



Strengthening Students' Interpersonal Communication through Peer Interaction at MI Nurul Iman

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Abstract

This study explores the role of peers in strengthening the interpersonal communication skills of 4th grade students at MI Nurul Iman. Interpersonal communication is a fundamental skill that enables children to express ideas, understand others, and engage in effective social interactions. This research employs a descriptive qualitative method involving 32 students and one homeroom teacher as participants. Data were collected through interviews and non-participant observation, analyzed using the Miles and Huberman model which includes data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. To ensure data reliability, the study applied data source and method triangulation. Research findings indicate that peers play an important role in strengthening interpersonal communication skills by providing support, feedback, interaction facilities, and behavioral models. Peer interactions also improve students' ability to convey messages, listen actively, empathize, communicate non-verbally, and build self-confidence. These skills are reinforced through students' daily communication contexts at school, such as group discussions, breaks, and seating arrangements among peers. The study highlights the strategic importance of leveraging peer dynamics to foster students' interpersonal communication and provides practical insights for educators to design socially interactive learning environments.

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INTRODUCTION

Primary education is the initial stage of education that has a crucial role in shaping children's character and skills. At this age, children are not only faced with academic learning, but also begin to learn to interact with others outside the family environment, namely schools which can be the main place to establish social relationships (Fitri, et al., 2025). A positive school environment plays an important role in supporting the development of students' character and social skills, especially interpersonal communication skills as a foundation for students to be able to adapt and interact well in their environment (Jannah & Sukartono, 2022).

Interpersonal communication skills are the ability to convey and receive messages effectively in social interactions. This ability includes verbal and non-verbal aspects, such as the ability to listen well, express opinions, empathy, and collaborate with others which are an integral part of children's social development (Seneru & Astika, 2023; Suryana & Permana, 2025). Good interpersonal communication can promote positive relationships with peers and teachers, and increase students' confidence to participate in learning activities (Fahrurnisa et al., 2023).

Not all students have good interpersonal communication skills. Some students have difficulty expressing their opinions, understanding other people's feelings, or establishing good social relationships with their friends and teachers. This arises due to the different backgrounds and experiences experienced by each student (Suryana & Permana, 2025). In addition, the lack of opportunities for students to practice communicating effectively, both verbally and non-verbally, also affects students' interpersonal communication development (Ariyani, et al., 2024).

One strategy that can be used to overcome these problems is through the role of peers. Peers are friends of relatively similar age or level of development, who interact regularly in the school environment (Hidayat, et al., 2024). Based on Bandura's Social Learning Theory (1977) (in Firmansyah & Saepuloh, 2022), social learning occurs when individuals observe the behavior of others, imitate it, and receive feedback on their actions. Within the scope of elementary school, the

role of peers is vital, namely supporting the strengthening of students' interpersonal communication skills through daily interactions, providing emotional support, and modeling positive social behavior (Utami, 2024). Positive relationships between peers can encourage students to be more open and confident in expressing themselves (Astuti et al., 2024).

Furthermore, in daily interactions at school, peers have at least four main roles in supporting students' interpersonal communication skills. First, as supporters who encourage confidence in expressing opinions. Second, as feedback providers who give direct responses to how students communicate. Third, as interaction facilitators who create an inclusive communication environment. Fourth, as role models whose behavior serves as an example in fostering empathetic and polite communication (Yandani et al., 2022; Johnson & Johnson, 2018).

According to Spitzberg and Cupach's Interpersonal Communication Competence Theory (1984) (in Arasaratnam, 2016), communication competence is the appropriate and effective management of interactions between individuals, representing different affective, cognitive, and psychomotor aspects. In the context of primary education, this is reflected in peer interactions, where students actively act as senders and receivers of messages, building shared understanding through dialogue and feedback that naturally occur in daily learning activities.

The role of peers in the school environment is not only limited to social interaction, but also includes the formation of norms and values. Elementary school students tend to imitate the behavior of their peers, such as respect, tolerance, and also responsibility which are part of interpersonal communication (Yandani et al., 2022). Through daily interactions, peers become a medium for direct practice for students to hone their communication skills, such as active listening, expressing opinions, and resolving conflicts. Group dynamics that occur in classroom activities can improve students' self-confidence and communication (Gremmen, et al., 2018). This indicates that interaction with peers not only shapes

communication skills, but also moral values that can support good social relationships between students.

