

Interactional Communication Between Teacher and Students to Improve the Quality of Learning At the Mutiara Hati Magelang Special School

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Abstrak

Penelitian ini dilatarbelakangi oleh pentingnya komunikasi interaksional dalam upaya membangun hubungan yang lebih efektif antara guru dan siswa di Sekolah Luar Biasa (SLB), khususnya di SLB Mutiara Hati Magelang. Komunikasi yang tidak responsif dan satu arah sering kali menjadi kendala dalam menciptakan kualitas pembelajaran yang optimal bagi siswa berkebutuhan khusus, terutama siswa yang mengalami hambatan verbal dan gangguan perkembangan sosial. Dalam konteks ini, tujuan penelitian terletak pada upaya untuk mengidentifikasi praktik komunikasi interaksional guru yang mampu mendorong peningkatan partisipasi dan motivasi siswa dalam pembelajaran. Penelitian ini menggunakan teori komunikasi interaksional dari Schramm dan Budianto, yang mencakup lima indikator utama, yaitu: respons, keterbukaan, kepercayaan, empati, dan dukungan. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif dengan metode pengumpulan data melalui wawancara mendalam, observasi partisipatif, dan dokumentasi. Informan utama terdiri dari tiga guru di SLB Mutiara Hati yang memiliki pengalaman langsung berinteraksi dengan siswa berkebutuhan khusus. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa praktik komunikasi interaksional yang mengedepankan empati dan keterbukaan, serta respons verbal dan nonverbal yang adaptif terhadap kebutuhan unik setiap siswa, berkontribusi besar terhadap peningkatan motivasi belajar, kepercayaan diri, dan kualitas pembelajaran. Guru yang menunjukkan pemahaman emosional dan menggunakan pendekatan non-verbal seperti ekspresi wajah yang lembut dan sentuhan ringan terbukti mampu menciptakan iklim kelas yang lebih suportif dan inklusif. Dapat disimpulkan bahwa, komunikasi interaksional yang efektif bukan hanya alat untuk menyampaikan pesan, melainkan juga medium untuk membangun koneksi psikologis yang mendalam antara guru dan siswa. Penelitian ini juga merekomendasikan pelatihan komunikasi interaktif bagi guru SLB sebagai strategi berkelanjutan dalam meningkatkan kualitas pendidikan inklusif di Indonesia.

Kata Kunci: Komunikasi Interaksional; Kualitas Pembelajaran; Siswa Berkebutuhan Khusus; Sekolah Luar Biasa

Abstract

This research is motivated by the importance of interactional communication in building effective relationships between teachers and students in Special Needs Schools (SLB), particularly at Mutiara Hati Special Needs School in Magelang. Unresponsive and one-way communication often becomes an obstacle in creating optimal learning quality for students with special needs, especially students who experience verbal barriers and social development disorders. In this context, this research aims to identify teacher interactional communication practices that can encourage increased student participation and motivation in learning. This research uses the interactional communication theory of Schramm and Budianto, which includes five leading indicators: response, openness, trust,

empathy, and support. This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach with data collection methods through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and documentation. The primary informants consisted of three teachers at Mutiara Hati Special Needs School who had direct experience interacting with students with special needs. The study results indicate that interactional communication practices that prioritize empathy and openness, as well as adaptive verbal and nonverbal responses to the unique needs of each student, contribute significantly to increasing learning motivation, self-confidence, and learning quality. Teachers who demonstrate emotional understanding and use non-verbal approaches such as gentle facial expressions and light touch have been shown to create a more supportive and inclusive classroom climate. Effective interactional communication is a tool for conveying messages and a medium for building deep psychological connections between teachers and students. This study also recommends interactive communication training for special needs teachers as a sustainable strategy to improve the quality of inclusive education in Indonesia.

Keywords: Interactional Communication; Learning Quality; Students with Special Needs; Special Needs Schools

Introduction

Inclusive education is urgent because it guarantees the right of every child, including those with special needs, to equal access to education without discrimination. Inclusive education promotes social justice, respects diversity, and strengthens human values in the learning process by creating an open and welcoming learning environment for all students. Furthermore, inclusive education can help students with special needs develop academically, socially, and emotionally optimally. This system also requires teachers and schools to develop learning approaches that are flexible, communicative, and responsive to differences, which ultimately can improve the overall quality of education for all students.

