

## Analysis of Syntactic Complexity in Elementary School Aged 7-8 Years

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### Abstract:

This research aims to identify the profile of syntactic complexity abilities in elementary school aged 7 - 8 years in Surakarta. This research uses a quantitative approach with a survey-based descriptive design using multi-stage sampling which focuses on observing a single variable. Each respondent's sentence complexity will be calculated using analysis of language samples obtained from the results of the conversation, and the results will be analyzed descriptively statistically. The results show that interrogative, complex and compound-complex sentences are in the low group. Complete sentences, subject, predicate, object, information, declarative, simple, compound, active and passive are in the medium group. The syntactic abilities of children aged 7-8 years are mostly adequate, but have not yet reached their maximum potential. The role of teachers, speech therapists, and parents is important in optimizing this development through active language stimulation, syntactic structure practice, and early detection, taking into account environmental and social factors.

**Keywords:** *Elementary School, Syntactic Complexity, Language Stimulation*

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## INTRODUCTION

Language ability is a skill that is acquired from the time a person is still in the womb. As quoted in (Khoirunnisa, Diniyah, & Noviyanti, 2023), according to Ramirez, children begin to hear and pay attention to the conversations around them from the age of 0. This is emphasized by (Febrina, 2020) who states that the language produced by children can be seen from their ability to directly interact with the language around them. Imroatus in (Shanty & Dewi, 2021) states that language acquisition will continue to develop as the child ages. A baby will experience language and speech development day by day, but of course, each



child's progress is not the same—some speak quickly, while others take quite a long time (Masitoh, 2019).

Language is defined as a system of arbitrary sound symbols produced by speech organs and functions as a means of communication for society in daily life (Rohmaningtyas, 2021). The structure of language can be divided into three levels; sounds essentially occupy the first level, grammar is in the second level, while the components of meaning occupy the final level. Thus, language becomes a field of study in linguistics, including phonology, morphology, syntax, and semantics (Darwin, Anwar, & Munir, 2021). This is supported by the opinion of (Fitriyah, 2023) that in the study of psycholinguistics, language acquisition is divided into several stages. These stages include the acquisition of sounds and simple words (phonology), words (morphology), sentences and grammar (syntax), and the meaning contained in words (semantics).

Syntax is defined as the study of sentence structure, which includes words, phrases, and clauses (Rumilah, 2021). According to its etymological meaning, it refers to the combination of words into word groups (phrases) or sentences, and then combining those phrases into sentences. Therefore, syntax in the Indonesian language is known as the science of sentence structure (Tarmini, 2019).

Syntax plays an important role in linguistic studies. Syntax contributes to giving meaning and clarifying the function of syntax in a sentence. Syntactic complexity can be used to measure children's language proficiency, and syntax plays a crucial role in enhancing reading and writing skills for educational methods in schools (Eliastuti, 2023). According to (Khoirunnisa, Diniyah, & Noviyanti, 2023), the syntactic phase occurs between the ages of 2 to 7, during which children show grammatical awareness and begin using sentences. Therefore, this study focuses on elementary school children aged 7 to 8 years, who should already be applying more complex sentences as preparation for the next phase, which is semantics. This research is necessary to gather data on the syntactic complexity of children aged 7 to 8 years due to the lack of knowledge regarding syntactic complexity at this age and the absence of standards for assessing syntactic complexity by speech therapists in Indonesia.

Research on the analysis of syntactic errors has shown that the error percentage is high when categorizing sentences containing elements of syntactic mistakes, which can be concluded that syntax in learning is very necessary, especially for elementary school students (Sari, 2022). Considering that at this level, children are actively interacting in environments outside the home, proper and correct language usage must be instilled (Eliastiti, 2023). Thus, this study aims to identify the profile of syntactic complexity in elementary school children aged 7 to 8 years, by analyzing language samples obtained from each respondent to

determine the completeness of sentences, the use of sentence components, and the types of sentences children use to communicate in daily life.

