



The Language Continuum as a Conceptual Framework for Character Development in Early Childhood

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Abstract. This study aims to examine the language continuum as a conceptual framework for character development in early childhood. A qualitative literature review was conducted by synthesizing relevant scientific publications from the past five years addressing child development, teacher–child communication, scaffolding, self-regulation, and character education. The synthesis indicates that character development involves not only behavioral compliance but also the gradual development of self-awareness, responsibility, and self-regulation through meaningful social interactions. The language continuum, comprising visually looking on, non-directive statement, questioning, directive statement, and offering help, provides a progressive model of teacher communication in which the level of intervention can be adjusted to children’s needs and responses. Conceptually, the progression from less to more direct intervention may create opportunities for children to observe, reflect on, and regulate their behavior before receiving more explicit guidance. The study proposes the language continuum as a conceptual perspective for understanding how progressive teacher–child communication may relate to character development in early childhood. Its proposed relationships remain to be examined through empirical research across diverse early childhood education contexts.

Keywords: *character development, early childhood, language continuum*

Abstrak: Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji kontinum bahasa sebagai kerangka konseptual pembentukan karakter anak usia dini. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan metode studi literatur melalui sintesis berbagai publikasi ilmiah

dalam lima tahun terakhir yang membahas perkembangan anak, komunikasi guru dan anak, scaffolding, regulasi diri, dan pendidikan karakter. Hasil sintesis menunjukkan bahwa pembentukan karakter tidak hanya berkaitan dengan kepatuhan terhadap aturan, tetapi juga mencakup perkembangan kesadaran diri, tanggung jawab, dan regulasi diri melalui interaksi sosial yang bermakna. Kontinum bahasa yang terdiri atas *visually looking on*, *non-directive statement*, *questioning*, *directive statement*, dan *offering help* memberikan kerangka tahapan komunikasi guru yang memungkinkan tingkat intervensi disesuaikan dengan kebutuhan dan respons anak. Secara konseptual, pergerakan dari intervensi yang lebih minimal menuju arahan yang lebih langsung dapat memberikan kesempatan bagi anak untuk mengamati, merefleksikan, dan mengatur perilakunya sebelum memperoleh arahan yang lebih eksplisit. Penelitian ini mengusulkan kontinum bahasa sebagai perspektif konseptual untuk memahami keterkaitan antara komunikasi guru yang bertahap dan perkembangan karakter anak usia dini. Hubungan yang dirumuskan secara konseptual tersebut masih memerlukan pengujian empiris dalam berbagai konteks pendidikan anak usia dini

Kata Kunci: Pengembangan karakter, anak usia dini, kontinum bahasa

INTRODUCTION

Early childhood character development is closely related to children's experiences in interacting with teachers and peers. Character development encompasses not only compliance with rules but also the gradual development of self-awareness, responsibility, and the ability to regulate behavior in social situations. Previous studies have shown that interactive learning experiences, including role-play, can support children's social-emotional development (Meilina et al., 2021), while language and communication are closely associated with moral development in early childhood (Fitri & Na'imah, 2020; Putri & Setyawan, n.d.). These findings suggest that character development is shaped not only by what children are taught but also by how teachers communicate, respond to children's behavior, and provide opportunities for children to understand and regulate their actions.

Language therefore serves a function beyond the transmission of information. In teacher–child interactions, verbal communication can help children interpret situations, consider behavioral choices, and understand the values underlying social rules. Studies have highlighted the role of teacher–child verbal interactions in children’s thinking, social understanding, and behavioral development (Anggraini, 2021; Azzahra & Kuswandi, 2019). Reflective and interactive communication may also provide children with opportunities to respond, reason, and make sense of their experiences rather than simply follow external instructions (Aeni & Setiasih, 2024; Hamel et al., 2021). This makes the way teachers intervene verbally particularly relevant to understanding how everyday classroom interactions may contribute to children’s character development (Rudasill et al., 2022; Salminen et al., 2021).