Inclusive education, involving Special Needs Schools, plays a crucial role in fulfilling the educational rights of children with special needs. Based on basic education data, currently 40,928 schools provide inclusive education at the elementary, middle, and high school levels, both public and private. Of these educational units, 135,946 students with special needs have participated in learning. This demonstrates the importance of the quality of learning provided by special needs educational institutions (Kemendikbud, 2023). In addition, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology issued Ministerial Regulation No. 48 of 2023 concerning the obligation of formal schools to accommodate and facilitate the needs of students with disabilities. Under this regulation, every formal school must provide appropriate accommodations through budget support and financial assistance, facilities and infrastructure tailored to the needs of students with disabilities, and curriculum adjustments. The school environment is an influential and meaningful environment for students in the teaching and learning process at school (Pudjaningsih, 2023). The relationship between the regulation of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology issued Ministerial Regulation No. 48 of 2023 with this research is to see how teacher and student communication is implemented at the Mutiara Hati Magelang special school in the context of this policy whether communicative interactions have met appropriate accommodations, how they contribute to the quality of learning, as well as obstacles/needs for improvement according to standards based on applicable regulations.

The quality of learning in special education schools depends heavily on effective communication between teachers and students. Communication in education is a complex

process involving conveying information, ideas, and feelings between teachers and students to understand better and improve learning effectiveness (Gainforth, 2014). Furthermore, Gainforth emphasized that effective communication plays a crucial role in creating a supportive and interactive learning environment, ultimately improving the quality of learning (Gainforth, 2014). Interactional communication plays a crucial role in inclusive education because it bridges teachers and students from diverse backgrounds, including those with special needs. Through effective communication, teachers can understand each student's characteristics, abilities, and needs and adapt learning strategies so that all students feel valued, engaged, and motivated to learn. This creates a safe and supportive learning environment, which is the essence of inclusive education. Furthermore, good interactional communication enables a two-way learning process, where students actively share their opinions, ask questions, and express themselves. In an inclusive context, this is crucial for building the confidence of students with disabilities and encouraging their equal participation in classroom activities. Teachers who can communicate adaptively, both verbally and nonverbally, will be more successful in creating interactions that support the growth of empathy, cooperation, and tolerance among students.

The school environment and teachers' communication skills significantly influence student learning motivation (Darmawan, 2021). The interpersonal communication models teachers use can improve students' self-confidence and academic performance (Marehan, 2020). Furthermore, effective communication is crucial in educational supervision, fostering collaboration, facilitating the exchange of experiences, and improving the quality of the supervision process (Bachtiar, 2024). These findings underscore the importance of developing teachers' communication skills to create a positive learning environment and improve educational outcomes (Parawangsa, 2024). Effective communication between teachers and students fosters a motivating and supportive educational environment. Positive teacher-student relationships increase students' self-confidence and motivation to participate in learning. To build these relationships, teachers must understand students' abilities, respect their opinions, foster cooperation among students, and treat them fairly (Kurniawati, 2023). Implementing communication techniques that focus on understanding students' emotional and social cues, such as using clear body language and responding to nonverbal cues, can improve learning effectiveness (Kurniawati, 2023). These techniques help create a supportive environment that allows students to feel connected and participate more easily.

However, it is still difficult to establish effective interactive communication practices between teachers and students in Special Needs Schools, including Mutiara Hati Special Needs School. Based on observations and interviews conducted during this study, teachers still experience difficulties adapting their communication styles to the unique needs of each student, especially children with verbal and behavioral disorders. As many as 63% of teachers in Special Needs Schools feel they do not have sufficient specialized communication training to deal with students on the autism spectrum or deafness, resulting in many learning interactions being one-way and less responsive. Furthermore, the 2020 UNESCO Global Education Monitoring Report highlighted that teachers in special education tend not to have complete competence in interactional approaches based on empathy and active participation, especially in the context of local culture and limited school resources. Another factor contributing to the low level of active student engagement in Special Needs Schools is the minimal empathetic communication carried out by teachers, which is caused by high workloads and limited access to adaptive communication training. The school environment is an environment that is influential and meaningful for students in the teaching and learning process at school, both in social and

non-social environments (Sembiring, 2024). Based on these statements, interactional communication in special schools still faces serious obstacles that need to be studied to uphold inclusive education. In the context of communication in Special Needs Schools, teachers often encounter various barriers in interacting with students, resulting in significant challenges in the learning process. These barriers arise in multiple communication elements, including the communicator, the message, and the recipient, potentially impacting the quality of interactions between teachers and students. Several studies have shown that effective communication between teachers and students in Special Needs Schools is often hampered by differences in students' thinking and understanding of the subject matter, making it difficult for teachers to convey information clearly and effectively. Teachers are also expected to gain experience developing their potential as well as doing good work, and being able to work together (Erwan, 2020).

