Indonesian Language Performance of Mentally Retarded Children: Reference for Writing Literacy Text Needs

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Abstract—**This research examines the Indonesian language performance of mentally retarded children by identifying the vocabulary and sentence patterns. These two elements have implications for effective reading speed, which is needed in implementing the school literacy program. Identifying the vocabulary and sentence patterns of mentally retarded children is important to show the causes and overcome the low effective reading speed problems. Based on the data and discussion, the vocabulary is dominated by concrete nouns – monomorphemics, and the dominant sentence pattern is a monoclause – active. Meanwhile, the limitations of abstract thinking trigger the dominance of vocabulary characteristics and sentence patterns. Hence they fail to apply grammatical aspects in forming polymorphemic words and sentences with multiclauses. Text interventions are needed following their Indonesian language performance and repertoire to support their involvement in the school literacy program.**

Index Terms—**mentally retarded children, Indonesian language performance, literacy, effective reading speed**

I. INTRODUCTION

The urgency of literacy skills as an effort to utilize the global information flow proclaimed by UNESCO in 2003 was welcomed by the Government of Indonesia with the establishment of national literacy programs involving family, school and community (Atmazaki et al., 2017). As an element of the national program, the school literacy should be implemented by all levels and types of educational institutions. Schools are no exception in this context, focusing on educating children with special needs. The development of literacy skills for mentally retarded children is directed so that they have life skill.

The relationship between literacy activities and language skills cannot be denied. Language skills are the basic capital in absorbing and disseminating information which is one of the characteristics of a literate society. Therefore, to support the development of these programs, it is necessary to map out their linguistic competencies and Indonesian language skills. Based on the linguistic data, literacy reading materials can be designed according to their needs, and this research aims to achieve this goal.

Mentally retarded children are marked by below-normal intelligence (Kemis & Rosnawati, 2020). As a reference, Ilyas (2016) identified the intelligence dimension of these children under a score of 70. Low intelligence impacts their language skills, the basic literacy capital. However, the Indonesian government requires literacy activities for at least 15 minutes before learning (Kemendikbud, 2015). Text intervention is needed, hence literacy reading materials follow the needs, which is the significance of this research.

As a guide for the school literacy for children with special needs, an implementation guide was compiled (Kemendikbud, 2016a), containing 9 activities to increase the capacity of mentally retarded students. The nine literacy activities are based on Indonesian language skills, including listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Referring to the

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guide, improving the Indonesian language skills is the focus of activities in literacy. The school literacy program should also be prioritized because these skills help them absorb knowledge.

The Indonesian performance of mentally retarded children represents their language skills. The skills in speaking Indonesian orally and in writing, both productively and receptively, rely on mastery of vocabulary and sentence patterns. This affects the ability to produce and understand discourse or text in school literacy activities. Based on this logic, the research on the Indonesian language performance of mentally retarded children focused on aspects of vocabulary and sentence patterns. The results are expected to be used as a reference in preparing reading materials to support the implementation the literacy program in Special Schools.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

A. Indonesian Language Performance and Development of Mentally Retarded Children

It is important to describe the Indonesian language performance of mentally retarded children as a reference for intervention in providing educational services. This is because every educational service uses Indonesian as an introduction, which is domiciled as the official language in Indonesia. This research defines performance as language use skills (Arnawa, 2008). Therefore, the literacy skills of mentally retarded children are highly dependent on their performance capacity, which is linear with their language development.

Mentally retarded children experience obstacles in acquiring their language. Wijaya (2016) described that even though the language acquisition procedure is the same as for normal children of their age, those that are mentally retarded (a) are relatively lagging in mastering a language, (b) have a deficiency in grammatical aspects, (c) less able to communicate verbally, and (d) less able to understand and express abstract or complex concepts. Similarly, Thurlow et al. (2009) stated that barriers to the ability to use the language productively and receptively impact the low reading skills needed to increase literacy capacity. Qualitatively, Kemis and Rosnawati (2020) explained that the speed of language acquisition is much lower than normal children, and most of them do not achieve normal development. The indicator is that mentally retarded children tend not to master grammatical aspects and fail to use compound sentences. Based on these assumptions, this linguistic barrier is important in preparing literacy readings because language skills are needed in thinking and literacy.

