

ANALYSIS OF NON-VERBAL EXPRESSION IN THE “TIMUN EMAS” DRAMA PERFORMANCE FOR CHILDREN AGED 10–18 YEARS AT FASTI (FORUM ANAK SAMBIREJO TIMUR)

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Abstract

This article analyzes nonverbal communication in the drama performance of Timun Emas at the Children's Forum (FASTi) in East Sambirejo. The aim is to understand how nonverbal expressions such as gestures, facial expressions, posture, eye contact, and intonation contribute to the delivery of moral messages to children aged 10–18. Using qualitative descriptive methods, the data were collected through observation, interviews, and documentation. The findings suggest that nonverbal communication effectively supports children's understanding of the storyline and values such as courage, compassion, and creativity. This study highlights the educational potential of drama through nonverbal cues as a medium for character building.

Keywords: *Nonverbal Expression, Drama, Children, Timun Emas, Communication*

Abstrak

Artikel ini menganalisis komunikasi nonverbal dalam pertunjukan drama Timun Emas yang diselenggarakan oleh Forum Anak Sambirejo Timur (FASTi). Tujuan dari penelitian ini adalah untuk memahami bagaimana ekspresi nonverbal seperti gerakan tubuh, mimik wajah, postur, kontak mata, dan intonasi berkontribusi dalam penyampaian pesan moral kepada anak-anak berusia 10–18 tahun. Dengan menggunakan metode deskriptif kualitatif, data dikumpulkan melalui observasi, wawancara, dan dokumentasi. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa komunikasi nonverbal secara efektif mendukung pemahaman anak-anak terhadap alur cerita serta nilai-nilai seperti keberanian, kasih sayang, dan kreativitas. Studi ini menyoroti potensi edukatif dari pertunjukan drama melalui isyarat nonverbal sebagai media pembentukan karakter.

Kata kunci: *Ekspresi Nonverbal, Drama, Anak-anak, Timun Emas, Komunikasi*

1. INTRODUCTION

Communication is a fundamental aspect of human interaction, encompassing both verbal and non-verbal dimensions. While verbal communication involves spoken or written language, non-verbal communication includes gestures, facial expressions, body movements, eye contact, tone of voice, and spatial behavior. These non-verbal elements play a crucial role in enriching and reinforcing messages, especially in contexts where emotions and abstract values are being conveyed. In the field of performing arts—particularly drama—non-verbal communication becomes a primary vehicle for storytelling. This is especially relevant in performances aimed at children, who are more visually oriented and emotionally reactive than adults. Their cognitive development stage often favors concrete and visible expressions over abstract or linguistically complex ideas. Thus, children aged 10 to 18 tend to respond more effectively to visual and physical cues, making drama an ideal medium for character education and moral development.

Timun Emas is one of Indonesia's most beloved folktales, rich in cultural values and moral teachings such as bravery, cleverness, perseverance, and filial devotion. The narrative tells the story of a young girl, Timun Emas, who must outwit a giant (Buto Ijo) to escape a life-threatening fate. The tale's strong moral content and emotional narrative arc provide fertile ground for exploration through drama, especially when conveyed through powerful non-verbal performance techniques.

This research is rooted in the intersection of folklore, child psychology, communication studies, and performing arts. In particular, it explores how non-verbal expressions within a dramatic adaptation of Timun Emas can effectively communicate moral messages to children. This issue is critical not only in the context of arts education but also in character-building initiatives, especially those facilitated by community organizations such as the Forum Anak Sambirejo Timur (FASTi), which serves as a participatory space for child development.

The choice to analyze the performance within the FASTi setting is deliberate. As a grassroots initiative focused on children's empowerment and participation, FASTi provides a culturally responsive and inclusive environment where children are both audience and active learners. This research investigates how children perceive and emotionally respond to the non-verbal elements of the Timun Emas performance. It also seeks to understand the extent to which such expressions facilitate comprehension of the story's themes and values.