## **METHOD**

This study uses a quantitative research type with a survey approach. The survey approach is a method used for non-experimental data collection through questionnaires, tests, structured interviews, and so on, based on the perspective of the data, not the researcher's perspective (Sugiyono, 2015). The survey approach was chosen to collect data through questions posed to the respondents.

This study was conducted from November 12 to December 12, 2024, at five elementary schools in Jebres District, Surakarta City. The type of sampling technique used is multi-stage sampling, where this type of sampling determines a sample from a broad population to a narrower sample using a step-by-step process (Firmansyah, 2022). The first stage uses cluster random sampling, the second stage uses quota sampling, and the third stage uses purposive sampling. The population of this study is elementary school children in Surakarta, particularly in Jebres District, totaling 202 students from 1st to 2nd grade of both public and private elementary schools. The research sample consists of elementary school children aged 7-8 years from 5 elementary schools in Jebres District, totaling 50 students. The study was conducted at SD subdistrict in Jebres (SD Muhammadiyah 4 Kandang sapi), subdistrict Mojosongo (SD Negeri Mojosongo 3), subdistrict Tegalharjo (SD Negeri Tegalharjo), subdistrict Purwodinigratan (SD Negeri Purwodiningratan), and subdistrict Jagalan (SD Muhammadiyah 8 Jagalan).

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The research instrument used is the language sample analysis by Pratomo (2024), which was developed from several journals including: (Evans, 1992), (Pavelko, 2023), and (Southwood, 2004) all of which have undergone validity and

reliability testing, ensuring that the instrument is valid and can be used. The language sample analysis contains procedures for using and collecting language samples. Language samples can be collected through methods such as conversation, free play, and story generation. The results will then be transcribed using an instrument in the form of a sentence complexity analysis form, which consists of: analysis of sentence completeness, use of sentence components, and types of sentences.

Through the survey approach, the questions are designed to prompt children's utterances, which can then be used as language samples. These language samples will be transcribed and analyzed using a syntactic complexity form, which is used to calculate the syntactic complexity for each child. Data processing is carried out by converting the children's spoken utterances, recorded in audio, into text for each child. Then, categorization is done to determine the low/medium/high groups based on the minimum value, maximum value, range, average, and standard deviation.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

The characteristics of the sample are differentiated based on age and gender, resulting in the following data:

**Table 1.** Frequency Distribution of Respondents Based on Age

<b>Age</b>	<b>Frequency (n)</b>	<b>Presentase (%)</b>
7 – 7.6	16	32
7.7 – 8	21	42
8 – 8.6	13	26

The frequency distribution of respondents' ages is distributed as shown in Table 1. The age data was obtained from the students' guardians/parents. Based on the data above, it is found that the number of respondents aged 7 to 7 years and 6 months is 16 respondents (32%), aged 7 years and 7 months to 8 years is 21 respondents (42%), and aged 8 to 8 years and 6 months is 13 respondents (26%).

**Table 2.** Frequency Distribution of Respondents Based on Gender

<b>Gender</b>	<b>Frequency (n)</b>	<b>Presentase (%)</b>
Perempuan	27	54
Laki-laki	23	46

The frequency distribution of respondents' gender is distributed as shown in Table 2. The gender data was obtained from the students' guardians/parents. Based on the data above, it is found that the number of female respondents is 27 respondents (54%) and the number of male respondents is 23 respondents (46%). The findings of this study are the categorization for data grouping based on criteria and the profile of syntactic complexity in elementary school children aged 7-8 years with the following categorization:

**Table 3.** Category

Butir	Mean	Std. Dev	Low Group	Medium Group	High Group
<b>Complete sentence</b>	34,9	23,3	$\leq 11,56$	11,56 or 58,20	$\geq 58,20$
<b>Incomplete sentence</b>	65,1	23,4	$\leq 41,73$	41,73 or 88,47	$\geq 88,47$
<b>Subject</b>	38,4	21,3	$\leq 17,04$	17,04 or 59,76	$\geq 59,76$
<b>Predicate</b>	80	11,7	$\leq 68,29$	68,29 or 91,79	$\geq 91,79$
<b>Object</b>	81,6	15,8	$\leq 65,9$	65,8 or 97,42	$\geq 97,42$
<b>Adverbial</b>	31,1	15,5	$\leq 15,55$	15,55 or 46,61	$\geq 46,61$
<b>Deklaratif sentence</b>	33,6	21,8	$\leq 11,79$	11,79 or 55,37	$\geq 55,37$
<b>Interogatif sentence</b>	1,42	2,84	$\leq -1,42$	-1,42 or 4,26	$\geq 4,26$
<b>Simple sentence</b>	16,4	12,3	$\leq 4,10$	4,10 or 28,70	$\geq 28,70$
<b>Compound sentence</b>	8,2	7,5	$\leq 0,73$	0,73 or 15,67	$\geq 15,67$
<b>Kompleks sentence</b>	1,64	0,77	$\leq 0,86$	0,86 or 2,42	$\geq 2,42$
<b>Compound-complex sentence</b>	4,7	7,3	$\leq -2,58$	-2,58 or 11,98	$\geq 11,98$
<b>Active Sentence</b>	65,8	18,5	$\leq 47,36$	47,36 or 84,32	$\geq 84,32$
<b>Passive Sentence</b>	13,04	11,06	$\leq 1,98$	1,98 or 24,10	$\geq 24,10$

Based on Table 3, the average (mean) and standard deviation (std. dev) values of sentence length used are calculated. The categories can be determined based on the low, medium, and high values of each mean and standard deviation. This categorization is used to group the data into categories that can be measured and analyzed systematically. This categorization can also be used to calculate the frequency of data more clearly and to compare each syntactic aspect.

### Sentence Completeness

**Table 4.** Frequency Distribution Based on Sentence Completeness

Group	Frequency (n)	Presentase(%)
Low	10	20
Medium	33	66
High	7	14

Table 4 shows that the sentence completeness of children aged 7-8 years tends to fall in the medium group (66%). This is interpreted to mean that the children's abilities in this group are sufficient, but still at an average level or have not yet reached their maximum potential.

### Use of Sentence Components

**Table 5.** Frequency Distribution Based on the Use of Subject

Group	Frequency (n)	Presentase (%)
Low	8	16
Medium	34	68

High	8	16
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Table 5 shows that the use of subjects by children aged 7-8 years tends to fall in the medium group (68%).

**Table 6.** Frequency Distribution Based on the Use of Predicate

Group	Frequency (n)	Presentace (%)
Low	7	14
Medium	36	72
High	7	14

Table 6 shows that the use of predicates by children aged 7-8 years tends to fall in the medium group (72%)

**Table 7.** Frequency Distribution Based on the Use of Object

Group	Frequency (n)	Presentace (%)
Low	4	8
Medium	44	88
High	2	4

Table 7 shows that the use of objects by children aged 7-8 years tends to fall in the medium group (88%).

**Tabel 8.** Frequency Distribution Based on the Use of Adverbial

Group	Frequency (n)	Presentace (%)
Low	7	14
Medium	34	68
High	9	18

Table 8 shows that the use of objects by children aged 7-8 years tends to fall in the medium group (68%). It can be concluded that the use of sentence components in children aged 7-8 years is highest in the use of objects (88%) and lowest in the use of subjects and adverbials (68%).

## Types of Sentences

**Table 9.** Frequency Distribution Based on the Use of Declarative Sentence

Group	Frequency (n)	Presentace (%)
Low	8	16
Medium	34	68
High	8	16

Table 9 shows that the use of objects by children aged 7-8 years tends to fall in the medium group (68%).