There is limited research on the role of peers in developing interpersonal communication. Most studies focus on the general impact of social interactions, while exploration of how peer mechanisms can actively strengthen students' communication skills, such as giving compliments, showing empathy, or providing support has not been widely studied. In fact, in the school environment, students spend most of their time interacting with peers, both during learning and outside class activities such as recess or extracurricular programs.

These interactions naturally create opportunities to develop communication skills such as expressing opinions, active listening, and conflict resolution. However, this potential has not been fully explored systematically, mainly due to the lack of attention to internal factors, as stated in the research of Pangestu, Edwita, & Bachtiar (2019) that self-confidence not only affects students' courage in communicating, but also correlates with students' critical thinking skills that encourage more meaningful interactions.

This study offers a new contribution by analyzing peer interaction not merely as a supporting factor, but as an essential social mechanism in shaping students' interpersonal communication skills. Rather than describing peer influence in general terms, this research adopts a contextual approach by exploring how peer-based interactions contribute to communication development in the everyday environment of elementary education.

Therefore, this study aims to provide a deeper understanding of how peer interaction can be optimized to strengthen the interpersonal communication skills of 4th grade students. The findings are expected to offer practical insights for educators in designing effective peer-based interventions as part of holistic social learning in schools.

METHOD

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach to describe in depth the role of peers in strengthening the interpersonal communication skills of 4th grade elementary school students. The research was conducted at MI Nurul Iman with the

research subjects consisting of class IV-A students totaling 32 students. In addition to students, homeroom teachers were also involved in data collection as a supporting data source to obtain a more holistic perspective.

The data collection techniques used in this study were interviews and non-participant observation. Interviews were conducted with several students and classroom teachers to explore perceptions and experiences related to interpersonal communication and peer interaction. Observations were conducted both inside and outside the classroom to capture patterns of communication that occurred naturally among students in their everyday school environment.

The data obtained were analyzed using the Miles and Huberman model, which consists of three stages: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. To ensure data reliability, this study applied data source triangulation by comparing information obtained from students and classroom teachers, as well as method triangulation by matching the results of interviews and observations.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Based on the observations and interviews conducted at MI Nurul Iman, it was found that peers play a very significant role in strengthening the interpersonal communication skills of 4th grade students. The research findings reveal four main roles of peers: as supporters, feedback providers, interaction facilitators, and role models that contribute to developing various aspects of students' interpersonal communication skills.

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The Role of Peers in Strengthening Interpersonal Communication Skills

As part of social learning, peers play a strategic role in shaping students' interpersonal communication skills. The following are some of the roles played by peers in strengthening key aspects of interpersonal communication based on observations and interviews.

Role as Supporters

The research results show that peers often provide moral support to their friends who are speaking, whether in the form of encouragement, applause, or verbal praise. This support has proven effective in increasing students' courage to perform in front of the class, even though students initially felt shy or afraid of making mistakes. This encouragement creates a safe atmosphere for students to express themselves and establish two-way communication.

The role of peers as supporters, demonstrated through providing encouragement and verbal praise, is a tangible form of support that plays an important role in forming and strengthening students' interpersonal communication skills. Peer support functions as an external reinforcement that encourages students to be more confident when communicating (Fahrurnisa et al., 2023). Additionally, a positive social environment and peer social support create a sense of security for students (Jannah & Sukartono, 2022). This shows that 4th grade students who receive positive support from their peers tend to be braver in expressing their opinions in front of the class.

Role as Feedback Providers

Students in this study often received responses from their friends regarding their speaking style or the content of messages delivered, both in the form of appreciation and correction. Peers usually provide comments directly and spontaneously, such as saying "awesome" or "your voice is not clear enough." This indicates that students are not only message receivers but also actively help improve their friends' communication.

