Volunteer Interpersonal Communication Fosters Motivation/Self Development in Complex-Background Foster Children Via CMM Theory at S3

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ABSTRACT

This research examines interpersonal communication based on intuition, bypassing institutional formalities, yet effectively fostering motivation and self-development in children from complex social backgrounds at the *S3 Lintau* Foster Home. Children with challenging backgrounds need supportive care and effective communication from family figures to build self-confidence, motivation, and growth. This study reveals that volunteers, through adaptive communication and intuition, successfully fulfill this needs. The research aims to analyze how volunteers' interpersonal communication processes contribute to motivating and developing foster children at the *S3 Lintau* Orphanage. Utilizing a qualitative case study approach, researchers apply Joseph DeVito's interpersonal communication concepts alongside the Theory of Coordinated Management of Meaning (CMM) to deeply investigate communication flows. Findings highlight the significance of verbal and nonverbal communication that is personalized for each foster child. The process begins by building closeness, followed by supportive and empathetic message delivery, internalization of rules and values, encouragement of competent behavior, and ultimately fostering motivation and self-development. This progression relies heavily on reconstructing and coordinating meanings to establish shared understanding of the values, rules, and motivations imparted. The study demonstrates how volunteers, without formal authority, use intuitive and adaptive interpersonal communication to meet the emotional and developmental needs of foster children in a complex social context, effectively promoting their growth and motivation.

Keywords: interpersonal communication, foster children, motivation, self-development, CMM, orphanage

INTRODUCTION

Interpersonal communication plays a very important role in the success of parenting and education of children, especially when it is done by parents themselves (Schneider et al., 2022). As stated in Erik Erikson's Theory of Personality Development, parents, especially mothers, have roles whose quality greatly determines the personality development of their young children, including independence, confidence, life skills, emotional maturity, and the achievement of personal identity (Thahir, 2022; Rorije, Damen, & Janssen, 2023). Unfortunately, not all children are lucky enough to be cared for by their biological parents. Many children must be cared for in social institutions such as the Children's Social Welfare Institute (LKSA) or foster homes because of various coercive conditions (Mao, Zang, & Zhang, 2020; Joseph, 2024). One such institution is the S3 Foster Home (Thousand Days Alms) in Lintau Buo District, Tanah Datar Regency, West Sumatra Province, where children face challenges related to emotional development, trust, and communication (Labella, Raby, & Dozier, 2020; Gao, Gao, & Zhou, 2024; Lee, Brown, & Smith, 2025).

Ironically, children there generally have complex social backgrounds, such as traumatic experiences, cognitive impairments, physical disabilities, very poor family conditions, and others (Tumlin et al., 2023). Ideally, children during the period of growth and development—especially those with problematic backgrounds and unpleasant past experiences—need

supportive care and effective interpersonal communication from parents and close family members to foster confidence, motivation, and self-development (Cooley et al., 2022; Beal et al., 2024). However, these children do not receive that support from their families due to various factors, including parents who are involved in the law and imprisoned, parents with mental disorders, or parents in very poor conditions unable to send their children to school (Lotty et al., 2024). As a result, they must be raised not within their own families but in social institutions that can provide a safe environment for them, such as foster homes (Labella et al., 2020). Meanwhile, volunteers in foster homes rely on communication skills based on intuition in caregiving without formal knowledge (Mao et al., 2020). However, it turns out that interpersonal communication based on intuition without formal training can effectively motivate and encourage self-development in children with complex and diverse backgrounds (Smeyne et al., 2025; Dere et al., 2024). The researcher observes the phenomenon of the power of communication in empowering and "healing" trauma, even when conducted without formal training (Fowler et al., 2024).

Another interesting aspect is that the communication in parenting carried out by volunteers at the S3 Lintau Foster Home must be adapted to the diversity of complex and complicated social problem backgrounds of the foster children within the same care environment (Tonheim, 2025). This creates complex communication dynamics because volunteers must be able to apply different communication approaches according to each child's characteristics and needs (Teculeasa et al., 2022; Rip et al., 2020). Few foster homes accommodate children with such varied social backgrounds and complex experiences (Tonheim, 2025; Karatasas, 2024). Therefore, volunteers must certainly take empathetic and supportive approaches to foster the confidence of foster children so they can develop themselves for a better future (Teculeasa et al., 2022; Tonheim, 2025).