Furthermore, autistic children often have difficulty initiating conversations, which hinders the teaching and learning process and can reduce active student participation in class. This difficulty highlights the importance of a more adaptive and inclusive approach to communication in educational settings. In online learning situations, communication challenges become even more complex (Permana, 2020). Numerous communication barriers arise during online learning, including misperceptions between teachers and students. This often results in miscommunication, disrupting students' understanding of the subject. As the research object, the Mutiara Hati Special School in Magelang also demonstrated a similar phenomenon. Based on initial interviews in the field, teachers stated that there were inequalities in students' response patterns to verbal communication. Some students required non-verbal approaches such as gentle facial expressions, light touches on the shoulder, or gestures to respond to simple commands. This indicates that interactional communication at Mutiara Hati Special School should be more focused on a combination of verbal and non-verbal communication and understanding students' emotions. However, various studies show that the communication challenges in special needs schools are diverse and complex. Efforts to address these barriers must involve a comprehensive and sustainable strategy, including improving teachers' communication skills and developing teaching methods that better suit the needs of students with special needs. This can create a more inclusive and effective learning environment, ultimately supporting optimal student development and learning. As a teacher, you must understand and learn to communicate in the classroom (Al-Munawarah, 2024).

For example, research at Pelita Hati Special School in Pekanbaru on interactional communication between teachers and students shows that despite implementing several communication models, such as instructional and psychological communication, barriers persist in the teaching and learning process (Handayani, 2019). Several studies have shown that interactional communication in special schools can enhance student development. Therefore, further research is needed to examine interactional communication between teachers and students at Mutiara Hati Special School in Magelang. This research will provide a better understanding of effective communication practices in special education contexts and help formulate better strategies to support students with diverse needs. Previous research has broadly discussed interactional communication between teachers and students, typically occurring in regular schools, focusing on verbal communication patterns such as questions, answers, or instructions. However, little research has explored the context of special needs schools or schools for students with special needs, particularly regarding the communication strategies teachers use to adapt to student characteristics and their impact on the quality of learning. Furthermore, little research directly links the quality of these interactions to overall student learning outcomes.

The article "Interactional Communication Between Teachers and Students to Improve the Quality of Learning at the Mutiara Hati Magelang Special School" attempts to fill this gap by examining communication between teachers and students at the Mutiara Hati Magelang Special School. The focus is not only on communication patterns but also on how these interactions impact the quality of learning. By considering the local context and students with special needs, this article provides a specific and relevant empirical contribution to improving learning effectiveness in similar schools.

A two-way interactional communication process occurs between teachers and students. The sender and receiver can switch roles when sending and receiving messages. Feedback, or response to messages, is an important element of the interactional communication model. Communication is not only about conveying information, but also about understanding and responding to information within the context of social interaction. Interactional communication involves the communication process, feedback, and social context. Communication is a crucial part of life because it allows students to express their feelings and ideas (Prikhodko, 2020).

Interactional communication addresses the complexity of communication, where messages are not only delivered in one direction but also involve responses and interpretations from the recipient. Interactional communication considers variables such as body language, facial expressions, and tone of voice that can influence message comprehension (Littlejohn, 2016). Interactional communication also emphasizes the importance of context in understanding interactional communication, as messages can often be interpreted differently depending on the situation and the communicator's background (West, 2006).

The most prominent problems at Mutiara Hati Special School in Magelang are limited funding and facilities, and dependence on informal support or donations from the community. This impacts the school's ability to provide supporting accommodations, such as learning facilities, materials, and adequate teaching staff. Limited financial resources complicate school operations and the provision of inclusive support facilities. This also results in a shortage of qualified special teachers to handle students with special needs. This limits the number of students who can be optimally supported and results in a high teacher-student ratio, making support services less personalized. Facilities and accommodations are also considered inadequate, hampering the effective implementation of inclusive learning.

A communication process model that describes the flow of message exchange between teachers and students, as well as factors that influence communication effectiveness, including the sender, message, channel, recipient, and the presence of feedback (Yulia, 2023).



Figure 1. Interactional Communication Model
Source: Yulia, 2023

The illustration also emphasizes the presence of noise that can occur at various points in the communication process, including during message development, transmission through the channel, and reception. This interference can take the form of physical, psychological, or semantic barriers that can reduce the clarity of the message. This model also demonstrates that the sender's experience and the receiver's field of knowledge influence the communication process. Differences or similarities in experience and knowledge between the two parties will influence how effectively the message is understood.

Overall, the illustration emphasizes that communication is a dynamic, two-way process, where effectiveness is greatly influenced by feedback, interference, and similarities in experience and knowledge between the sender and receiver. This model is relevant for use in communication research to analyze factors that can enhance or hinder achieving communication goals, particularly in teacher-student communication. Interactional communication can be measured through five indicators: verbal or nonverbal responses, openness, the teacher's willingness to acknowledge and accept students' thoughts, exchange of meaning, positive attitudes, and balance in speaking and listening to students (Rahmawati, 2019). In the study of the development of interactional communication, research has highlighted the importance of adaptive and responsive two-way communication in educational contexts, particularly in inclusive learning (Kaur, 2020). Effective interactional communication between teachers and students involves not only the exchange of verbal messages but also encompasses nonverbal aspects, empathy, and the teacher's ability to adapt communication style to students' needs. This aligns with the view that open and supportive interactional communication can increase students' active participation in the learning process (Kaur, 2020).

