



The Role of Teacher Interpersonal Communication on the Development of Social Skills of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) Students

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Abstract

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a developmental disorder in childhood, marked by delays in cognition, language, behavior, communication, and social interaction. This study aims to explore how teacher-student interpersonal communication influences the skill development of ASD students. Using a qualitative case study approach, direct observation, and in-depth interviews were conducted with three classroom teachers, the principal, and four ASD students. The findings reveal that teachers' interpersonal communication significantly impacts the social skill development of ASD students. By fostering openness and equality, teachers build trust and emotional bonds, enhance students' social skills, learning focus, and emotional stability, and employ appropriate teaching methods. Teachers integrate positive behaviors through routines like greeting peers or teachers and provide concrete examples and repeated explanations to develop peer relation skills. Empathy from teachers allows adaptive learning tailored to students' needs, using visual aids to aid comprehension. Supportive attitudes and creative teaching methods foster a strong task orientation and academic ability in ASD students. Consistent routines, such as the salim culture, help students understand and follow school rules, promoting positive behavior. Future research should further evaluate the effectiveness of these strategies and programs and explore additional factors influencing ASD students' learning success.

Keywords: Teacher Interpersonal Communication; Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD); Social Skills

1. Introduction

Social skills are a very important aspect of human ability to build balanced and harmonious relations with other individuals in society. The provision of social skills is also very relevant for individuals with special needs, especially those with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), as they face barriers in interacting with others (Swandari & Mumpuniarti, 2019). Assisting children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in developing a number of social skills will help develop their self-confidence. This will help them to build many friendships, develop healthy emotional well-being, and nurture a caring attitude towards others, which in turn will build positive self-confidence in these children. The sooner children can overcome social challenges, the easier it will be for them to deal with academic problems appropriate to their level of education at school (Suharsiwi, 2015).

According to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders V (DSM V), Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a group of developmental disorders that are lifelong and have a neurodevelopmental basis, meaning that brain development disorders are the underlying cause. The disorder results in dysfunction of the child's brain so that they cannot

function like a normal brain, and this is reflected in striking behavior in two main areas, namely impaired social communication and repetitive patterns of behavior with limited interests (American Psychiatric Association (APA), 2013). This condition leads to decreased development in the area of social skills in children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD).

Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) face challenges in understanding and perceiving the feelings and thoughts of others around them. Conversely, they also have difficulty realizing how their behavior can affect or change their surroundings. Although some children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) appear to lack interest in social interactions, in reality, some have a desire to interact socially, but require assistance from others to do so (Mansur, 2016). Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) show differences in communication skills, especially in understanding verbal communication that has a social function. They tend to take language literally and have difficulty in understanding the context in which language is used. Each child with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) has unique expressive and receptive communication characteristics (Margaretha, 2015).

Teachers who implement communication strategies tailored to the individual needs of autistic children can help them better understand instructions, respond to social situations, and develop the ability to interact with classmates. In addition, teachers' use of visual communication aids and clear role models can help autistic children understand expected social behaviors. Through an established relation between teachers and Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) students, supported by appropriate communication strategies, it has been proven to expand the scope of social skills of autistic children today. Using approaches that address individual needs and build inclusive communication, teachers can be key in strengthening autistic children's social skills in educational settings (Sihotang, 2018).

The action taken in this social skills problem is that the teacher applies or conducts interpersonal communication during learning activities with students. Interpersonal communication is a type of communication involving closer and more personal relations between individuals or small groups. Through the application of interpersonal communication implemented by teachers, it is hoped that students can have development in their social skills, especially in peer relations and academic abilities (De Vito, 2016). Social skills of autistic children can develop because teachers continue to apply habituation through interpersonal communication with students starting from small things so that children will understand by themselves. Teachers who effectively demonstrate openness, empathy, support, positive attitudes, and equal treatment to children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) can facilitate the process of developing social skills. Their persuasive actions can be well received by children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) (Pangestika & Lestari, 2017). The effect of teachers' interpersonal communication on the development of social skills of children with autism is also more effective if teachers can apply it in accordance with existing aspects such as openness, empathy, supportive attitudes, positive attitudes and equality. (Wahyuni, 2017). The role of interpersonal communication between teachers and students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is very important because it will create an extraordinary relation between the two. This makes the role of this communication crucial. Therefore, it is very important that there is interpersonal contact between teachers and students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). In addition, teachers have the ability to teach social skills to children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and help strengthen their social talents. As a result of this, the academic process can run smoothly at school (Ayasrah, 2022).