This issue can be further understood through the concept of *scaffolding* in sociocultural learning theory. *Scaffolding* emphasizes the provision of support that is adjusted to children’s current abilities and gradually modified as their competence develops. In this process, language functions as a mediational tool through which teachers can help children interpret situations, reflect on their actions, and regulate behavior. Research indicates that scaffolding can support character development in early childhood (Day et al., 2022), while teacher–child verbal interactions have been associated with the development of children’s self-regulation (Salminen et al., 2021). However, these perspectives provide limited specification of how teacher communication can be structured progressively from minimal intervention to more direct guidance in response to children’s behavioral needs. This gap provides a basis for examining the *language continuum* as a conceptual framework for understanding progressive communication interventions in early childhood character development.

However, although previous studies have emphasized the importance of scaffolding and teacher–child verbal interactions in supporting children’s character development and self-regulation, there remains a conceptual gap in explaining how the intensity of teacher communication can be progressively adjusted before, during, and after a child requires direct guidance (Day et al., 2022; Muir et al., 2023). In classroom practice, teachers may respond to inappropriate behavior primarily through commands, prohibitions, or corrections. While such responses may provide immediate behavioral direction, they may not always allow children sufficient opportunities to observe a situation, consider the meaning or consequences of their behavior,

and participate in regulating their own actions. Thus, the issue is not simply whether teachers provide guidance, but how such guidance can be provided proportionally in response to children's needs and behavioral responses (Salminen et al., 2021).

From this perspective, the language continuum offers a potential conceptual framework for mapping teacher communication interventions progressively, ranging from visually looking on, non-directive statement, questioning, directive statement, to offering help. This sequence positions direct intervention as one form of support to be used when necessary, rather than as the initial response to every instance of children's behavior. Conceptually, movement across these stages may be understood as a process in which the level of support is adjusted according to children's needs while allowing opportunities for awareness, responsibility, and self-regulation to emerge. Accordingly, this study aims to synthesize relevant literature and formulate the language continuum as a conceptual framework for understanding the relationship between teacher communication interventions and character development in early childhood. The contribution of this study lies in integrating progressive communication, scaffolding, and value internalization into a conceptual framework that can subsequently be examined and refined through empirical research across diverse early childhood education contexts.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach using a literature review to synthesize empirical and conceptual evidence on language development, interactive communication, and character formation in early childhood within the framework of a language continuum. Relevant journal articles and academic books were identified through Google Scholar using keywords related to *language continuum*, *teacher-child communication*, *language development*, *character formation*, *moral development*, and *self-regulation*. Sources were selected based on their relevance to early childhood education, substantive connection to the study focus, availability of full text, and academic credibility. Data were analyzed through systematic identification and screening, critical reading, extraction of key findings, thematic categorization, and cross-source synthesis. The analysis focused on teacher-child communication, scaffolding, value internalization, self-regulation, and progressive communication interventions

to identify recurring patterns, conceptual relationships, and research gaps. Source triangulation was employed by comparing findings across multiple publications to enhance the credibility and consistency of the synthesis. The resulting synthesis was used to formulate the language continuum as a conceptual framework for character development in early childhood and to derive its implications for instructional interaction in early childhood education.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The Language Continuum in the Perspective of Early Childhood Character Development

A literature search conducted via Google Scholar, followed by a selection process based on predetermined criteria, reveals that early childhood character formation occurs as a gradual and contextual process shaped by the quality of children's social interactions. The reviewed literature indicates that character traits such as discipline, responsibility, and self-regulation are not adequately cultivated through direct instruction alone; rather, they are shaped by interactional experiences, teacher support, and opportunities for children to develop the capacity to regulate their own behavior. The quality of teacher–child relationships during the preschool years, for example, has been shown to be associated with the development of children's self-regulation (Rudasill et al., 2022). In the perspective of social interaction, language also serves as an important medium in this process, as teacher–child interaction provides children with opportunities to receive support, understand their environment, and develop both their language and cognitive abilities (Lestari et al., 2023; Yang et al., 2021).