The problem is how a communication model that seems successful in motivating and encouraging children's self-development—especially in children with complex social problems—can be implemented relying only on intuition and without formal training (Bulathwela et al., 2024; Sicora et al., 2021). Meanwhile, as stated by Albertin & Hidayat (2020), healing for children who have experienced trauma can be facilitated through traumatic counseling. For children who have experienced sexual abuse, for example, counseling over several meetings can help victims eliminate trauma, accept themselves, forgive, and come to terms with their past (Hardman, 2022; Mask, 2025). Thus, the researcher focuses on how interpersonal communication carried out by volunteers can provide motivation and self-development to children in the S3 Lintau Foster Home. The purpose of this study is to analyze the process of interpersonal communication by volunteers in the S3 Nursing Home and how such communication contributes to the growth of motivation and self-development of foster children.

The benefits of this research are expected to contribute both theoretically and practically. Theoretically, this research can enrich the body of communication science, especially in the application of Coordinated Management of Meaning (CMM) Theory and the LUUUTT model in the context of parenting. Practically, the findings can serve as a guide for orphanage volunteers and childcare practitioners in developing effective interpersonal communication strategies to motivate and support the self-development of children with

complex backgrounds. In addition, the results can be used as a consideration in preparing communication training programs for volunteers and caregivers in social institutions.

METHOD

Researchers used qualitative methods to explore and understand meanings derived from social or humanitarian issues experienced by specific individuals or groups. The study involved formulating research questions, collecting data from selected participants, analyzing data inductively by moving from specific to general themes, and interpreting the data's meaning (Creswell, 2017). A case study approach was employed to understand complex social phenomena and interpret real-life events, commonly used in social psychology and sociology research (Yin, 2015). The researcher examined events and activities carried out by individuals or groups over a specified period, using predetermined data collection methods.

The study followed a constructivist paradigm, focusing on the systematic analysis of socially significant behaviors. Informants were chosen through purposive sampling, selecting individuals based on specific characteristics and the need for relevant information. The research involved 13 informants: five volunteers who had been with the *S3 Lintau Foster Home* for at least four years and were familiar with the children's development, six foster children who had lived there for at least four years, and two local community members or donors who closely observed the foster home's progress.

Data analysis followed the model by Miles, Huberman, and Saldana, including data collection, condensation, display, and drawing and verifying conclusions. Data validity was ensured through source triangulation, re-verifying information from different informants to avoid bias (Afrizal, 2019). Creswell (2017) described triangulation as examining evidence from multiple sources to create a coherent justification for the research topic.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

From the results of the visualization, NVivo 12 shows a concept map that summarizes the research findings. In the concept map, there are two central themes, namely interpersonal communication and foster child self-development. In simple terms, the concept map shows that interpersonal communication that occurs in foster homes, which includes verbal, nonverbal, supportive, adaptive, challenge, interaction, and rule understanding, has led to foster children's self-development. This is seen from increased self-confidence, behavior change, improvement in communication skills and understanding, as well as the emergence of independence and life skills.

To answer the research objectives related to the interpersonal communication process that occurs in foster homes, the researcher analyzed the findings with the model of interpersonal communication stages presented by DeVito (2023), namely contact, involvement, intimacy, deterioration, repair, and dissolution.

The initial stage of this process is the contact process, starting from the volunteer's understanding of the foster child where the volunteer sees, hears, reads messages, sees photos or videos about the foster child's profile. Because volunteers have indeed started foster homes from social movements since the beginning, volunteers have their own beliefs and values towards foster children from a social perspective. The initial stages of the interpersonal communication process here are greatly influenced by how the meaning that the volunteers

have for the foster children by knowing the background of the foster children as well as the motivation or personal values that the volunteers have to establish a closer relationship with the children. In this study, researchers found that there are various values that volunteers have in establishing interpersonal communication with foster children. Among them are inner satisfaction, happiness for the success of foster children, soul call to help and spiritual belief that there is a reward for every good activity.

The next stage in the interpersonal communication process in the S3 foster home is the involvement stage, where volunteers try to learn more about foster children. In this phase, interaction begins to be emphasized and self-disclosure slowly occurs. This stage is an important phase in building deeper interpersonal relationships. Communicative actions were also used by volunteers as an effort to get closer and gain the trust of foster children. Here, volunteers rely on the power of verbal and nonverbal communication simultaneously. Volunteers in this case have almost the same tendency to use non-verbal communication, especially through touch communication. From the information of several informants, non-verbal communication is used to show concern and gain the trust of foster children. They also believe that physical touch is an expression of affection. In addition, non-verbal communication is used in between interactions with volunteers to provide advice and motivation. Furthermore, at the intimacy stage, where a commitment has emerged to build good relationships and social bonding. Analysis of interactions in foster homes revealed that the core of the mentoring process was carried out showing a commitment to interpersonal relationships that were consciously built between volunteers and foster children. In addition, social bonds are formed which refers to the occurrence of meaningful social and emotional connections between volunteers and foster children characterized by a sense of attachment, trust, support and a sense of security. To create this social bonding, volunteers make relationships not like institutional relationships in orphanages, but are actively constructed into a relationship that resembles family bonds. In this case, volunteers not only try to create a family atmosphere, but also present family functions, avoid the label of foster children, and interact like friends or best friends.