B. Indonesian Language Vocabulary and Sentence Patterns

Vocabulary elements and syntactic structures are the focus of this research. These two elements are influential on the literacy activities of mentally retarded children. Vocabulary elements and syntactic structures are related to the production and understanding of literacy messages. As an agglutinative family, Indonesian vocabulary can be monomorphemic and polymorphemic. Polymorphemic is formed through morphological processes (Kridalaksana, 1996) of affixation, reduplication, compounding, and abbreviation. The process of forming polymorphemic words in Indonesian involves the ability to think abstractly. In this process, there are obstacles to the formation and understanding of polymorphemic vocabulary due to a lack of the ability to think abstractly.

Referentially, vocabulary in Indonesian is divided into concrete and abstract (Arnawa, 2009). Concrete vocabulary deals with physical aspects, while abstract relates to mental aspects. The references of concrete vocabulary are tangible, visible, and touched. In contrast, abstract vocabulary is used to identify groups with intangible references. The two groups involve different mental activities in their use for productive and receptive language activities. Involvement of higher mental activity is required for the use of abstract vocabulary.

Another grammatical aspect examined is the Indonesian sentence patterns of mentally retarded children. The sentence patterns used are mental activities that represent their logical structure. Grammar is an abstract rule of a language in which the use involves cognitive processes. In the linguistic problem, mentally retarded children are identified as individuals with intelligence significantly below the average of normal children (Wijaya, 2016). Indonesian has a variety of sentence patterns, but this research is focused on the number of clauses. Therefore, Indonesian sentences for mentally retarded children will be identified and classified based on the number of clauses and are divided into simple and compound sentences. A simple sentence only consists of one independent clause, while a compound sentence is formed from several independent clauses (Kridalaksana, 1993).

C. Literacy and Reading Skills

Generally, literacy means understanding the letter, sentence or literate. However, not every individual who understands the sentence is identified as literate. Many understand the letter or sentence but are not literate because they are not accustomed to reading and writing to absorb and disseminate information. Technically, literacy is defined as a continuous activity in accessing information, science, and technology by involving critical thinking (Abidin et al., 2017; Suwandi, 2019). The Ministry of Education and Culture of Indonesia (Kemendikbud, 2016b) formulated 6 literacy components. According to the characteristics of mentally retarded children, this research only focused on early and basic literacies. Early literacy is the ability to understand spoken language, which is formed through the experience of interacting with the social environment. In this stage, oral language skills, such as listening and speaking, become very urgent. In basic literacy, mentally retarded children are expected to understand spoken and written language, namely,

reading and writing, fiction and non-fiction. In this stage, they are expected to be able to perceive information and draw meaningful conclusions.

Referring to the explanation above, literacy skills depend highly on their language. This research will identify the literacy skills based on their effective reading speed. This is a measurement that combines speed with reading comprehension. Reading speed is calculated based on the average number of words read in one minute. Meanwhile, understanding is calculated based on the number of questions answered correctly (Jumaidi et al., 2013).

D. Previous Related Research

Research on linguistic aspects of mentally retarded children always attracts the attention of language teaching experts and linguists. Sulistiani et al. (2021) showed that nouns and numerals dominate the mastery of Indonesian vocabulary. The nouns come from their environment, while the numerals follow the noun used to express the amount, for example, 2 chickens (head). The sentence produced consists of nouns and numerals to state the amount. Nisa et al. (2021) found that the vocabulary of mentally retarded children is in the form of basic words, and only a small part uses words with affixes. The results of these two studies are sufficient to illustrate the limitations of vocabulary mastery for mentally retarded children. These vocabulary characteristics are important to consider in literacy learning. Furthermore, research on the syntactic aspects of the Indonesian language was conducted by Al-Mubarrok and Wagiati (2021). Through this research, the Indonesian sentence structure often used is single-cluase.

Conversely, the linguistic barriers promote several education experts to conduct action research as an intervention. Widodo (2016) reported that placard media improve the early reading skills of mentally retarded children. It reports that over 2 cycles, there was an increase in the initial reading level of +14.55. Another action research by Pratiwi et al. (2021) found that the role-playing method improves the speaking skills of mild mental retarded children. After the role-playing method was applied for 2 cycles, there was an increase in the speaking skills between 52 – 58%. This increase occurred because the method provided a freer and more participatory opportunity in language acts. The two action research shows the importance of collective intervention to improve the language skills of mentally retarded children as the basic capital to support the implementation of school literacy programs. This assumption is in line with MacQueen et al. (1973), which emphasize the importance of classroom intervention in language development. This collective approach is important to increase learning motivation by emphasizing the inclusion of language activities in all subjects. Each teacher is motivated to understand the verbal communication process, maintain the classroom environment, assess each child's verbal ability, provide new experiences, and develop methods for integrating speech improvement into daily activities.

