications in building the children's character. Family that communicates language politely, in general, has good character. The parents' discipline in words' arrangement and use of regular sentences has significant role in building the children's character.

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