The role of peers as feedback providers helps in reflecting students' communication methods. Feedback given simply and spontaneously can serve as evaluation material for students to improve their interpersonal communication skills. Seneru & Astika (2023) state that interpersonal communication plays an important role in forming

positive social relationships between individuals. Children's cognitive and social development can occur through interaction with their social environment, one of which is through peers who provide scaffolding in the form of feedback when communicating. This feedback serves as temporary assistance that encourages understanding, self-reflection, and gradual interpersonal communication development (Elghotmy, 2023). This means that feedback from peers not only improves communication quality but also strengthens social relationships among students.

Role as Interaction Facilitators

The research findings show that some students take the initiative to invite quiet friends to communicate or participate in group discussions. Students create inclusive situations by providing speaking opportunities and showing good listening attitudes. The presence of active friends among passive students encourages the creation of more open and participatory two-way communication.

Students' initiative to invite passive friends to participate in discussions reflects the role of peers as interaction facilitators. This phenomenon shows the development of social intelligence among children. This finding is supported by research by (Finch, et al., 2019) which states that peers are not only important for social relationships but can also help children become better at managing their attention and behavior at school. The ability to facilitate social interactions is one of the most important aspects of children's social maturity and becomes a predictor of academic and social success in the future (Johnson & Johnson, 2018). Support from peers who are already accustomed to the school environment has been shown to help students experiencing cultural adaptation difficulties to be more active in their interactions (Yulistyan et al., 2019).

Role as Role Models

Observation results show that not all students have outstanding communication abilities, but there are several students who are recognized by teachers and their friends as examples in communication methods. The existence of students who are recognized as examples in communication shows that peers can become role models in communication.

The existence of students who are recognized as examples in communication shows that peers can be role models in communication. This indicates that students tend to imitate the behavior of friends who are considered competent, especially in the formation of moral behavior (Yandani et al., 2022). This is also supported by research by Utami (2024), which confirms that children learn behavior through observation and imitation of models, especially peers who are considered to have good social status within the group. In this finding, students who serve as role models not only influence communication styles but also shape class social norms, such as respecting differences of opinion among students.

Strengthening Interpersonal Communication Skills through Peer Interaction

The interactions that occur between students are not merely social relationships, but also serve as a means of learning that allows students to develop their communication skills. The following are various types of interpersonal communication skills that are formed through peer interactions.

Message Delivery Skills

The research results show that interaction with peers encourages students to convey their ideas more clearly. The encouragement from friends makes students braver in speaking even though the sentence structure or vocabulary used is not yet perfect.

Students' message delivery skills have improved due to peer encouragement to express their opinions clearly. Although the sentence structure used is not yet perfect, the encouragement from friends makes students braver in conveying their ideas. This is consistent with research by Sagita, Manuaba, & Abadi (2020) which found that good interpersonal communication between teachers and students as well as between students makes students feel comfortable and happy during the learning process. This courage becomes important capital for developing students' interpersonal communication skills in the future, which ultimately contributes to students' academic success through improved ability to convey ideas effectively in the learning environment (Ariyani & Hadiani, 2020).

Active Listening Skills

Students show attention when their friends are speaking through eye contact, nodding, or short responses that are appropriate to the conversation context. Students also learn to respect speaking turns and not interrupt conversations, thus creating a healthy dialogue atmosphere.

Students' ability to pay attention to friends' conversations through eye contact and short verbal responses reflects the active listening skills possessed by students. The higher the effectiveness of interpersonal communication possessed by students, the better the relationships between individuals in the school environment (Seneru & Astika, 2023). In this skill, students learn to appreciate every conversation and not interrupt their friends' conversations, thus creating a healthy dialogue atmosphere. This ability can become the foundation for students to develop empathy and understand other people's perspectives.

Empathy Skills

Empathy emerges when students are able to understand the emotional condition of their friends who are nervous or confused when speaking. Students can respond to this by calming and encouraging them. The development of empathy in students is visible when students are able to understand the emotional condition of their friends who are anxious or confused when speaking.

The responses given by students in the form of support and encouragement reflect sensitivity to their friends' emotional needs. Empathy not only increases closeness within a group but can also reduce potential conflicts (Gross, 2015). In this case, empathy shown by peers is not only beneficial for the recipient of empathy but also strengthens social bonds among students and can create a more conducive learning environment.

