

INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION PATTERNS BETWEEN TEACHERS AND CHILDREN IN PHONICS LEARNING AT BRIGHT CUBS LEARNING CENTER

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to describe the patterns of interpersonal communication in phonics learning for early childhood at Bright Cubs Learning Center. A descriptive qualitative approach was employed, using in-depth interviews with three phonics teachers and two parents. This research applies Social Learning Theory and Symbolic Interactionism to explain how communication between teachers and students shapes learning experiences and children's perceptions of letters and sounds. The findings reveal that warm, responsive, and interactive communication patterns play a crucial role in building children's self-confidence and facilitating their understanding of phonics. Symbolic communication expressed through facial expressions, body movements, and vocal intonation provides meaningful learning cues for children in learning to read. The interaction fosters not only early literacy skills but also the broader development of children's interpersonal communication. These findings highlight the importance of the quality of interpersonal relationships in early childhood education, particularly in the phonics learning context.

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1. Introduction

The development of literacy skills in early childhood is essential for building a strong foundation for children's future communication and learning abilities. Literacy not only supports academic success but also plays a crucial role in children's capacity to express themselves, understand others' messages, and interact effectively in social environments. According to the 2022 Program for International Student Assessment (PISA), Indonesia's literacy scores remain low compared to other countries. The lack of early literacy mastery significantly impacts children's cognitive, communication, and interpersonal development. For example, children who do not understand phonics well may struggle to form words and express themselves verbally, which can hinder their confidence and limit their social interactions (PISA, 2022).

The early childhood period, known as the golden age, is a critical phase for developing essential skills, including literacy. At this stage, children's brains develop rapidly, making high-quality interactions and appropriate stimulation vital for their reading and writing development (Hadriana & Nugraha, 2024). Delays in literacy acquisition can have long-term effects on

academic and social success. Effective support during this period, including through phonics learning, can help children quickly develop reading skills and build self-confidence (Siregar, 2024). Phonics learning emphasizes the relationship between letters and sounds to build systematic reading skills.

At Bright Cubs Learning Center, this method is taught using various multisensory approaches to maintain children's interest and accommodate their short attention spans (Kasprick, 2023). A key factor in successful phonics learning is the quality of interpersonal communication between teachers and children. This aligns with the idea that communication is not merely the transfer of knowledge, but a strategic process that empowers learners through meaningful interaction and involvement (Hidayatul Rachmad & Sasongko, 2023). Meaningful communication creates a supportive learning environment where children feel comfortable and motivated to learn (Eriyanti et al., 2021). Interpersonal communication in phonics learning involves verbal and nonverbal strategies, such as using simple language, expressive facial gestures, and positive reinforcement. Teachers also build partnerships with parents to align expectations and support children's literacy development at home (Susilawati, 2021). These communication strategies require patience, consistency, and adaptability to each child's needs. According to Bandura's Social Learning Theory, children learn behaviors and skills by observing and imitating role models around them, including their teachers (Bandura, 1977 as cited in Ozer, 2021).

In phonics learning, children acquire reading skills not only by listening to verbal instructions but also by observing gestures, facial expressions, and mouth movements that symbolically support the learning process. Symbolic Interactionism further emphasizes that communication involves the exchange and interpretation of symbols, which shapes how children internalize and understand phonics symbols and sounds in meaningful ways (Blumer, 1969; as cited in Puryanto, 2023). Previous studies have examined successful interpersonal communication between teachers and students, focusing on classroom engagement and student motivation (Maulia & Purnomo, 2023; Sola et al., 2022). However, limited studies specifically address how interpersonal communication patterns in phonics learning impact early literacy outcomes for young children.

This research aims to fill that gap by exploring how interpersonal communication patterns during phonics learning create a positive learning atmosphere and support children's early literacy development at Bright Cubs Learning Center. The purpose of this study is to describe the interpersonal communication patterns that occur between teachers and young children during phonics learning and to analyze how these patterns influence the learning experience and literacy development. The research seeks to answer the following problem: How do the interpersonal communication patterns between teachers and children during phonics learning at Bright Cubs Learning Center take place?

2. Method

This study used a qualitative descriptive method to explore the interpersonal communication patterns that occur in phonics learning for early childhood at Bright Cubs Learning Center. The qualitative approach was chosen to obtain in-depth information about the interaction process between teachers and students, as qualitative research focuses on understanding social phenomena in a natural context.

The subjects of this study consisted of phonics teachers at Bright Cubs and parents of children who participated in phonics learning. The selection of informants was conducted purposively based on their direct involvement in the phonics learning process. According to the research document, the subjects included three phonics teachers and two parents, namely Mrs. Theresia and Mrs. Bernice, who were actively engaged in supporting their children's literacy development.

