

Utilization of Technology in Developing Communicative Competence in Sekolah Murid Merdeka (SMM) Students

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ABSTRACT

Communication competence is an increasingly crucial skill, not only for the future but also for daily life. The era of globalization and rapid technological advances has made the ability to communicate one of the indicators of individual success in various aspects of life. The widespread use of digital media will also make communication skills more complex. As an educational institution, Sekolah Murid Merdeka (SMM) is committed to developing student competencies by integrating communicative competency into the curriculum. SMM uses a blended-learning approach by combining multiple instructional methods—such as in-person teaching, online content, and interactive activities in a personalized competency-based learning process according to students' interests and aspirations. This research aims to identify learning methods and strategies used by teachers in developing communicative competence and the student profile on the achievement of this competency development at Sekolah Murid Merdeka. This research combines quantitative and qualitative approaches simultaneously (a mixed method). A total of 1,780 summative assessment data of SMM students were used to measure the achievement of communicative competence, while data from interviewing 6 SMM teachers were used to explore the learning methods and strategies. The results showed that SMM improves students' communicative competence by applying a project-based approach and collaborative learning. The findings of this study are expected to offer a comprehensive analysis of communicative competence achievement, as well as a basis for providing concrete recommendations to refine learning strategies that enhance students' communicative competence.

Keywords: *Competency; Communicative; Blended Learning; Learning Methods; Student-centered Learning*

INTRODUCTION

Communication is a process of exchanging information with other people. In life, communication is important because every time you meet someone, you need to interact. According to Wilbur Schramm (in Trihayu, 2018:388-392), communication is the act of carrying out contact between the sender and recipient with the help of messages; the sender and receiver have some shared experience that gives meaning to the messages and symbols sent by the sender and received and interpreted by the receiver. In the learning context, the communication process is differentiated into verbal and non-verbal communication (Trihayu, 2018:388-392). Good communication is an effective exchange between each party, the communicator and the communicant (Nurrachmah, S, 2024). Effective communication will lead to effective relationships.

Effective communication in learning transforms messages in the form of science and technology from teachers as communicators to students as communicants, where students can

understand the meaning of messages according to predetermined goals. Effective communication in learning will lead to increased insight into science and technology and can change behavior for the better. Research conducted by Garina (in Ilyashenko et al. 2019) shows that communicative competence is a prerequisite for forming diverse personalities and competent professionals. Therefore, teachers have an important role and are most responsible for ongoing effective communication in learning.

The importance of communication in learning encourages teachers to look for effective ways so that students can understand well while being actively involved in the learning process. Activities in blended and face-to-face learning projects can foster the development of communicative competency skills. Forming communicative competence in student preparation with the support of electronic technology will open up new ways to become quality professionals.

Sekolah Murid Merdeka (SMM) is Indonesia's first blended learning school. Teaching and learning activities at SMM are a breakthrough in developing student competencies. Learning activities use multiple instructional methods—such as in-person teaching, online content, and interactive activities. In the learning process, SMM applies a personalized competency-based curriculum according to standards and is accredited, accompanied by various programs and learning options according to children's talents, interests, and aspirations.

This research aims to identify and analyze the learning methods and strategies applied by teachers to enhance students' communicative competence, as well as the student profile on the achievement of communicative competence at the elementary, middle, and high school levels at Sekolah Murid Merdeka. The research results will provide a comprehensive picture of how the development of communicative competence is carried out and the results of this learning. It also offers actionable recommendations for the development of curricula and teaching methods, both at Sekolah Murid Merdeka (SMM) and in schools in general, thereby equipping students with the communicative skills they need to tackle future challenges.

METHOD

This research used a mixed-method approach, beginning with a qualitative approach with a case study that included in-depth interviews with SMM teachers and a literature study. In-depth interviews were conducted with six SMM teachers who taught in grades 5–6 elementary school, 7–10 middle school, and 11–12 high school at SMM. To enrich the data, a comprehensive literature review was conducted to investigate, analyze, and synthesize previous research. Journals and relevant sources provided documentation for the data collection techniques. The data obtained was then analyzed using the content analysis method.