The quality of learning is one of the leading indicators of educational success, which is influenced by various factors, including the effectiveness of communication between teachers and students, the active involvement of students greatly influences the quality of learning, the use of innovative learning methods, and the existence of constructive feedback from teachers. Learning quality is also defined as the level of achievement of learning objectives. Achieving these objectives involves increasing knowledge and skills and developing attitudes through the learning process. Furthermore, learning principles are applied to both students and teachers. These principles relate to motivation, active participation, direct involvement or experience, repetition, feedback, and learning outcomes (Ahmadi, 2023). Using these principles helps teachers choose appropriate actions to avoid actions that do not enhance student learning. Learning quality can be defined as the intensity of the systemic and synergistic relationships between teachers, students, the learning climate, and learning media in producing optimal learning processes and outcomes by curricular requirements (Ahmadi, 2023). The benchmark for educational success can be seen from educators' readiness to deliver learning in a classroom. Planning is an absolute requirement for every management activity in a learning process. Without planning, implementing an activity will be difficult and may even fail to achieve the desired goals (Sutikno, 2009). According to the Ministry of National Education in 2004, indicators of learning quality are seen from teacher activities in learning, including teacher behavior, student activities, including student learning behavior, student learning outcomes, and their impact on student learning, learning materials, the quality of learning media, and the learning climate. This means that indicators of learning materials, learning media, and learning climate management are included in indicators of teacher skills in learning (Nurhasanah, 2022). In applying the interactional communication model between teachers and students, there are five leading indicators: response or feedback, openness, trust, empathy, and support (Turner, 2009).

This research is crucial based on the empirical conditions at Mutiara Hati Special Needs School in Magelang. This school faces challenges such as limited funding, a shortage of special education staff, and the need for adequate educational accommodations per Minister of Education and Culture Regulation No. 48 of 2023. In such a situation, the quality of communication between teachers and students is key to bridging these limitations so that learning remains effective and inclusive. This research is relevant because it reveals how interactional communication strategies used by teachers can increase the participation, understanding, and development of students with special needs amidst limited facilities. The findings of this study can also serve as a practical reference for teachers, schools, and policymakers in developing more adaptive and responsive learning approaches to the needs of students in special needs schools. Thus, this research not only addresses academic needs but also directly impacts improving the quality of inclusive education in the field.

Method

This research uses a qualitative approach, which adheres to the phenomenological school of thought, emphasizing scientific research activities, describing and understanding the social phenomena being studied. This research seeks to understand the phenomena and facts under study, prioritizing the perspective of the research subjects over the researcher's. Researchers employ different approaches to qualitative research. The subjects of this study were teachers and students at Mutiara Hati Special School. This school was chosen as the research location because it has characteristics in its learning approach that require effective interactional communication between teachers and students to improve the quality of learning. The subjects of this study were teachers who actively teach at Mutiara Hati Special School in Magelang. The selection of teachers as informants was based on the consideration that teachers are the parties directly involved in the learning process and are the leading actors in building interactional communication with students. The informant criteria in this study include being a permanent or honorary teacher who actively teaches at Mutiara Hati Special School, having at least one year of teaching experience at the school that demonstrates sufficient understanding and involvement in the communication process with students with special needs, having direct experience interacting with students from various types of special needs, both verbally and nonverbally, and being willing to provide information openly and objectively regarding the communication practices they carry out during the learning process. Where data was collected through interviews, observations, and documentation, and for interviews, using interview guidelines as a guide and observation checklist. The data analysis in this study refers to the data analysis methods described by Miles and Huberman, including data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. To ensure data validity, this study employed triangulation techniques, collecting data from different sources to obtain data from the same source. Researchers conducted interviews, conducted direct observations, and documented the teaching and learning process of children attending Mutiara Hati Special School.

Result and Discussion

Mutiara Hati Special Needs School was founded by Mrs. Sri Murdani in 2016. On January 3, 2017, it officially accepted students with special needs for tutoring. Based on documentation obtained during the research process, there are three classroom teachers at Mutiara Hati Special Needs School: Mrs. Sri Murdani, Mrs. Fadhiya, and Mrs. Aini. All teachers have educational backgrounds and training relevant to the education of children with special needs. In the 2024-2025 academic year, there are 20 students with

special needs, including mild intellectual disabilities, autism, speech delays, and learning difficulties. All students receive special attention in academic learning and the development of social and emotional skills. The teachers' learning approaches are individualized and tailored to each student's unique characteristics. During teaching and learning activities, teachers at Mutiara Hati Special Needs School use various methods to communicate and engage with their students. The communication methods teachers and students use are used to improve the quality of classroom learning. Research findings from interviews indicate that all informants used the response aspect in the context of teacher and student behavior, referring to the communication process, always providing direct responses between teachers and students. Regarding teacher behavior, all informants demonstrated attentiveness in building interactional communication. They responded appropriately to the situation occurring in the classroom.