Data collection techniques in this study used three methods: in-depth interviews, participant observation, and documentation. In-depth interviews were conducted directly with phonics teachers to understand the communication strategies used during phonics learning and with parents to explore their perceptions of the teachers' communication and its impact on their children's learning. Participant observation was carried out in the classroom to directly observe the verbal and nonverbal communication patterns between teachers and students during phonics activities. Documentation in the form of class notes, photos, and videos of phonics learning was used to support the interview and observation data. To ensure the validity of the data, this study used triangulation. Triangulation in this research compared and confirmed information from various sources such as teacher interviews, parent interviews, and direct observations in class. According to Nurfajriani et al. (2024), triangulation in qualitative research increases data validity by analyzing information from multiple perspectives.

The data analysis technique used was the interactive model from Miles and Huberman (1994), which consists of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. According to Qomaruddin and Sa'diyah (2024), qualitative data analysis is a systematic process that provides a deep understanding of the observed phenomenon. The interactive model was applied iteratively from the beginning of data collection to the final verification. Asipi, Rosalina, and Nopiyadi (2022) also stated that the interactive model supports comprehensive and valid data analysis through continuous verification and triangulation. This systematic procedure is designed to enable other researchers to replicate and verify this research in similar contexts.

3. Results and Discussion

This study reveals that interpersonal communication in phonics learning at Bright Cubs Learning Center plays a significant and multi-layered role in shaping children's phonological awareness, emotional readiness, and emerging sense of identity as language users. The communication that takes place between teachers and students is not limited to content transmission, but constitutes a dynamic, symbolic, and emotionally resonant exchange. It is this communicative climate—intertwined with empathy, responsiveness, and relational meaning—that aligns profoundly with Bandura's Social Learning Theory and Symbolic Interactionism.

Communication in this context becomes a medium through which children learn not only sounds, but also how to learn, how to relate, and how to see themselves as learners. As Fauziyah Nasution et al. (2023) emphasize, individual identity is shaped through social interaction. In phonics learning, the way children speak, respond, and make sense of teacher input is inseparable from how they develop linguistic self-confidence and personal meaning from learning.

Communication Practices Observed

Throughout the phonics sessions, teachers employed a variety of verbal and non-verbal strategies that were both instructional and emotional in nature. These included modeling pronunciation, giving clear and gentle corrections, providing reinforcement through praise or reward systems, and using expressive gestures to maintain student engagement. These actions are not just pedagogical techniques; they serve as relational acts that communicate safety, support, and motivation.

Children, in turn, engaged in active reciprocal communication—imitating sounds, initiating questions, smiling in response to encouragement, and even correcting themselves or

peers. Their reactions demonstrate emergent agency, revealing how meaning is co-created in real time. In this setting, meaning is not imposed but negotiated, which aligns with Littlejohn and Foss (2012, in Vardya & Nurhajati, 2022) who argue that the meaning of a message depends not only on linguistic structure, but also on interaction between sender and receiver.

This co-construction of meaning is especially apparent during phoneme demonstrations. Teachers not only pronounce sounds but accompany them with dramatic mouth movements, hand gestures, and intonation shifts. These embodied cues transform the classroom into a multi-sensory symbolic space, enabling children to perceive learning as emotionally and socially engaging. As Yuliana et al. (2023) point out, *language is a fundamental element in shaping meaning and constructing social interaction*—a process vividly seen in how children rely on both auditory and visual cues to grasp phonetic concepts.

The figure below illustrates one aspect of such symbolic learning:

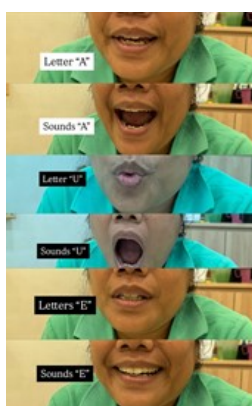


Figure 1.

Mouth Position Differences When Saying Letter Names and Producing Phonics Sounds

This communication is not unidirectional. Rather, children's responses shape feedback loops, allowing teachers to adapt explanations and delivery in real time. Such mutual regulation enhances trust and decreases anxiety—especially vital in early childhood. The relational nature of this communication builds a secure base, where children feel confident to experiment with language, make mistakes, and correct them collaboratively with their teacher.