The synthesis reveals an important issue in learning communication practices, namely the use of direct communication in the form of prohibitions, commands, or corrections when children display inappropriate behavior. Such communication can provide immediate direction, however, overly direct support needs to be carefully considered to preserve space for children to understand the situation and develop the ability to regulate their own behavior. Literature on teacher–child relationships indicates that the quality of interaction constitutes an important part of children's developmental environment, including in the development of self-regulation (Rudasill et al., 2022). Thus, the central issue lies not in the use of direct instruction per se,

but in how the level of communicative intervention is adjusted to children's conditions and needs.

This synthesis points to the need for a communication framework that allows teachers to calibrate the level of intervention according to children's conditions. It is in this context that the language continuum holds conceptual relevance. The language continuum places communicative intervention along a spectrum, ranging from observing the child (visually looking on), providing non-directive statements, asking questions (questioning), providing directive statements, to offering help. The concept of the language continuum itself has been used to describe the stages of teachers' communicative intervention in interactions with children (Ula & Subrata, 2022).

Meanwhile, research on teacher–child interaction shows that the quality of communication constitutes an important part of children's learning experiences and development (Lestari et al., 2023; Yang et al., 2021). In this study, these stages are further synthesized with the processes of self-regulation and the internalization of character values. Accordingly, the conceptual contribution of this study lies in linking the stages of teacher communication, the process of self-regulation, and the internalization of character values within a single, continuous framework.

The visually looking on stage plays an important role in providing space for children's exploration. At this stage, the teacher observes the child's behavior without directly intervening, thereby giving the child an opportunity to independently recognize what is wrong and needs to be corrected. This approach is consistent with the principles of child-centered learning, which emphasizes the importance of constructing understanding through experience (Hilmiyah et al., 2023). However, the synthesis indicates that observation cannot always be positioned as a stand-alone strategy. When a child's behavior poses potential risks, or when the child is not yet able to regulate their own behavior, teachers need to escalate the level of intervention through subsequent communicative stages. Thus, the significance of the visually looking on stage lies not merely in "non-intervention," but in providing children with the opportunity to develop awareness before assistance is given.

The non-directive statement stage functions as an early, non-judgmental form of intervention. Statements such as "I see you standing on the table" help children become aware of their behavior without feeling blamed. When this stage is positioned after visually looking on, a shift can be

observed from observation toward the provision of information that still preserves space for the child to determine their own response. This pattern suggests that teachers' communication within the language continuum is not aimed at immediately controlling behavior, but rather at adjusting the level of support to match children's capacity for self-regulation (Yang et al., 2021).

Furthermore, the questioning stage becomes an important part of the character formation process, as it provides children with the opportunity to think and express their understanding of a given situation. Open-ended questions such as "What is the table used for?" do not merely direct children toward a rule, but can also help them consider the function, context, and consequences of an action. Hamel's research shows that questioning practices form part of teachers' interactions during early childhood learning activities, with variations between open and closed questions used by teachers to support children's exploratory processes (Hamel et al., 2021). Accordingly, within the framework of the language continuum, questioning can be regarded as a stage that provides children with greater space to articulate their thinking before teachers offer direct guidance.

The directive statement and offering help stages function as reinforcement within the process of character formation. Guidance provided by teachers helps children clarify misunderstandings, while direct assistance ensures that children can carry out appropriate actions. Nevertheless, the use of these two stages must be applied proportionally. If overused, this approach may reduce children's opportunities to think and make decisions independently (Muir et al., 2023). Therefore, achieving a balance between independence and assistance becomes key to the successful implementation of the language continuum.

In conclusion, the language continuum functions not merely as a communication strategy, but also as a pedagogical framework that enables the process of character formation to unfold in a reflective and sustained manner. This approach shifts the focus from mere behavioral control toward the development of children's awareness and sense of responsibility for their own actions (Amir & Hastuti, 2023; Ulfah et al., 2023).