Interactional communication between teachers and students at Mutiara Hati Special School is a highly dynamic process, as illustrated in the Interactional Communication Model. This model emphasizes that communication occurs in two directions, involving the teacher as the message's sender, the student as the recipient, the message, the channel, and feedback, and is influenced by experience, knowledge, and various distractions. This study found that although communication elements were functioning well in many aspects, there were significant disparities in implementing each indicator, as evident in the differences in teachers' abilities to interpret and respond to student expressions.

Experienced teachers tend to be quicker to pick up on students' nonverbal cues, such as hand gestures or facial expressions, and can respond appropriately. Conversely, new or less-trained teachers often fail to grasp the meaning of students' responses, especially those with severe communication difficulties. This can make some students feel misunderstood and reluctant to respond actively during the lesson. One informant said in an interview, "Some students are quiet. Sometimes I am confused about whether to wait or ask again, because I fear they will become even more withdrawn."

1. Responsiveness

Teachers implement responsiveness by consistently allowing students to participate in classroom learning activities. Furthermore, conversations between teachers and students during the classroom learning process are always accompanied by responses from the teacher, as students tend to require immediate feedback when communicating. Teachers provide this freedom to foster student confidence. This can make students feel happy and foster good communication, as responses contribute to the quality of classroom learning. Teachers tend to repeat their responses several times until students understand what they are conveying. Teacher responses can be prone to communication gaps, sometimes making it difficult for students to absorb the necessary information. The frequency of teacher-student interaction often determines whether students understand the teacher's instructions.

Therefore, responsiveness can also improve the quality of classroom learning. While some students readily understand teacher instructions, many students with special needs require more responsiveness than others to understand the instructions better. Responding is beneficial for students in boosting self-confidence, but it must be balanced with patience and support from the supervising teacher.

Regarding student behavior, responding is crucial in the classroom. As noted by informants, communication with students is easier to understand with the addition of body gestures, as students with speech delays often struggle to communicate. Therefore, a teacher's response will clarify the intended meaning. Often, students do not understand a

single explanation. Therefore, responding to student behavior is crucial. Besides clarifying or reinforcing the teacher's message, responses can foster students' sense of belonging. Teacher responses can determine whether a particular situation is appropriate or not.

Informants explained that the learning climate, or atmosphere, during class depends on the students' feelings. They observe the beginning of the lesson and then determine appropriate teaching methods. Informants also pay attention to the learning materials and learning system. The learning materials used in special schools are presented more flexibly, adapting to the needs of the students in the class. Teachers typically prepare backup materials in case of incompatibility or if students feel uncomfortable learning the material. For the learning system, the informant said that various methods are used, but usually the ones that are often used are those that use media that can attract students' attention. In addition to responding, teachers also practice openness within their teacher-student relationship. Teachers strive to respond honestly to student feedback. This provides space for students to express their needs and feelings during class. Openness encourages students to share what they need or want to share with the teacher. Therefore, openness reveals what communication methods are appropriate and inappropriate for students. Furthermore, it reflects an effort to teach students values and ethics and provides a clear structure for teacher-student interactions.

Some teachers consistently create an open and inclusive classroom environment, where students can ask questions or share stories without fear of judgment. However, not all teachers can maintain this openness. Some teachers still prefer a one-way lecture method, which can make students who are quiet or lack confidence increasingly passive. Students who feel the classroom environment is not conducive to openness tend to withdraw and avoid disclosing their difficulties. One teacher once heard a student say, "I want to talk, but sometimes I am afraid the teacher will not like it or is busy."

2. Openness

Openness often arises when a student wants something, but the teacher does not follow through in class. For example, when a student asks to go home early and complains to the teacher, the teacher explains that it is not yet time for the lesson to end. The teacher openly communicates this, honestly explaining to the student until they understand the lesson is over. The teacher actively communicates with students in class, providing deep attention and understanding to their activities and experiences. Indicators of openness reflect the teacher's efforts to communicate honestly with students. Furthermore, the teacher strives not to hurt students' feelings, which could discourage them from participating in class activities. However, some students still need more time and patience to understand and comprehend what the teacher is saying.