Analysis with Theoretical Frameworks

The findings resonate strongly with Bandura's Social Learning Theory, where learning occurs through observation, imitation, and reinforcement. Teachers act as social models, demonstrating correct articulation, inviting imitation, and offering praise to reinforce desired behaviors. As Bandura (1977, as cited in Jin, 2021) explains, learning is not solely a product of reinforcement but occurs through observing the behaviors of others. Phonics instruction at Bright Cubs exemplifies this: students are constantly observing not only what their teachers say, but how they say it—how their mouths move, how their voices rise or fall, and how their bodies gesture with energy and clarity.

Moreover, the motivational component of Bandura's theory is evident in how children respond to symbolic rewards, such as stickers, cheers, or gentle applause. These extrinsic cues

support the development of self-efficacy—a belief in one’s ability to succeed in specific learning tasks—which further encourages verbal participation and independent reading attempts.

Simultaneously, the learning process is deeply symbolic, making Symbolic Interactionism another crucial theoretical lens. In this perspective, learning to read is not merely decoding letters but interpreting symbols—sounds, gestures, tones—that carry meaning beyond their surface value. For example, the /s/ sound is not just a hiss; it becomes an expressive symbol through the teacher’s exaggerated movement and sound pattern. As da Renda Vitorino & Pires (2022) affirm, teachers do not merely teach sounds mechanically but use symbols such as intonation, facial expressions, and hand gestures to aid understanding. These symbols are interpreted by the child and internalized as meaningful.

This symbolic exchange is what turns phonics from rote memorization into interpretive learning. Children learn to associate specific sounds with gestures, mouth shapes, and emotions. The mind, as Lili (2022) asserts, functions as a reflective mechanism, enabling individuals to understand themselves and their symbolic environment. In the phonics classroom, the mind is not passive; it is constructing identity, making decisions about what is meaningful, and forming memories that connect sound with feeling and self-expression.

Learning Outcomes and Communication Effects

As observed, phonics learning at Bright Cubs is not isolated skill acquisition, but a socially embedded, emotionally scaffolded, and symbolically mediated process. This is evident in the way children and teachers build rapport and co-create understanding. Several learning outcomes emerged:

- **Phonological awareness is constructed through multimodal engagement**, where gesture, tone, repetition, and expression reinforce memory and pronunciation.
- **Communication is emotionally resonant**, giving space for expressions of joy, confusion, pride, and discovery.
- **Feedback is not merely corrective but relational**, supporting a sense of safety and competence.

These outcomes point to the power of adaptive, responsive communication, especially when supported by consistent interaction with families. As Idham et al. (2023) remind us, collaboration with parents is necessary to extend learning consistency from school to home. Teachers who maintain ongoing communication with families help reinforce phonics practice beyond the classroom and contribute to a more cohesive developmental environment.

In totality, phonics learning at Bright Cubs is distinguished by its relational depth and symbolic richness. The classroom becomes a symbolic ecosystem, where each gesture, tone, and utterance contributes to a child’s evolving understanding of language and self. Children are not passive recipients of knowledge but active meaning-makers, constantly interpreting, responding, and growing within a web of interpersonal communication.

Table 1.

Communication Pattern	Indicators	Description
Interpersonal Communication Practices	Eye contact, smiling, soft intonation	Building comfort and trust
Teacher Strategies for Corrections/Reinforcement	Gentle corrections, praise, sticker rewards	Maintaining confidence and motivation
Communication Dynamics and Emotional Responses	Emotional sensitivity, student enthusiasm	Building confidence and class engagement

4. Conclusion

The findings of this study highlight that interpersonal communication between teachers and young learners plays a vital role in shaping the process and outcomes of phonics learning. Rather than serving as a one-way transfer of knowledge, communication in the classroom was observed as a dynamic and reciprocal exchange—rich with verbal expressions, gestures, facial cues, and emotional warmth. These interactions created a learning atmosphere where children not only felt safe and supported but also motivated to engage, respond, and explore language confidently.

The communication patterns observed reflected a high degree of sensitivity to children's individual needs. Teachers adjusted their approaches—whether in giving instruction, offering encouragement, or responding to mistakes—with patience and empathy. Through this process, children were not passive recipients of information; instead, they actively co-constructed meaning with their teachers, learning to associate sounds with symbols through shared experiences.

This study affirms that effective phonics learning goes beyond method or material—it thrives in the quality of human connection. The symbolic and emotional dimensions of communication, as seen in teacher-child interactions, supported children's literacy development in a holistic way: cognitively, socially, and emotionally. These findings emphasize that fostering a responsive, supportive, and symbolically rich communication environment is essential for early literacy education.

By understanding and nurturing these interpersonal patterns, educators can help children not only learn to read but also build confidence, express themselves, and connect meaningfully with others. The implications of this study suggest that communication is not just a pedagogical tool—it is the heart of learning itself.

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