Non-Verbal Communication Skills

Students begin to use body language such as facial expressions and hand gestures to support messages conveyed verbally. However, this non-verbal communication is not yet fully optimal and still needs improvement.

Students' non-verbal communication skills are not yet running optimally but are beginning to develop through interaction with peers. The use of body language such as facial expressions and hand

movements to support verbal messages shows that students are beginning to understand the complexity of ongoing interpersonal communication. Each student has different responses to non-verbal communication, for example, some students feel happy when touched by the teacher, but other students feel afraid (Widodo & Rozhana, 2018). Therefore, developing this skill is very important for the success of students' interpersonal communication in the future.

Self-Confidence

Many students mentioned that their self-confidence increased due to support from friends. When students see that their friends do not laugh at their mistakes when communicating, then these students become more open and brave to speak. The supportive classroom social environment also becomes the main foundation for the growth of students' self-confidence in speaking.

Peer support is a key catalyst for increasing students' self-confidence. One important aspect in building children's self-confidence is through social interaction with peers (Potard, 2017). When students do not mock their peers' mistakes during communication, they become more open and confident in speaking. Social support and positive experiences from others, including peers, can strengthen an individual's belief in their own abilities. When students witness success and acceptance within their social environment, including in communication, this can significantly enhance their self-confidence (Zhao, et al., 2024).

Communication Situation Contexts that Support Skill Strengthening

The effectiveness of strengthening communication skills is not only determined by the communicator, but also by the communication situation itself. The following are some situations that support the development of students' interpersonal communication skills.

Group Discussions

Group discussions provide students with an opportunity to demonstrate their roles through the exchange of opinions, listening, and responding actively and freely without feeling pressured by the teacher. These group discussion activities are very much in line with the principles of cooperative

learning. According to Johnson & Johnson (2018), cooperative learning is the use of small groups in the learning process where students work together to maximize their own learning and that of each other. This model is based on the Theory of Social Interdependence, which emphasizes positive interdependence, supportive interaction, individual responsibility, social skills, and group processing as key elements (Johnson & Johnson, 2018). In this context, group discussions not only allow students to practice interpersonal communication but also foster cooperation, empathy, and shared responsibility within peer groups, thereby strengthening both academic and social competencies simultaneously.

In addition, project based learning as a learning model provides space for students to discuss in groups and gives them the opportunity to develop their interpersonal communication skills (Khodijah, Suharno, & Triyanto, 2018; Arianda, et al., 2024). This shows that group dynamics in learning can provide natural space for students to develop their communication skills without feeling awkward or forced.

Interactions Outside the Classroom

During play or break time, communication flows more naturally and spontaneously. Students tend to be more expressive, using more casual language while still showing politeness and the social skills they possess. During play or break time, communication that occurs between students is more spontaneous but still polite.

Communication between students that occurs outside the classroom tends to be more expressive using more casual language, thus supporting the formation of positive social relationships (Eraydın et al., 2021). This interaction not only strengthens relationships between students but can also help students develop social skills such as empathy and cooperation. In this case, students learn to understand their friends' feelings and perspectives, thus creating positive social interactions that support students' learning motivation while at school (Qomaruddin et al., 2023).

Communication Between Desk Partners

Physical closeness with desk partners makes interactions more intense and intimate. In this case,

students become more open in speaking, giving each other input, and learning to adjust their communication styles. Students become more open with their desk partners due to physical closeness between individuals, thus creating more intense and intimate interactions.

Physical closeness with desk partners creates new friendships with more intense interactions in various situations, even outside the classroom environment (Faur & Laursen, 2022; (Maranca, 2024). This consistent interaction with desk partners allows students to develop a deeper understanding of communication and can foster trust between students.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that peers play a vital and multidimensional role in strengthening the interpersonal communication skills of 4th grade elementary students. Through daily interactions, peers act as moral supporters, feedback providers, facilitators of communication, and role models. These roles significantly contribute to the development of various communication skills, including clarity in delivering messages, active listening, empathy, and self-confidence. The communication contexts, such as group work, informal interactions during break times, and conversations with desk mates, offer valuable opportunities for practicing and internalizing these skills.

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