A quantitative approach was also carried out to measure the students' achievement of communicative competence based on summative assessment data. It used descriptive analysis, which

was designed to provide an overview of students' achievement on communicative competence at SMM across preschool, elementary, middle, and high school levels. The research population included all SMM students at that level, with a sample of 10% of the total population at each level of education using a stratified random sampling technique. The data source referred to a summative assessment of communicative competence based on relevant rubrics implemented at Sekolah Murid Merdeka. The research instrument was the rubric that measured students' communicative competence indicators. The data obtained were analyzed using descriptive analysis to describe the average competency achievement, the distribution of achievement for each competency element, and differences in achievement between levels of education.

Quantitative research procedures were carried out in four stages. The first stage was collecting summative data from the Sekolah Murid Merdeka assessment system. The second stage involved selecting samples of assessment tasks that met the criteria in the assessment rubric. The third stage involved analyzing the assessment data with descriptive statistical tools to describe competency achievement. Finally, the fourth stage was preparing a research findings report.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. SMM Learning Method

Sekolah Murid Merdeka (SMM) applies a blended learning method that combines multiple instructional methods— in-person teaching, online content, and interactive activities using Zoom application and Learning Management System (LMS) in the Sekolah.mu platform. SMM's asynchronous (online face-to-face) learning sessions are called "Live Learning." In each live learning session, discussion is held on a topic that is part of the learning theme.

SMM strives to equip all students with future competencies. This school develops children's competencies for the future by applying the 5M learning method. 5M stands for Memanusiakan Hubungan (Humanizing Relationships), Memahami Konsep (Understanding Concepts), Memberdayakan Konteks (Empowering Context), Membangun Keberlanjutan (Building Sustainability), and Memilih Tantangan (Choosing Challenges). SMM learning is always based on the 5M principles; in humanizing interactions, SMM tries to build student-friendly learning processes that:

1. Empathetic and personalized according to the child's needs, interests, and talents,
2. Guides students to understand further the context of the learning material provided,
3. Encourages students to involve the community as a learning resource and space to impact the surrounding environment positively,
4. Provides directed and sustainable learning experiences to students,
5. Guides students to master skills through meaningful challenge choices.

This approach facilitates technology-based learning and encourages the formation of holistic student competencies, both academically and socially.

2. Strategy for Developing SMM Communicative Competence

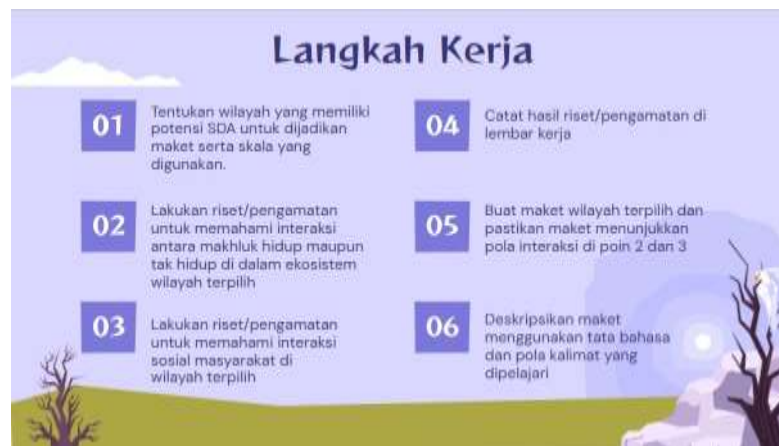
To enhance students' communicative competence, Sekolah Murid Merdeka (SMM) teachers apply various innovative strategies. One of these strategies is to use inquiry questions relevant to the student's experience to build initial engagement. For example, when learning about "advertising", the teacher starts with a roleplay and discussion session using questions such as, "What things will make students decide to buy a product?"

Another strategy is to develop learning materials that refer to real communicative situations. For example, SMM teachers took the students to local festivals and Bogor Chinatown. There, students were taught about street food, cultural mixing, and why they happen. They also learned how people interacted and communicated to introduce and sell the products.

The integration of technology in learning is another important strategy. Technology can be used as an effective tool in improving communicative competence. Teachers utilize digital platforms or technology-based applications to facilitate interaction between students. In SMM, technology integration can be done in the Learning Management System (LMS) and other platforms, such as Padlet. In one activity, the teacher asked questions about a particular phenomenon on Padlet, allowing students to answer and discuss it online. This strategy expanded students' opportunities to communicate more authentically and contextually.

SMM also applies project-based learning methods as a strategy to develop student competencies. One example of a project given to students was a thematic project with the theme "Interactive Disaster Preparedness," where students were divided into four booths. Each booth will discuss a different theme. The first booth discussed facts and hoaxes, the second focused on the earth and tsunami, the third addressed first aid, and the fourth summarized conclusions. This project promoted student communication through interactive presentations and discussions at each booth.