III. METHOD

A. Research Design

This research focuses on the relationship between the Indonesian language performance of mentally retarded children and their literacy text needs. The phenomenon needs to be understood to design more effective literacy learning interventions. Therefore, this research used a qualitative design (Strauss & Corbin, 2003; Miles & Huberman, 2014).

B. Sample / Participants

A total of 22 participants were students from the State Special School 1 Buleleng and the State Special School 1 Jembarana, Bali, Indonesia, class X – XII. The participants were identified as mentally retarded from educable and trainable student groups or mild and moderate mental retarded children. In detail, the participants were presented in the following table.

TABLE 1
RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

Class	Participant		Total
	Male	Female	
X	8	5	13
XI	4	3	7
XII	1	1	2
Total	13	9	22

Besides students, this research also involved 2 teachers as informants to triangulate and validate the data obtained.

C. Instruments

The data needed were the characteristics of vocabulary, Indonesian sentence patterns, and the effective reading speed of mentally retarded children. Observations, document recording, and tests were carried out (Marzuki, 1986). Observations were made in the classroom learning process to map the Indonesian language's characteristics. The documents were recorded by collecting a portfolio of student work, such as essays and notes. Similarly, the test method was applied to confirm vocabulary and sentence patterns and measure the effective reading speed. The instruments used were observation guidelines, data cards, vocabulary and sentence tests, and reading speed tests related to the data collection technique. Furthermore, the tests were constructed using pictures, while the effective reading speed test was

constructed with a short discourse followed by questions about the discourse content. The test instruments were prepared by referring to reading, writing, and arithmetic assessment for mentally retarded children (Wasdi & Puspita, 2019).

D. Data Collection Procedures

The data collection procedure was based on a qualitative design relying on a naturalistic setting (Sugiono, 2012), and the stages were as follows. The first is determining the range of data required. The second is designing observations and recording interactions between students and teachers and students with students. The third is designing vocabulary, sentence patterns and effective reading speed tests by referring to the assessment guidelines for mentally retarded children. The fourth is designing interviews to triangulate and validate the data, while the fifth is identifying and classifying the corpus to determine the core data.

E. Data Analysis

The collected data on the Indonesian language performance was analyzed using a descriptive linguistic approach (Gleason, 1970; Alwasilah, 1985; Arnawa, 2008). The aim was to identify the characteristics of the language used. Furthermore, data on effective reading speed were analyzed by descriptive statistics to calculate the average speed with the following formula.

$$KEM = \frac{jk}{m} \; x \; \frac{sn}{SMI} = \cdots kpm$$

(Adapted from Jumaidi et al., 2013)

Description:

KEM	= Effective reading speed	sn	= Real score got by each reader
SMI	= Ideal max score	jk	= Number of words read
kpm	= Reading speed/minute	m	= Reading time (minutes)

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Description of the Indonesian Language Performance of Mentally Retarded Children

This research focuses on vocabulary characteristics, sentence patterns, and the effective reading speed of mentally retarded children related to their literacy text requirements. However, it should first explain a general description of the Indonesian language for mentally retarded children. Hence the vocabulary characteristics, sentence patterns, and effective reading speed can be better understood. Language acquisition is the same as in normal children since it takes place naturally and intentionally without planning. Even though the process is the same, the results are different, caused by the limited intelligence in mentally retarded children, which simultaneously proves the involvement of cognitive roles in language acquisition. Four-year-old normal children can speak their first language, but a mentally impaired child finds this hard. In mentally retarded children, age cannot be used as an indicator of language development.

Mentally retarded children experience language barriers, which can be observed in all aspects of language, such as phonology, morphology, semantics, and syntax. In the phonological aspect, the pronunciation of consonant sounds is often unclear. In broader language constructions, for example, in speech, prosodic elements, such as pauses and intonations, are often mispronounced. In the field of morphology, they tend not to be careful in using polymorphemic word-forming affixes. They only use root words, even though the context requires using derived words. In vocabulary and semantics, vocabulary can be used with concrete references. Furthermore, generic and abstract meanings are poorly understood, while single-clause sentences are used in syntax.