**Table 10.** Frequency Distribution Based on the Use of Interogative Sentence

Group	Frequency (n)	Presentace (%)
Low	38	76
Medium	4	8
High	8	16

Table 10 shows that the use of objects by children aged 7-8 years tends to fall in the low group (76%). It can be concluded that the use of sentence types based on purpose in children aged 7-8 years is highest in declarative sentences (68%) in the medium group and lowest in interrogative sentences (76%) in the low group.

**Table 11.** Frequency Distribution Based on the Use of Simple Sentence

Group	Frequency (n)	Presentase (%)
Low	11	22
Medium	30	60
High	9	18

Table 11 shows that the use of objects by children aged 7-8 years tends to fall in the medium group (60%).

**Table 12.** Frequency Distribution Based on the Use of Compound Sentence

Group	Frequency (n)	Presentase (%)
Low	16	32
Medium	28	56
High	6	12

Table 12 shows that the use of objects by children aged 7-8 years tends to fall in the medium group (56%).

**Table 13.** Frequency Distribution Based on the Use of complex sentence

Group	Frequency (n)	Presentase (%)
Low	27	54
Medium	14	28
High	9	18

Table 13 shows that the use of objects by children aged 7-8 years tends to fall in the low group (54%).

**Table 14.** Frequency Distribution Based on the Use of Compound-compleks sentence

Group	Frequency (n)	Presentase (%)
Low	28	56
Medium	15	30
High	7	14

Table 14 shows that the use of objects by children aged 7-8 years tends to fall in the low group (56%). It can be concluded that the use of sentence types based on the number of predicates in children aged 7–8 years is highest in simple sentences (60%) in the middle group and lowest in compound-complex sentences (56%) in the low group.

**Table 15.** Frequency Distribution Based on the Use of Active sentence

Group	Frequency (n)	Presentase (%)
Low	6	12
Medium	38	76

High	6	12
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Table 15 shows that the use of objects by children aged 7-8 years tends to fall in the medium group (76%).

**Table 16.** Frequency Distribution Based on the Use of Passive sentence

Group	Frequency (n)	Presentace (%)
Low	12	24
Medium	30	60
High	8	16

Table 16 shows that the use of objects by children aged 7-8 years tends to fall in the medium group (60%) It can be concluded that the use of sentence types based on the number of predicates in children aged 7-8 years is highest in active sentences (76%) and lowest in passive sentences (60%).

The analysis results show the frequency distribution of respondents based on gender, with 27 female students (54%) and 23 male students (46%). The frequency distribution of respondents by age is as follows: 16 respondents (32%) aged 7 to 7 years and 6 months, 21 respondents (42%) aged 7 years and 7 months to 8 years, and 13 respondents (26%) aged 8 to 8 years and 6 months.

### **Profile of Syntactic Complexity in Elementary School Children Aged 7-8 Years**

The research results regarding sentence completeness show that incomplete sentences dominate with a percentage of 20%, compared to complete sentences with a percentage of 14%. The remainder falls into the medium group (66%), which indicates that the sentence completeness skills of children aged 7-8 years can still be optimized so that their abilities could fall into the high group. Most children who produce incomplete sentences use a sentence pattern with only a predicate or object, meaning they only produce a single word, which does not meet the criteria for a complete sentence. Meanwhile, children who are able to produce complete sentences tend to use compound-complex sentence patterns, which contain multiple clauses. This is reinforced by Prayoga's statement in 2013, which mentions that children aged 7-8 years can form many sentences, but about 2.13% of the sentences spoken are incomplete (Prayoga, 2013). These incomplete sentences mostly lack the necessary subject or predicate to form a perfect sentence.

The use of sentence components involves mastering various elements such as the subject, predicate, object, and adverbial. Children who have produced complete sentences mostly have the correct subject and predicate, although in this study, many children tend to use the object as their response. The subject is an important element in producing a complete sentence; without a subject, the utterance becomes incomplete, indicating that at this age, although some children can form simple sentences, many still often neglect it. This happens because they frequently engage in informal conversations, where children often finish their thoughts spontaneously

without paying attention to proper language structure. This is supported by a study conducted by (Hasim, 2018), which found that children in the early grades typically use simple structures when speaking. This is especially true for complete sentence patterns. They are unable to understand complete forms, such as passive sentences, even though they can comprehend more complex forms.