The process of positive communication occurs until the intimacy stage. At this stage, there is a mutual commitment and social bonding or the process of forming social and emotional connections between two parties, which creates a feeling of closeness, security, and mutual care. It is an important foundation of healthy interpersonal relationships and is the key to fostering trust, comfort, and motivation for children to develop. Although there is a slight deterioration when faced with communication challenges in the early stages of interaction, it is not considered a threat but rather a process to be enjoyed. Broadly speaking, there are internal and external challenges faced. Internal challenges related to difficulties in the early stages of interaction with children, cognitive impairment in conveying messages and ensuring understanding in these children, while volunteers relied solely on intuition skills and a heart-to-heart approach. Meanwhile, external challenges come from the social environment where there is still miscommunication or lack of understanding from the community about the complexity and true purpose of the foster home. The disturbance becomes a psychological burden on volunteers that has the potential to affect the morale and energy of volunteers so that in turn it can have an impact on the quality of their interactions with foster children.

Researchers will also analyze the findings using the Coordinated Management of Meaning (CMM) Theory. In contrast to the analysis using the concept of the stages of the interpersonal communication process DeVito which better identifies the 'what' the stages go through in a relationship so as to provide a clear structure to be analyzed, the analysis using CMM Theory emphasizes more on the 'how' and 'why' of a relationship moving from one stage to the next. De Vito's model of the stages of interpersonal relationships provides a chronological framework. While CMM Theory helps to understand the dynamics and meanings at each stage. The CMM theory explains how both parties: volunteers and foster children, with different life scripts, try to construct a social reality or a social world together by managing and creating meaning through the conversations they have made. At the 'contact' stage, for example, there are life scripts that foster children have such as inconfidence, shyness, and others. The volunteers responded with acts of speech such as smiles or greetings that did not only mean words, but also an invitation to start the introductory episode. At this stage the volunteer tries to start **a** friendly introductory episode, but from the perspective of the foster child may internally define this episode as 'judgment of the new person'. Coordination (harmonious joint action) here may still be very fragile and more dependent on one-way efforts from volunteers.

Then, at the involvement stage, self-disclosure and testing occur. This is where a moment of coherence begins to occur where the response of each party becomes crucial to establishing a common definition of the relationship that is being formed. Volunteers consistently create positive episodes with dialogical communication, touch communication, small attention, repetitive messages and other efforts to build a foundation of trust. Meanwhile, foster children may test volunteers with difficulty communicating, understanding, and not wanting to listen. This condition will test the patience of the volunteers. Every consistency of volunteers challenges the negative life script that children still have. However, the interactions that are carried out slowly begin to build a new story. Volunteers also continue to convince foster children with verbal communication and real actions that the children are accepted as family members for volunteers. The peak of the process of creating a shared reality is at the intimacy stage. At this stage, a deep trust has arisen. Both parties have been able to share live scripts. They create a shared reality that they are one 'new' family. The foster children also began to be able to reveal themselves about their previous dark life script to the volunteers and could act as the goal of coordination and coherence from the previous stage. This is an invitation for volunteers to enter the script of the foster child's life, as well as an entrance where messages of motivation, values and rules begin to be embedded and become a belief for foster children.

The deterioration stage arises due to the destruction of coherence and coordination that fails completely. It can result in one party avoiding, staying silent, angry or even withdrawing. This stage is a negative episode of the process of interpersonal communication. At this stage, what happens in the foster home is during an episode where the volunteers' disappointment arises which is triggered by the indiscipline of the foster child or the lack of respect for the values that have been coordinated and cohesive beforehand. For example, when someone goes to play but doesn't go back and forth all day. Or, there are foster children who commit theft. So, at the end of this stage there are two, namely Repair and Disconnection. Repair It is carried out by coordinating and re-coherence the meaning of previously agreed values and firmly enforcing the rules. This stage requires communication skills from volunteers. This happened

to Rf's foster children who were given strict action when they did not come home all day because they played outside.