The Language Continuum as a Framework for the Internalization of Character Values in Learning Practice

The synthesis of the literature reveals that the internalization of character values in early childhood is influenced not only by the delivery of rules, but also by the quality of interaction that enables children to understand their behavior and develop awareness of their own actions. Studies on scaffolding highlight the importance of providing support gradually, in accordance with children's needs, while studies on teacher–child communication indicate that the quality of verbal interaction is associated with children's language development and their ability to understand and respond to the learning environment (Lestari et al., 2023; Ula & Subrata, 2022; Yang et al., 2021).

When these findings are compared, a common thread emerges character formation is more likely to occur when children are given the opportunity to understand and manage their own behavior, rather than merely receiving instructions from teachers. However, the studies drawn upon in this research tend to address the aspects of communication, scaffolding, moral development, and self-regulation separately, each from its own perspective. The synthesis of these findings points to the need to more systematically connect the process of teachers' communicative support with the process of character value internalization. In this context, the language continuum can be positioned as a conceptual bridge between the way teachers respond and the process by which children build awareness of their own behavior.

Based on this synthesis, the language continuum is understood not merely as a communication technique, but as a graduated framework for providing support to children. The stages, beginning with visually looking on, non-directive statement, questioning, directive statement, and culminating in offering help, allow teachers to adjust their level of intervention according to children's conditions and needs. This framework positions character internalization as a process that develops through interaction, namely by giving children space to become aware of their own behavior, receive communicative support as needed, and gradually develop the capacity to direct their own behavior.

Further analysis indicates that the application of the language continuum depends not only on the sequence of intervention stages, but also on teachers' ability to adjust their communicative responses to children's

conditions and needs. The quality of teacher–child interaction is known to be associated with the development of children's self-regulation, while systematic reviews indicate that teacher–child interaction can play a role in supporting the development of executive function and self-regulation in early childhood (Guler et al., 2014; Rudasill et al., 2022; Sankalaite et al., 2021). Based on the literature synthesis, the use of gradual and adaptive support provides children with space to understand a given situation, receive assistance according to their needs, and progressively develop the ability to regulate their own responses (Leith et al., 2018; Sankalaite et al., 2021). Therefore, the language continuum can be understood not merely as a communicative procedure, but as a pedagogical framework that requires teacher sensitivity to children's development and circumstances.

Furthermore, the language continuum also demonstrates advantages over conventional approaches that are direct and instructive in nature. Whereas conventional approaches focus on compliance as an outcome, the language continuum focuses on the process of building awareness. As a result, values formed through the language continuum tend to be more enduring and more readily applicable across a range of situations (Pitaloka et al., 2021; Retnaningsih & Zulkarnaen, 2023; Yulianti et al., 2023).

In conclusion, based on the literature synthesis, the language continuum can be positioned as a conceptual framework that integrates the stages of teachers' communicative intervention with the processes of awareness, self-regulation, and value internalization in early childhood. This framework offers the perspective that character formation can be understood as a gradual process unfolding through communicative interaction tailored to children's conditions and needs.

CONCLUSION

The literature synthesis suggests that the language continuum offers a promising conceptual framework for understanding how teacher–child communication may contribute to character development in early childhood. Rather than treating communication as a uniform form of behavioral control, the continuum positions teacher intervention as a gradual and adaptive process, ranging from visually looking on, non-directive statement, questioning, directive statement, to offering help. These stages represent different levels of communicative support that can be adjusted to children's

situational needs and may create opportunities for awareness, self-regulation, responsibility, and value internalization. The conceptual contribution of this study lies in connecting progressive communication interventions with processes underlying character development, particularly the movement from external guidance toward greater child participation in regulating behavior. Accordingly, the language continuum may serve as a useful analytical perspective for examining teacher–child interaction and character formation in early childhood education. However, its proposed relationships remain conceptual and should not be interpreted as evidence of causal effectiveness. Future empirical studies are therefore needed to examine how the continuum operates across different educational contexts and whether its application is associated with measurable changes in children’s character-related behaviors and self-regulation.

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