In addition, portfolio-based assessments are used to support the development of students' communicative competence. In grade 7, the summative assessment is to create a mock-up project of a demographic exploration including the living creatures and their ecosystems. Students were asked to create mock-ups of areas that showed interactions between living things. The following was a detailed description of the summative assessment for making mock-ups.



Picture 1: sample of summative assessment

The image above (picture 1) described the steps students had to take to complete the assessment. In part 4, students recorded the results of observational research on a worksheet; this showed that students could convey relevant messages. Apart from that, students were also free to choose visual designs to support communication goals. This approach not only trained students' abilities in designing effective communication but also strengthened their skills in conveying messages in a structured and creative manner.

3. The Role of Teachers in Building SMM Communicative Competence

Teachers at Sekolah Murid Merdeka (SMM) have a strategic role as learning facilitators who support the development of student competence, especially in the communicative aspect. Teachers help students design learning objectives, choose appropriate methods, and develop competence. SMM teachers have an essential role in supporting students who face communication challenges. They must create an inclusive and supportive environment in the classroom where students can feel comfortable to speak

One of the practices carried out by SMM teachers was to provide daily reflection at the end of the lesson. This reflection often expresses specific appreciation, such as "Today, you have become a communicative child because you can explain the material clearly and well." This positive feedback aims to increase student's awareness of the competencies they develop in SMM and how they are applied in daily activities.

SMM teachers also play a role in encouraging interaction and participation with students. This is done by designing group activities, discussions, or collaborative projects where students can interact. Through these activities, teachers build students' awareness of the neighborhood, which stimulates students to explore more profound knowledge. This exploration process directly contributes to developing students' communicative competence, which is integrated with their understanding of surrounding issues. With this approach, the role of SMM teachers is not only as educators but also as drivers of student involvement in meaningful and relevant learning.

4. Sekolah Murid Merdeka Students' Communicative Competence Achievements

This research used data from students at Sekolah Murid Merdeka (SMM) covering all levels of education from preschool to high school to get a comprehensive picture of the development of student communicative competence at each stage of education. The data were analyzed to gain a deeper understanding of students' achievements and to identify the patterns of growth in their competencies. Sekolah Murid Merdeka has succeeded in increasing student competency through the blended learning method and implementing a competency-based curriculum. This study assessed 86 copies from preschool to elementary school levels, 77 copies from middle school levels from grades 7-8, and 37 copies from high school levels from grades 10-12 using a specially designed rubric.

Given the significant differences and the varying competency targets at each level, a categorization of student achievement was created. In preschool and lower elementary school levels (grades 1-4), the target of communicative competence was the development of the ability to communicate clearly; at upper elementary school (grades 5-6), middle school, and high school levels, the target of developing communicative competence is the ability to make comprehensive reports. The following is a description of the results that have been collected.

Table 1. Achievement of students communicative competence in the "Communicate Clearly" dimension

Level	Class	Category of Achievement			
		Good	Average	Poor	Grand Total
Preschool	A	54.55%	0%	45.45%	100.00%
	B	75.00%	0%	25.00%	100.00%
	KB	72.73%	9.09%	18.18%	100.00%
Preschool Total		69.57%	2.17%	28.26%	100.00%
Elementary School	1	93.33%	0%	6.67%	100.00%
	2	100.00%	0%	0%	100.00%
	3	100.00%	0%	0%	100.00%
	4	94.12%	0%	5.88%	100.00%
Elementary School Total		96.72%	0%	3.28%	100.00%
Grand Total		85.05%	0.93%	14.02%	100.00%

Communicative competency in the "Communicate Clearly" dimension provided an overview of students' abilities at the preschool and lower elementary school levels. At the preschool level, there was significant variation between the three groups: preschool KB, preschool A, and preschool B. The majority of preschool KB students (73%) and preschool B (75%) demonstrated communication skills classified as "Good", while preschool A students showed a lower percentage at 55%. Conversely, the percentage of students with "Poor"

communication skills remained relatively high in Preschool A (45%) compared to Preschool KB (18%) and Preschool B (25%). The absence of students in the "Fair" category in all preschool groups showed that students' communication abilities at this level were divided into two distinct categories: "Good" or "Poor".