The last stage in interpersonal relationships, the disconnection occurs when there is no longer a coherence between volunteers and foster children. This happened to several foster children who were released or expelled because they were caught stealing. For children who break up with this condition, they retreat with their own version of why the relationship ended. The story will probably be integrated into their later life script to guide future relationships. Termination also occurs naturally because it is time for foster children to leave because they have finished school, as happened to FR and N. However, in these children who leave naturally, they already have a new life script. They are already in the final stage where the communication goals that were built at the beginning have been achieved. This is an episode where the foster child has succeeded in changing the script of his life from previously feeling worthless and unloved to the other way around. He leaves with a positive narrative in his life as a provision to face a better future.

Meanwhile, how interpersonal communication carried out by volunteers can encourage children's motivation and self-development as in goal two, it was found that volunteers applied adaptive communication to children according to the unique characteristics of each individual foster child, instead of applying the same communication approach for all children. For children with cognitive limitations, volunteers use simpler, repetitive methods of communication and require extra patience. As for children with traumatic experiences, volunteers tend to motivate by encouraging activity in the social environment, keeping the child busy with other activities and avoiding conversations that discuss the cause of the trauma.

In addition, volunteers implement supportive, persuasive and repetitive communication. Supportive communication is one of the communication approaches by showing encouragement and giving words of praise. Supportive communication is often applied by volunteers in volunteer interpersonal communication with foster children at the S3 Lintau Nursing Home, especially in children with cognitive impairments. Messages about rules and values, as well as motivational messages, were given by volunteers to foster children through supportive dialogue and repetition. These rules and values become a moral and ethical framework that is a limit for children's behavior. This is also related to the efforts of volunteers in developing foster children. Values and rules in the form of honesty, courage, responsibility and humility are instilled through daily dialogue, clear enforcement of rules, and example. The rules and values that are instilled through these methods so that they become a mutual agreement that is obeyed by foster children. In addition, volunteers encourage foster children to hone social skills through actively socializing and integrating with the environment, building courage and confidence and practicing independence and life skills. Children are encouraged to integrate socially and are sometimes even 'forced' to interact with the wider community as a form of hands-on exercise to build courage and confidence and practice their social skills. Another way to encourage competency actions by volunteers is by training foster children to communicate. This method is mainly carried out in children with cognitive impairment who at the beginning of admission have very limited communication skills.

Various methods in volunteer interpersonal communication to foster motivation and encourage foster child self-development as described above, are carried out continuously in daily interactions. The communication messages conveyed then become an internalization of

motivation and values by foster children which ultimately bring changes towards the self-development of foster children. The transformation of foster children can be seen from the consistency of attitude changes, improvement of social abilities and the emergence of future concepts for them where children begin to have their own desires and goals in life.

The researcher also analyzed interpersonal communication in fostering motivation and encouraging self-development using the LUUUTT Model in CMM Theory. The LUUUTT model is a model in CMM Theory to sharpen the analysis of interpersonal communication by volunteers in fostering motivation and self-development of foster children. The LUUUTT model provides a useful framework for dissecting how changes or self-development in foster children occur in an interaction flow. This model can help researchers dissect the various layers of the story in a conversation. LUUUTT stands for Lived Stories, Untold Stories, Unheard Stories, Unknown Stories, Stories Told, and Story Telling. Using the LUUWTT model, the changes that occur in foster children can be seen from the results of complex negotiations between the child's past story and the new story that is introduced and lived in the foster home.

Each child when they first enter already has their own lived stories. In the foster home, volunteers create new lived stories by presenting the meaning of family. Volunteers also actively introduce new stories told to children, namely messages of support and motivation that are conveyed consistently or continuously. Lived Stories can also be seen from real actions and interactions that give substance to told stories. For example, when volunteers say 'I told all my children' in front of others (told stories), the foster children live it by getting the freedom to take food at any time or take their own money. Likewise, the act of hugging a guilty child is a lived story of an expression of affection.

In the unknown stories, untold stories and unheard stories section, empathy is needed from volunteers to understand the background of foster children, find out unknown stories, create space for untold stories and learn to listen to unheard stories. In terms of untold stories, it can be seen explicitly from the case of N, the rape victim. The volunteers in that case consciously decided never to mention the bad incident that befell N. Volunteers deliberately did not dig up unspoken stories that became a traumatic experience for N. Instead of digging, the volunteers encouraged N to actively participate in activities or play with peers so as not to bring up the story that became a dark time for N. By making trauma an untold story, volunteers give new lived stories, such as achievement and courage, the opportunity to redefine Nayla's identity. Unknown stories can be seen from the process of R's foster children where volunteers do not force R to discuss the source of his fear, but focus on building positive experiences. This makes Rindu not need to constantly identify herself.