An inclusive learning climate prioritizes acceptance and active student participation. The foundation of acceptance and inclusivity is realized by school teachers who not only accept differences but also celebrate the uniqueness of each student. Teachers create a space where students feel safe to be themselves, without fear of judgment or exclusion. Furthermore, awareness education is regularly held to increase understanding of disabilities, and daily inclusion practices are practiced in the classroom and out-of-class interactions. Effective, open communication builds trust and holistic emotional support from various parties. Individualized and adaptive learning materials are designed with the principles of individualization and adaptation. Teachers understand that each student has different needs and learning styles, so they develop a tailored Individual Curriculum, modify learning materials in various formats, utilize assistive technology, and ensure the relevance and contextuality of the materials to students' daily

lives. The learning system is also given attention, with a focus on physical accessibility, close collaboration with parents and related experts, a comprehensive transition program to prepare students, and ongoing evaluation to monitor student development holistically.

3. Trust

Based on research findings, trust in the context of teacher and student behavior refers to the communication process in which teachers provide freedom to students and support their understanding. Teachers implement trust indicators to give students freedom in the classroom learning process, enabling them to feel safe and comfortable in the classroom. Students exhibit a high level of curiosity. Teachers emphasize that students must first develop trust to continue the learning process in the classroom.

In terms of trust, teachers value the diversity of opinions and perspectives among students by providing open space for them. Teachers who use trust indicators are more inclined to communicate openly to discuss topics with students. Trust also supports student participation in the communication process and fosters understanding. Students who communicate with teachers tend to adapt more quickly and develop the ability to communicate with others. Students become more confident in expressing their opinions or speaking with their peers.

Regarding trust, disruptions arise from teachers' inconsistent attitudes in fostering a sense of security for students. Patient and calm teachers can successfully build trust, encouraging students to ask questions and express their opinions. However, some teachers respond negatively when students make mistakes, discouraging further interaction. The communication process is hampered because students lose the confidence to open up to teachers. One student said, "I am afraid of making mistakes and getting scolded," reflecting the disruption in building trust between teachers and students.

Trust provides students with space to develop social skills and become more confident in communicating with those around them. Collaborative learning is fostered in line with trust, which supports students' sense of security in the classroom. Students can participate in classroom activities and communicate with anyone. In terms of the learning climate, all informants understood and perceived that the learning climate in the classroom is a crucial focus. Informants explained that the classroom atmosphere must be created to ensure a comfortable classroom environment for students. Students are taught to instill trust in their teachers, as one informant noted that sometimes some students are reluctant to be separated from their parents. Trust must be built between teachers and students so that students can comfortably experience learning in class with the teacher.

Trust is not merely an abstract belief, but rather a solid foundation that underpins the effectiveness of the teaching and learning process for students with special needs. First and foremost, trust in learning materials is built through clarity and logical structure. Students at Mutiara Hati Special School in Magelang require carefully structured materials, simple language, and clear visualizations to grasp the concepts taught without feeling confused or frustrated. Consistency in material presentation is also crucial, ensuring each learning session has a structured and predictable flow.

Furthermore, stable routines and a safe environment foster trust in the learning system. Mutiara Hati Special School students in Magelang need precise and reliable routines that provide security and comfort. They trust that the learning environment will consistently provide support and guidance, without sudden changes that can cause anxiety. Trust in teachers is also crucial. Trustworthy teachers consistently provide instruction, feedback, and support, while maintaining the confidentiality of students' personal information. Teachers demonstrate empathy and patience, understanding that students have different learning needs and paces.

Transparency in assessment also builds trust, as students and parents need to understand the learning criteria and objectives and how student progress is assessed. A transparent assessment process ensures assessments are conducted fairly and objectively, so students feel valued and motivated to learn. The relevance of the material to students' needs also contributes to trust. Material relevant to students' daily lives demonstrates that learning has practical value and can be applied in real life. Accessibility of materials to all students, regardless of their disability, demonstrates that the learning system cares about individual needs and is committed to providing equal opportunities for all students.

4. Empathy

Based on research findings on empathy in the context of teachers and students, it refers to the communication process in which teachers demonstrate the ability to understand and feel what students are feeling. Empathy enables teachers to achieve a shared understanding. Teachers who demonstrate empathy tend to be willing to listen and speak with students when they have specific desires or requests.

Empathy is found in collaboration, dialogue, and shared understanding. Teachers who demonstrate empathy hone their sensitivity to students with special needs. This is necessary because students with special needs tend to experience fluctuating moods. Suppose teachers are accustomed to and possess high empathy. In that case, they will be able to recognize the peaks and lows of students' emotions, thus identifying the best time for students to understand the material presented in class.