In declarative sentences, the number of children who are capable of forming declarative sentences consists of 8 children in the low group, 34 children in the medium group, and 7 children in the high group. Meanwhile, in interrogative sentences, the number of children capable of forming interrogative sentences consists of 38 children in the low group, 4 children in the medium group, and 8 children in the high group. It can be concluded that children aged 7-8 years tend to use declarative sentences, which are sentences that contain information or statements. Some children use interrogative sentences, which are sentences used to seek information or ask questions. Although the proportion is smaller, the interrogative sentences used by the children tend to be incomplete. For example, 'What is that?'. The findings of this study are consistent with previous research by (Astuti, 2024), which studied language acquisition in 5-year-old children at the syntactic level. The results of that study showed that 5-year-old children tend to produce more declarative sentences than interrogative sentences. At the age of 7, children are able to use descriptive words and adverbials (Zakiyah, 2024).

In sentence types based on the number of predicates, it was found that simple sentences dominate with a percentage of 60% in the medium group, compared to compound-complex sentences with a percentage of 56% in the low group. The number of children using simple sentences is 30 in the medium group, compound sentences are used by 28 children in the medium group, complex sentences are used by 27 children in the low group, and compound-complex sentences are used by 28 children in the low group. Here is an example of a simple sentence that is often used by children aged 7-8 years: 'I like to eat eggs.' The data above consists of just one clause, with the sentence pattern of subject + predicate + object + complement. Whereas, if we look at the syntactic complexity, it can be seen as follows: 'I was planning to go for a picnic at RT to the beach on Sunday, but I had a problem at school. My foot couldn't walk because it was hurting, so I couldn't join on Sunday. When I was at the beach, I could stand, but I couldn't walk yet, so I was massaged by grandma on Sunday. Then on Monday, I wore sandals because I still couldn't walk.'

The data above consists of 9 clauses. This data includes 4 main sentences and 5 subordinate clauses connected by conjunctions. The sentence contains a contradiction expressed with the conjunction 'but', a conclusion expressed with the conjunction 'so', a time connection expressed with the conjunction 'then', and a cause-effect relationship expressed with the conjunction 'because'. According to

Sunaringati 2020 in (Rohmaningtyas, 2021), while many factors can influence sentence complexity, the sentence pattern, the syntactic categories that serve their function, and the total clauses determine the sentence complexity. A clause sentence is defined as a sentence that has at least a subject and a predicate. Therefore, the subject is the most important element in constructing syntactic complexity.

In sentence types based on nature, it was found that active sentences dominate with a percentage of 76% compared to passive sentences, which have a percentage of 60%. The number of children using active sentences is 38 in the medium group, and the number of children using passive sentences is 30 in the medium group. Children tend to produce active sentences. An active sentence is one in which the subject acts as the doer of the action, for example, 'I play with dolls'. While passive sentences are also used by some children, passive sentences are often used to emphasize the object or the action, for example, 'cooked'. Children aged 7-8 tend to use active sentences because their cognitive and linguistic development is still in the simple and direct stage. In contrast, passive sentences require a more complex understanding because they involve the receiver of the action. This is supported by Piaget's theory in (Zakiyah, 2024), which explains that children aged 7 to 11 are usually in the concrete operational stage, which means they can think logically about concrete things but cannot perform abstract reasoning.

#### ***Errors in Grammar Usage***

The aspects in the low group are interrogative sentences, complex sentences, and compound-complex sentences. Meanwhile, the aspects in the medium group are complete sentences, incomplete sentences, subject, predicate, object, adverbial, declarative sentences, simple sentences, compound sentences, active sentences, and passive sentences.