Meanwhile, a more positive trend was seen at the lower elementary school level compared to the preschool level. Almost all students from Grade 2, Grade 3, and Grade 4 achieved the "Good" category, with a perfect score of 100% for Grade 2 and Grade 3, and slightly lower in Grade 4 (94.1%). Grade 1 students were slightly behind, with 93.3% in the "Good" category, while 6.7% were still in the "Poor" category. Similar to the preschool level, no students in lower elementary schools were in the "Fair" category, indicating a similar pattern of achievement, namely abilities that tend to focus on two categories.

Table 2. Achievement of students communicative competence in the "Create Comprehensive Reports" dimension

Level	Class	Category of Achievement			
		Good	Average	Poor	Grand Total
Elementary School	5	100.00%	0%	0%	100.00%
	6	40.00%	20.00%	40.00%	100.00%
Elementary School Total		75.00%	8.33%	16.67%	100.00%
Middle School	7	96.55%	3.45%	0%	100.00%
	8	88.46%	3.85%	7.69%	100.00%
	9	81.82%	18.18%	0%	100.00%
Middle School Total		89.61%	7.79%	2.60%	100.00%
High School	10	75.00%	25.00%	0%	100.00%
	11	100.00%	0%	0%	100.00%
	12	83.33%	16.67%	0%	100.00%
High School Total		86.49%	13.51%	0%	100.00%
Grand Total		87.30%	9.52%	3.17%	100.00%

The ability to create comprehensive reports showed varying trends between the elementary, middle, and high school levels. At the Primary School level, there was a significant contrast between Grade 5 and Grade 6. All Grade 5 students (100%) fell into the Good category, demonstrating strong mastery in preparing reports. However, in Grade 6, the distribution of abilities became more diverse with 40% of students in the "Poor" category, 20% in the "Average" category, and only 40% in the "Good" category. These differences reflected specific challenges, such as increased complexity of the material, adaptation to more challenging assignments, or teaching approaches that need improvement to maintain achievement consistency.

At the middle school level, most students demonstrated strong ability in report writing skill, but the trend showed a slight decline as the grade level increased. In Grade 7, 96.6% of students were in the “Good” category, but this percentage decreased to 88.5% in Grade 8 and 81.8% in Grade 9. In addition, there was an increase in the “Average” category, from 3.4% in Grade 7 to 18.2% in Grade 9, and the emergence of the “Poor” category in Grade 8 (7.7%).

At the high school level, the results remained stable, with most students demonstrating strong ability in report writing skills. All Grade 10 students (100%) fell into the “Good” category, indicating a solid foundational ability at the beginning of high school level. However, the distribution of ability achievements became more diverse in Grade 11 and Grade 12. A total of 75% of Grade 11 students were in the “Good” category, while the other 25% were in the “Average” category. In Grade 12, 83.3% of students were in the Good category, while 16.7% were in the “Average” category. The absence of students in the “Poor” category across all high school levels demonstrated a strong foundational understanding, though improvements are needed to ensure all students reach the highest proficiency level.

CONCLUSION

Communication is a fundamental element in effective learning, both verbal and nonverbal. Developing students' communicative competence is a priority that supports their ability to convey messages relevantly and based on quality arguments. Sekolah Murid Merdeka (SMM), Indonesia's first blended learning-based institution, has integrated a competency-based curriculum to improve students' communicative abilities through online and face-to-face learning.

The research results showed that the competency-based approach and blended learning method significantly support the development of students' communicative competence. Various activities such as discussions, presentations, and preparing project reports helped students develop their communication skills that not only enhance academic abilities but also equip students for real-world challenges. Communication barriers between teachers and students in blended learning can be minimized by developing materials that include life around the students. The summative assessment project-based portfolio allows students to develop their competencies in a more personalized manner and is not limited to the classroom. As the class level improves, the achievement of communicative competence of SMM students increases. Task-based learning strategies, content, and collaboration are the keys to creating interactive, meaningful, and relevant learning needs in the 21st century.

The findings of this study can be used to make evaluations and provide recommendations for curriculum development. Designing an adaptive curriculum appropriate to student development at each level is important. Regular evaluation of teaching methods is also needed, involving input from teachers, students, and parents. Teachers are encouraged to create summative assessments using real-life relevant tasks to increase student motivation and engagement. Additional interventions, such

as special training or focused supervision, can be done to assist students who remain in the “Poor” or “Average” category in improving these competencies.

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