Empathy is a teacher's ability to understand students' feelings, needs, and conditions deeply. Empathetic teachers can adapt their communication methods to suit their students' characteristics and needs. Classroom observations indicate that empathetic teachers find it easier to build rapport. "I always try to understand my students' feelings. If they seem sad, I talk to them before starting the lesson."

However, there are significant differences between experienced and novice teachers. Experienced teachers are more sensitive to changes in students' emotions, while novice teachers focus solely on delivering the material. Empathy bridges the gap between the teacher's experience and the students' knowledge in an interactional communication model, ensuring that the message is fully received.

Students with special needs are free to communicate and express their desires in the classroom. Teachers who demonstrate empathy do not get angry or restrict students' ability to express their desires. This way, students become accustomed to identifying right and wrong choices, ultimately leading to their decision-making. Teachers typically use statements like "Yes," "Good," "Correct," and "Good" to support students. Conversely, they say "No," "No," and "Not Allowed" when students make mistakes. However, teachers must also be aware of students' emotional states, as students with special needs can be emotionally unstable. This way, students will understand what the teacher is trying to convey.

Humanistic learning is fostered in harmony with empathy, which involves teachers' understanding of students' feelings. The humanistic quality of learning focuses on an interactional approach, which can help create a learning atmosphere where each student feels cared for and motivated to learn. Empathy in this context is not merely a feeling of pity, but rather the ability to understand and feel what is experienced by those with special needs, thus creating an environment that supports the holistic development of students. Empathy is reflected in how teachers and school staff build understanding and caring relationships in the context of a learning climate. Teachers not only view students from an academic perspective, but also from an emotional and social perspective. Empathetic teachers can recognize signs of difficulties that students may be experiencing,

both academic and personal, and provide appropriate responses. Teachers create a safe and comfortable classroom atmosphere where students feel accepted and valued for who they are. Empathy also manifests in how teachers communicate with students, using gentle and understanding language, and providing genuine support and motivation. Interactions between students are also characterized by empathy, as students learn to help and support one another and appreciate differences.

Furthermore, empathy plays a crucial role in developing and delivering learning materials. Empathetic teachers understand that each student has unique needs and learning styles and tailor learning materials to suit their abilities and interests. They employ various creative and innovative learning methods and media, providing examples relevant to students' daily lives. Empathy is also reflected in how teachers provide student feedback, focusing on the outcome, the process, and the effort involved. Teachers provide motivating feedback and help students learn from their mistakes. Furthermore, learning materials are designed to foster empathy in students through stories or activities that encourage students to understand and relate to the experiences of others.

In the context of quality learning, empathy manifests in providing services and facilities that support students' comprehensive needs. Mutiara Hati Magelang Special School has a responsive and flexible system, allowing students to receive the support they need academically, socially, and emotionally. Empathy is also reflected in the involvement of parents and the community in the learning process, where parents collaborate with the school to create an environment that supports student development. The evaluation system is designed with students' needs and abilities in mind, allowing them to reach their full potential.

5. Support

In the context of teachers and students, support is considered to increase self-confidence and encourage active participation in the learning process. By demonstrating a positive attitude toward students with special needs and providing constructive verbal encouragement, teachers not only help students overcome difficulties in understanding the classroom learning process but also build strong, supportive relationships, essential for the social and emotional development of students with special needs.

This support often occurs when students with special needs are engaged in learning activities. For example, when given a coloring assignment in class, the teacher will provide positive affirmation when students show their work. This action encourages students to complete the assignment. Furthermore, the teacher actively participates in the interaction and communication process. Support indicators reflect teachers' efforts to provide positive affirmation to boost students' self-confidence continuously.

Teacher support significantly impacts student motivation and confidence. This support can be praise, assistance during difficult times, or encouragement to try new things. Some teachers say, "I always encourage my students; whatever the outcome, I appreciate their efforts." Students who feel supported tend to be more active and confident in learning.

Disruptions in support indicators are evident in the differences in teacher treatment of students. Some teachers provide consistent support, while others pay less attention to individual student needs, especially those with significant challenges. In the interactional communication scheme, teacher support is the core message that must reach students through appropriate channels, although it is often hampered by interference from the students' psychological environment. This interference requires specific strategies, such as mentoring between teachers and using diverse learning media, to ensure that all students receive equal support and improve the overall quality of learning.

Furthermore, student interviews reinforced this statement: "I am happy when the teacher says I can do it. I am not afraid to ask if I do not understand because the teacher always helps." This demonstrates that teacher support increases motivation and builds students' confidence and courage to participate in learning actively. Students accustomed to receiving support through affirmation from their teachers will develop self-confidence. This is because the support teachers use emphasizes the positive aspects of what students have done. The abundance of support provided by teachers makes students aware that when they complete their responsibilities, they will receive support in the form of praise.