According to the data above, it can be concluded that 11 out of 14 aspects fall into the medium group. This can be interpreted that the children's abilities in this group are adequate but still at an average level, or have not yet reached their full potential. Therefore, this provides an opportunity for further development.

Optimization can be done by teachers. Children need to have a variety of learning experiences that help them develop optimally, including learning language by optimizing the child's language use. One way to meet the needs of early childhood is through active stimulation; this includes the use of vocabulary and additional skills that are implemented through stimulation (Supit, 2023). According to the journal titled 'Monolingual and bilingual children's production of complex syntactic structures' by (Korade, 2022), research was conducted to improve syntactic complexity. The improvement of syntactic complexity can be done by:

- a. Practicing complex syntactic structures through structured tasks, such as filling in picture stories or answering questions that contain stories.

- b. Intervention through storytelling activities using video stories or picture books to help children spontaneously produce complex sentence structures.
- c. Improving working memory through exercises such as visual memory games, as complex syntax requires greater memory capacity.
- d. Conducting early detection to monitor the child's early language abilities through cognitive tests.

Optimization can also be carried out by parents through the development of early childhood language. (Anggraini, 2020) argues that when parents make it a habit to talk to their children, the vocabulary acquired by the child will automatically increase. This also has a positive impact on children by continuously practicing their listening and speaking skills. The findings show that there are several errors affecting children's difficulties in constructing proper and correct sentence structures. These can be seen as follows:

- a. Children have limited understanding of sentence structure, which affects their ability to use sentences correctly and properly.
- b. Children often neglect the use of the subject as an essential element. The subject is a crucial element for understanding sentence patterns to determine the correct or complete sentence structure. The syntactic categories that fulfill their syntactic functions are subject, predicate, object, complement, and adverbial (Rohmaningtyas, 2021).

In line with the research conducted by (Zebua, 2024), it is stated that students at lower levels are generally still learning the basics of grammar and sentence structure, so they may experience difficulties in understanding fundamental concepts such as subject, predicate, and object, as well as how to combine these elements to form correct and clear sentences. There are several factors that can affect children in their syntactic complexity, as follows:

- a. Environmental factors greatly influence the language that children acquire, including how often they engage in communication. Through communication, children can discover new vocabulary to form more complex sentences. Without stimulation, children do not learn new things and are unaware of complex sentences. According to a journal titled "Optimization of Learning Effectiveness through the Learning Environment and Learning Motivation for Students" by Ahmad in 2021, it is stated that the learning environment significantly and positively impacts the effectiveness of learning (Ahmad, 2021).
- b. Social interaction factors can affect a child's use of syntactic complexity. For example, children who do not engage in much storytelling tend not to use complete sentences. Vygotsky's theory in (Suardipa, 2020) research emphasizes that social interaction is crucial for students in gaining understanding of complex concepts, problems, and processes

## CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the research on the syntactic complexity of 7–8-year-old elementary school children, categorization of the children's abilities and analysis of syntactic complexity profiles have been obtained. The aspects that fall under the low group are interrogative sentences, complex sentences, and compound-complex sentences. Meanwhile, the aspects in the moderate group include complete sentences, incomplete sentences, subject, predicate, object, adjunct, declarative sentences, simple sentences, compound sentences, active sentences, and passive sentences. This interpretation suggests that the children in this group have adequate abilities but are still at an average level or have not reached their maximum potential.

Optimization can be carried out by teachers by enhancing children's language needs through active language use, including vocabulary and other skills, with stimulation. Speech Therapists can improve syntactic complexity by practicing complex syntactic structures, intervening through storytelling activities, improving working memory, and conducting early detection. Optimization can also be carried out by parents through supporting language development in early childhood.

Several errors affect children in constructing good and correct sentence structures. First, children have limited understanding of sentence structure. Second, children often neglect the importance of using the subject as a key element in sentence formation. Factors that influence children's syntactic complexity include environmental factors and social interaction factors.

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