B. Characteristics of Indonesian Vocabulary of Mentally Retarded Children

Vocabulary is related to lexical and grammatical semantics. Lexical semantics is associated with monomorphemic words, while grammatical semantics is associated with morphological processes forming polymorphemic words. Data on the vocabulary of mentally retarded children were taken from two different sources, namely a portfolio of student performance in the form of essay documentation and some notes, as well as through observations of language acts. Based on this procedure, the types of words produced consist of nominal, verb, numerals, and adjective. Among these word classes, nominal and verbal dominate, while using nouns, verbs, and adjectives reached 56.09%, 14.36%, and 6.30%. Other information obtained from the data on the vocabulary is the use of numerals as much as 13.25%. The high frequency is because this type of word expresses the number of nouns. Regarding Indonesian vocabulary production, several types of words are still not or are rarely used, such as adverbials, conjunctions, pronouns, prepositions, articles, and interjections. This interpretation is taken because, in the Indonesian language, there are 10 known types of words.

The high frequency of noun and verbal use is because both types of words are important units in the semantic structure. Hence, every utterance will always involve a noun as an argument from the verb used. Chafe (1970) stated that nouns and verbals are central to semantics. Conversely, using nouns due to their real references does not require abstract thinking skills, which are an obstacle for mentally retarded children (Kemis & Rosnawati, 2020). Nouns and

verbal characteristics still follow the 'present' pattern, and the descriptions are related to personal and environmental experiences (Dardjowidjojo, 2003). Therefore, the difference in vocabulary production can be interpreted as a representation of differences in the social environment.

Morphologically, Indonesian vocabulary is divided into monomorphemic and polymorphemic. Monomorphemic words are commonly called base words, while polymorphemic are often called derivative words. As part of the agglutination family, Indonesian polymorphemic words are formed by combining free morphemes with affixes. There are several types of affixes: prefixes, infixes, suffixes, confixes, and combined. Besides going through the affixation process, such as merging free morphemes with affixes, the formation of Indonesian polymorphemic words can occur through other morphological processes, including reduplication, composition or compounding and contraction or abbreviation (Kridalaksana, 1996). Related to these morphological processes, the vocabulary produced is dominated by the use of monomorphemic. The composition is 83% and 17% monomorphemic and polymorphemic words. From 17% of the use of polymorphemic words, mentally retarded children form it by an affixation process. Other morphological processes, such as reduplication, composition, and contraction, have not been seen. They form polymorphemic words using limited productive affixes in the affixation process with the prefixes {*meng–, ber–,* and *di–*}; and the suffixes {*–an,* and *–kan*}. For example: *mengambil* (take)*, menyiram* (flush)*; berjalan* (walk)*, berlari* (run)*; dibaca* (be read)*, ditulis* (written)*; dengarkan* (listen)*, ambilkan* (take it)*; tulisan* (writing)*, lukisan* (painting). This lingual fact shows that the vocabulary represents their daily life.

The polymorphemic vocabulary production reflects the limitation of grammatical mastery. Grammar is an abstract system that allows an individual to use the language (Bloomfield, 1995; Chomsky, 1965; Lyon, 1992; Saussure, 1988). The limitation of grammatical rules is due to cognitive reasons. The cognitive development of mentally retarded children is not linear with their age development (Delphie, 2012). They tend to experience obstacles in abstract thinking, while grammatical mastery requires the ability to think abstractly.

Based on hypernymy - hyponymy semantic relations, the vocabulary of these children represents 'similar meaning' since the generalization and details are not known. As a general rule, the children can identify all fish as "fish," but they cannot determine the specific species. Furthermore, when they are presented with pictures of several types of animals in a single unit, for example, cows, cats, birds, and fish, they can identify each animal but fail to mention the generalization. In hypernymic - hyponymy relationship, the vocabulary of mentally retarded children can be visualized as follows:
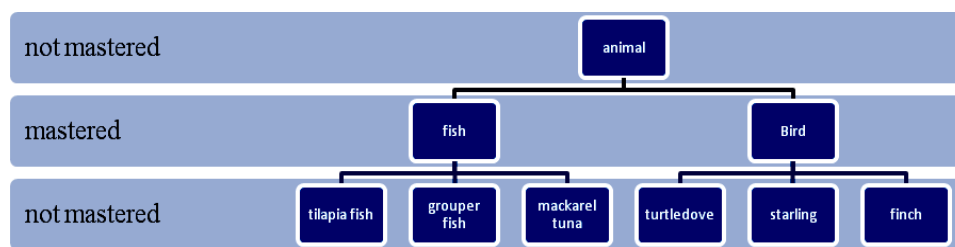

Figure 1. Visualization of Hypernymic – Hyponymy Relationships in Vocabulary of Mentally Retarded Children

Referring to the semantic data above, the vocabulary is dominated by concrete nouns. The children fail to construct hypernymy meanings due to their inability to build generalizations, which involve the ability to think abstractly. Furthermore, they cannot find specific semantic features as their distinguishing characteristics. Associated with cognitive psychology, mentally retarded children tend to think gestalt, which is more concerned with the totality than the parts. General and concrete impressions are the basis for forming the meaning of words.