Previous studies have emphasized the pedagogical benefits of drama in children's education. However, most have focused on verbal storytelling or actor training. There remains a gap in the literature regarding the specific role of non-verbal communication in

children's drama performances, especially in relation to traditional folklore. By focusing on this dimension, the present study aims to contribute to the body of knowledge on visual literacy, performance pedagogy, and cultural transmission among young audiences.

In summary, this study is motivated by the need to explore how non-verbal cues can serve as effective educational tools in children's drama. It aims to examine the kinds of non-verbal expressions used in the performance of *Timun Emas*, how these are received and interpreted by children aged 10–18, and the extent to which they contribute to the understanding of emotional content and moral values. The implications of this study are relevant for educators, cultural practitioners, and policymakers interested in enhancing child-friendly, culturally grounded learning through the arts.

2. METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative descriptive approach, which is commonly used to investigate social phenomena in a natural context, allowing researchers to explore and interpret meanings, experiences, and perceptions in depth. The focus of this research is to examine how non-verbal expressions used in the drama performance of *Timun Emas* influence the emotional and cognitive reception of children aged 10–18 years, specifically within the context of FASTi (Forum Anak Sambirejo Timur). Given the subjective nature of emotional interpretation and non-verbal cues, qualitative methods are deemed most appropriate.

a. Research Design

The qualitative descriptive design allows the researcher to observe and document phenomena as they occur naturally, without manipulation or intervention. The intent is not to measure variables quantitatively but to understand the nuanced and layered meanings behind children's reactions and interpretations of the drama. The study relies on three main data collection techniques: observation, interviews, and documentation, all of which provide triangulated insight into the research questions.

b. Research Site and Context

The study was conducted at the Forum Anak Sambirejo Timur (FASTi), located in Medan, Indonesia. FASTi is a community-based organization dedicated to child development, participation, and cultural enrichment. The *Timun Emas* drama performance was presented as part of a cultural education program on March 20, 2021, in the village hall of Sambirejo Timur. The performance was delivered by a local theater group using a traditional storyline adapted to suit a young audience.

This site was chosen for its authentic setting where children regularly engage in educational and cultural activities, ensuring that observations and interviews reflected genuine reactions in a real-world environment.

c. Participants

Participants in the study were children aged 10–18 who attended the performance. Using purposive sampling, 25 children were selected to represent two developmental age groups:

- 1) 10–13 years (middle childhood)
- 2) 14–18 years (adolescence)

This age stratification was based on Jean Piaget's theory of cognitive development, which suggests that these age ranges correspond with the concrete operational and formal operational stages, respectively. Children in the younger group are more responsive to visual and literal expressions, while older children may engage with abstract meanings and symbolic representation.

Consent was obtained from all participants and their parents or guardians prior to interviews. The identities of the children were anonymized in all transcripts and data presentations to ensure ethical standards were upheld.

d. Data Collection Techniques

To ensure the validity and richness of the data, multiple collection methods were employed:

- 1) Observation

Non-participant observations were conducted during the performance. A structured observation sheet was used to record key aspects of non-verbal communication including facial expressions, gestures, posture, proximity between characters, and vocal intonation. Observations also included audience reactions such as laughter, silence, surprise, or physical movement during the performance.

- 2) Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with selected children post-performance. These interviews consisted of open-ended questions designed to explore their perceptions, emotional reactions, and understanding of the story and its characters. Interviews were audio recorded with permission, then transcribed and coded thematically.

- 3) Documentation

Supporting materials including photographs, a video recording of the performance, and field notes were used to complement observational and interview data. These visual materials were particularly useful in cross-referencing specific scenes with children's interpretations.

e. Data Analysis

Data analysis followed the interactive model of Miles and Huberman (1994), which includes:

- 1) Data Reduction: Selecting, focusing, simplifying, and transforming the data from observations, interviews, and documents.
- 2) Data Display: Organizing the reduced data in tables, narrative summaries, and thematic charts to identify emerging patterns.
- 3) Conclusion Drawing and Verification: Interpreting the data in light of the research questions, verifying findings by cross-checking sources and ensuring consistency across data types.