Stories told also includes explicit narratives that volunteers convey to children to remind them of values and motivate such as the importance of not being arrogant and remembering their origins, instilling courage and others. Meanwhile, storytelling is an important factor in the transition of foster children to self-development. For example, the way the SCN informant uses a 'from heart to heart' approach or the way YR informants tell stories to foster children or small talk and dialogue like friends carried out by other volunteers, makes the message well received, even by children with weak catching ability. In the end, the new lived stories lived by the foster children became more dominant and helped by how volunteers shared told stories and storytelling. The foster children are gradually showing changes. They transform from a child who often cries and is afraid to talk to a child who can communicate

normally, or from a child who used to not connect and was afraid to play with people, now they have become more courageous. So are positive changes in other children. By managing the different layers of the story, the volunteers not only changed behavior, but fundamentally reconstructed the narrative of the child's identity. For example, volunteers help children rewrite the script of their lives, from what may be full of limitations to a new narrative full of potential and hope for the future.

In several previous studies, many have discussed interpersonal communication from the perspective of communication patterns and their influence on motivation. However, not much has been discussed about the process of interpersonal communication in fostering motivation and self-development in children with complex life backgrounds. In addition, there has been no research that uses CMM Theory and the LUUUTT Model as analytical knives to analyze the interpersonal communication process that encourages change and self-development in foster children. This is a novelty in this study where adaptive communication skills with the sincere intentions of volunteers and building interpersonal closeness like families can be used to encourage motivation and self-development in children from diverse backgrounds.

1. Theoretical and practical implications

The findings of this study have several important implications, both for the development of CMM Theory and for the application of interpersonal communication in parenting practice. The most significant practical benefit is the emphasis that the foundation of a parenting program is the quality of interpersonal relationships that can be built through communication, not the application of rigid rules. Foster home practitioners and the like are encouraged to consciously reconstruct their environment into a 'family' that starts with simple but powerful impactful actions. The power of supportive touch communication is also an important communication tool, because most of the children who come from family backgrounds that lack affection. For practitioners, this touch communication is a reminder that non-verbal affective communication is not just an add-on, but a core strategy to build trust and a sense of security. The findings also show that volunteers exercise their communication competencies intuitively. They adjust their communication style with each child according to their own knowledge and experience. It shows that the communication competence of volunteers or caregivers does not have to focus on standard procedures. However, it is also important to get special assistance from experts, as expected by one of the volunteers and input from one of the observers.

Meanwhile, the theoretical implication of this research is that it makes a significant contribution to the development of science, especially in the study of communication. This study shows how concepts in CMM theory that look abstract such as creating a social world, coordination of meaning can occur in real and organic ways in the field. The flow of interaction that shows the process of interpersonal communication starting from establishing a close relationship to the transformation of foster children can be sharply dissected using the LUUUTT model. Thus, this study can strengthen the validity of the CMM theory in the context of parenting communication in relation to the motivation and self-development of foster children.

CONCLUSION

It can be concluded that there are several stages of the interpersonal communication process that occur between volunteers and foster children in fostering motivation and encouraging self-development, as shown in the diagram of the stages of interpersonal relationships DeVito (2023). These stages start from contact, involvement, intimacy, deterioration, repair and dissolution. The concept of these stages can also be explained by the CMM Theory which prioritizes meaning in communication. If the DeVito Concept explains more about what stages occur, then the CMM Theory explains how and why it happens. The process that occurs in CMM Theory starts from coordination (initial introduction), coherence (alignment of meaning) between volunteers and foster children, and creating new social realities. The process continues in a negative direction in the event of a slump where coordination fails and the coherence built is destroyed. The choice can be to improve by rebuilding coherence or disconnecting the relationship. However, in children whose process has ended (disconnection) due to natural factors such as school graduation, then they have a new life script and a positive narrative to live their future. Suggestions that can be given based on the findings of this study are: First, for orphanage managers and similar institutions, it is recommended to prioritize the development of interpersonal communication skills for volunteers, not just relying on technical training in nursing. Second, the need for periodic assistance from psychologists or counselors to help volunteers deal with children with severe trauma or special needs. Third, for further research, it is recommended to explore the supporting and inhibiting factors of interpersonal communication in the orphanage setting with a mixed-methods method to obtain more comprehensive data. In addition, a CMM-based interpersonal communication module can also be developed that can be used as a practical guide for volunteers in orphanages.

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