Support manifests in various forms in a learning climate, from teachers and those providing personal mentoring, creating a safe and inclusive classroom atmosphere, to supportive student interactions. Teachers at Mutiara Hati Special School, Magelang, understand that each student has unique needs, so they strive to create an environment where students feel valued, heard, and motivated to learn. Emotional support, such as praise, motivation, and recognition for student effort, is an integral part of daily interactions. Furthermore, student collaboration is encouraged, creating a strong peer support network.

Furthermore, support is also reflected in carefully designed learning materials. Modifications to the curriculum and teaching materials are tailored to each student's understanding and learning style. Appropriate learning aids, clear visualizations, and simplification of abstract concepts are among the strategies implemented. Teachers at Mutiara Hati Special School, Magelang, deliver material and ensure that each student has equal access to knowledge. They are willing to repeat explanations, provide additional examples, and use various teaching methods to ensure students understand the material. Support in learning materials also includes providing resources that are relevant to students' daily lives, so that learning becomes more meaningful and applicable.

Within the context of the learning system, support is realized through various services and programs designed to meet students' needs comprehensively. Mutiara Hati Magelang Special School provides access to occupational therapy, speech therapy, and counseling services, delivered by competent experts. The school's physical environment is also designed to be easily accessible to students with various disabilities, with facilities. Furthermore, the school also establishes partnerships with parents and external parties to provide ongoing support for students. Regular evaluations of the support system are conducted to ensure that the services provided remain relevant and practical, and to identify areas for improvement.

Based on the interactional communication model, non-verbal and visual messages are often more dominant and crucial in special needs schools. Based on this model, researchers can identify the most effective channels teachers use to address various student needs, including feedback to measure the quality of learning. When viewed from student to teacher, student responses such as nods, ability to complete tasks, or even blank stares provide vital feedback for teachers to determine whether messages, including teaching materials, have been received and understood. Conversely, from teacher to student, providing correction, praise, and positive reinforcement provides feedback to foster student understanding and motivation.

Physical disruptions also occur during learning activities, such as classroom noise, poor lighting, and student conditions such as hearing, speech, cognitive limitations, and attention deficits. Psychological disruptions also occur, including anxiety, low self-confidence, trauma, and fatigue. Semantic disruptions also occur, including using language or terms too difficult for students to understand. The gap in experience between teachers and students with special needs is significant. Teachers have formal educational backgrounds, while students have unique worldviews and perspectives shaped by their

circumstances. Therefore, effective teachers can enter and understand their students' experiences, use examples relevant to their world, and understand how students with special needs process information.

Conclusion

Interactional communication at Mutiara Hati Special Needs School (Sekolah Khusus Mutiara Hati) demonstrates that five key aspects—responsiveness, openness, trust, empathy, and support—play a crucial role in creating an inclusive and meaningful learning process. When teachers and students respond to each other, are open with one another, build trust, demonstrate empathy, and provide consistent support, communication becomes more effective and the learning environment more conducive to the growth of students with special needs. However, the implementation of these five aspects still faces challenges, primarily due to communication barriers and differences in teachers' sensitivity to individual student characteristics. Theoretically, the findings of this study contribute to broadening the understanding of the concept of interactional communication in the context of special needs education. This research confirms that effective interactional communication is influenced not only by structural factors but also by the quality of interpersonal relationships consciously and contextually built between teachers and students with special needs. Thus, this study enriches the communication literature by adding pedagogical and inclusive dimensions to communication practices in special needs education environments, which have been relatively underexplored in academic studies. Practically, the results of this study provide strategic implications for improving the quality of learning in special needs schools. Teachers, as key actors in the educational process, need to develop communication strategies that are more adaptive and empathetic to students' needs. Some recommended strategies include training to increase communication sensitivity for teachers, the use of alternative media and communication methods appropriate to students' specific needs, the creation of a safe and supportive classroom environment, and the strengthening of two-way communication patterns that encourage active student participation. Implementing these strategies is believed to increase learning engagement, strengthen teacher-student relationships, and support the optimal achievement of educational goals. This study has several limitations that should be considered. The scope of the study was limited to a single educational unit, which limits the generalizability of the findings to other special needs schools with different characteristics. Furthermore, the qualitative approach used was not able to provide quantitative measurements of the influence of communication variables on student learning outcomes. Furthermore, not all types of special needs were proportionally represented in this study, so the results do not fully represent the diversity of student needs in special needs schools as a whole. Based on these limitations, it is recommended that further research be conducted with a broader scope in several special needs schools with diverse student needs. Furthermore, a mixed methods approach can be used to combine the strengths of qualitative and quantitative data, enabling more comprehensive analysis. Future research could also focus on developing and evaluating communication training programs for special needs school teachers to measure the effectiveness of these interventions in improving the quality of interactions and student learning outcomes.

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