Thematic coding was applied to interview transcripts and observation notes, identifying recurring patterns related to emotional recognition, value interpretation, and audience engagement.

f. Triangulation

To ensure data validity and reliability, triangulation was applied in the following ways:

- 1) Methodological triangulation: Using multiple data collection methods (observation, interview, documentation).
- 2) Data source triangulation: Comparing data from children of different ages, facilitators, and researchers' field notes.
- 3) Temporal triangulation: Observing whether consistent responses were recorded during and after the performance.

This triangulated approach ensures that findings are robust and not reliant on a single source or perspective.

g. Ethical Considerations

This study adhered to ethical standards for research involving minors:

- 1) Informed Consent: Both parental and child consent were obtained before interviews.
- 2) Anonymity and Confidentiality: No personal data of the children were disclosed. Names were replaced with codes.
- 3) Non-coercion: Participation was entirely voluntary, and children were free to withdraw at any stage without consequence.

All data were stored securely and used solely for the purpose of this research.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The research results are derived from observations of the *Timun Emas* performance and semi-structured interviews with 25 children. The main focus was on how non-verbal

expressions—facial expressions, gestures, posture, eye contact, and vocal tone—were used in the performance, and how children perceived and understood these cues.

a. Observation of Non-Verbal Expressions

The following table summarizes the dominant non-verbal expressions observed during the performance:

Aspect	Character	Observed Behavior	Emotional Effect
Facial Expressions	Timun Emas	Wide eyes, open mouth, furrowed brow	Fear, anxiety
	Buto Ijo	Angry eyes, tight jaw, snarling mouth	Threat, aggression
	Ibu Timun	Tearful eyes, drooping face	Sadness, affection
Gestures	Timun Emas	Running, hiding, clutching magical objects	Urgency, fear, strategy
	Buto Ijo	Fist clenching, stomping, pointing angrily	Dominance, threat
	Ibu Timun	Embracing, reaching out slowly	Love, sadness
Posture	Timun Emas	Crouched when afraid, upright when escaping	Vulnerability, strength
	Buto Ijo	Broad stance, towering over others	Intimidation, power
Eye Contact	Timun Emas & Buto Ijo	Direct, intense eye contact during chase scenes	Tension, confrontation
Vocal Tone	Buto Ijo	Loud, rough shouting	Anger
	Ibu Timun	Soft, slow voice when parting from her child	Tenderness, sadness

b. Children’s Perception from Interviews

Interviews with 25 children revealed the following patterns:

Theme	Age 10–13 (Younger)	Age 14–18 (Older)
Understanding of Emotions	Focused on visible actions and facial expressions	Interpreted emotional tone and symbolic meanings

Favorite Scene	Chase scene; dramatic movements of Buto Ijo	Separation scene; emotional moment with the mother
Most Recognizable Character Emotion	Fear (Timun Emas), Anger (Buto Ijo)	Sadness (Ibu Timun), Bravery (Timun Emas)
Perception of Message	“Timun Emas is brave,” “Buto Ijo is scary”	“The story teaches courage, love, and cleverness”
Reaction	Laughed, scared, surprised	Reflective, emotionally touched

These findings confirm that non-verbal communication was effective in engaging both emotional and cognitive aspects of the child audience. The visual storytelling enabled them to follow the narrative even in the absence of lengthy dialogues. The emotional depth conveyed through expressions and movement made the drama more relatable and meaningful.

4. CONCLUSIONS

Based on the data collected and analyzed, several key conclusions can be drawn:

Key Finding	Implication
Non-verbal expressions were consistently interpreted correctly by children	Visual cues are sufficient to convey emotional content in children's drama
Children aged 10–13 rely more on visual cues	Emphasizing exaggerated expressions helps younger children understand the story
Children aged 14–18 grasp symbolic and emotional messages	Older children benefit from layered, expressive storytelling
All children recognized core values like courage, love, and cleverness	Drama is an effective medium for character education

Non-verbal expression in *Timun Emas* drama served as a bridge between performance and learning. Children were not only entertained but also emotionally moved and morally influenced. Thus, integrating such expressive folklore-based performances in educational and cultural programs for children can significantly enrich their developmental experience.

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