C. Tendency of Sentence Patterns in the Indonesian Language for Mentally Retarded Children

In a speech event, the sentence is a unit of language to convey the idea as a whole. In Indonesian, sentences can be identified from various points of view. However, in this research, Indonesian sentences were identified based on the number of clauses. Based on this approach, the sentences used are divided into single-clause, often called simple, and plural-clause, compound sentences (Arnawa, 2008; Kridalaksana, 1993). Based on the data, the dominant sentence used is simple, which is 92%, while 87% use active construction. The dominance of using single-clause sentence structures is in line with the vocabulary data. These children are less able to use conjunctions to build relationships between clauses. Barriers to using compound sentences seem to be related to the limitations of children building logical relationships between clauses due to the lack of development of their cognitive aspects. Another aspect that needs attention from the sentence structure is the pattern of inter-phrase order. Many sentences have unnatural sequence patterns, such as *Hujan main bola berdua (Rain plays football together)*. Functionally, the message is understandable, but the grammatical rules should be changed to *Berdua main bola kehujanan (We are in the rain together while playing football)* or *Berdua main bola kehujanan (Together playing football in the rain).*

From 92% of the simple sentences used, 87% were active construction. The following explanation can be given for this lingual fact. First, mentally retarded children tend to highlight the subjects related to the Tagmemic theory (Verhaar, 1984) that the subjects are filled by noun slots dominating the vocabulary. Second, the limited ability to apply

morphological rules promotes the use of this active construction. The third is the low use of passive sentence construction because this type of sentence prioritizes ideas over subjects while the idea is an abstract concept. Other data revealed about 8% of sentences with multiclauses. However, they are not grammatical, for example *Aku lari jalan licin dan jatuh air* (I ran on a slippery road, and the water fell). This sentence consists of 2 clauses, namely *// I ran on a slippery road // the water fell//.* To this sentence, the following responses can be given. First, they do not understand prepositions as functions and tend to be contentive. Second, there is an error in the use of conjunctions. The relationship between clauses is causality, not equality, hence the correct conjunction used is *hence* not *and*. This syntactic data corresponds to the vocabulary that mentally retarded children do not understand conjunctions and prepositions. Therefore, the fix becomes *Aku berlari di jalan licin shingga jatuh ke air* (I ran on a slippery road, hence I fell into the water).

D. Effective Reading Speed of Mentally Retarded Children

Literacy is closely related to language activities of oral and written. However, not every language act can be said to be a literacy activity related to cognitive processes. Literacy can process, understand, apply, and transform the acquired knowledge into everyday life (Lederberg et al., 2014; Mayer, 2007; Enns, 2009). Regarding this concept, these activities are closely related to creative reading comprehension skills. Creative reading comprehension activities are the functional language through the process of integrating knowledge possessed with information being read. The reading skills needed to achieve this skill level are reading the lines, between the lines, and beyond the lines (Oka, 1976). Creative reading comprehension skills can be achieved through habituation, development of reading interest, and literacy-based learning. These are challenges in learning literacy for mentally retarded children because the data shows that their average effective reading speed is very low. The number of words that can be read ranges from 42 - 67 words per minute, with an understanding level of 15.6 - 27%. By applying descriptive statistics, the median reading speed is 54.5 words per minute, with an understanding level of 21.3%. The effective reading speed of mentally retarded children is around 11.609 words/minute, referring to the median value. This figure is below the average for normal children. The limitation stems from the existence of obstacles in the intelligence aspect. A text intervention is needed that follows the linguistic performance to become literate.

V. Conclusion

Literacy activities are related to language skills. The literacy barriers experienced by mentally retarded children stem from language acquisition barriers and their relatively low intelligence level. The intelligence score is below 70, which has implications for Indonesian language performance as reflected in the limited characteristics of vocabulary and sentence patterns used, as well as the low level of effective reading speed. The Indonesian vocabulary of these children is dominated by concrete and monomorphemic nouns. In syntax, it is dominated by the use of active-monoclause sentences. The characteristics of the vocabulary and the sentence patterns correspond to each other. With characteristics and limited intelligence levels, the effective reading speed is 11.609 words per minute. The linguistic and cognitive reality requires text intervention to support the implementation of the School Literacy Program. The text intervention needed should follow the Indonesian language's performance possessed by mentally retarded children.

Acknowledgments

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