Empirically, the researcher sees that in the field when implementing the Teaching Assistance program in schools, there are significant differences in the development of social skills of students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) depending on the characteristics of the teachers they have. Teachers who are active, initiative, and creative in teaching and strive to build strong interpersonal communication and emotional closeness with students, have a positive impact on the development of social skills of ASD students. Students who were mentored by teachers with these characteristics tended to show improvements in peer relations, academic achievement and compliance levels. In contrast, students who have teachers who are less dedicated or who only carry out their professional responsibilities mechanically, without making efforts to build close emotional relations with students, experience barriers in their social skill development. Thus, it is important for teachers to pay attention to the role of interpersonal communication and emotional closeness in teaching ASD students to facilitate optimal social skills development.

2. Method

This study uses a type of qualitative research that involves an in-depth understanding of an event from the perspective of the observed. In this type of research, researchers explain the meaning of the event by recording important details based on the point of view of the event itself (Kurnia, 2007). Qualitative research methods involve researchers investigating the object of research in its natural context. In this type of research, the researcher becomes the main instrument used. Data collection is done using various techniques simultaneously (triangulation), while data analysis tends to move inductively. The main focus of the results of this study is more on the meaning contained in the data rather than trying to make generalizations (Sugiyono, 2017).

The research applied the case study method, which is an in-depth analysis of a particular subject or event. Yin (2006) describes a case study as a detailed investigation of the identity of an entity, be it a person, event, situation, or document, with the aim of understanding the relations that exist among the variables involved. The subjects of this study consisted of 4 students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and 3 classroom teachers at SLB C Autis Negeri Kedungkandang Kota Malang who are responsible for teaching classes of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) students. The other Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) students who were also part of the research subjects were S, D and AZ. Thus, the total research subjects consisted of seven individuals, including students and classroom teachers, who represented different aspects and levels in the teaching and learning of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) students in the special education setting. The data analysis technique in this study uses a model from Miles and Huberman (1984), qualitative data analysis involves continuous interactive activities until all data are met, with a continuous process of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification until all aspects of the data have been fully revealed (Sugiyono, 2017).

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Result

The findings reveal that teachers' interpersonal communication significantly impacts the social skill development of ASD students. By fostering openness and equality, teachers build trust and emotional bonds with their students. This approach enhances students' social skills, learning focus, and emotional stability. Additionally, teachers employ appropriate teaching methods to meet the unique needs of ASD students, creating a supportive and conducive learning environment. The establishment of a trusting relation is fundamental, as it allows students to feel secure and understood, which is crucial for their overall development.

Teachers integrate positive behaviors through routines such as greeting peers or teachers and providing concrete examples and repeated explanations to develop peer relation skills. These routines help ASD students understand social norms and expectations, making social interactions less daunting. Empathy from teachers enables adaptive learning tailored to students' needs, often utilizing visual aids to aid comprehension. Visual supports, such as pictures and diagrams, help students grasp complex concepts more easily and reinforce their learning. This tailored approach ensures that each student's learning style is accommodated, thereby enhancing their academic and social outcomes. Supportive attitudes and creative teaching methods foster a strong task orientation and academic ability in ASD students. Consistent routines, such as the salim culture, help students understand and follow school rules, promoting positive behavior. This consistency provides structure and predictability, which are vital for ASD students. Future research should further evaluate the effectiveness of these strategies and programs, delving deeper into their long-term impacts. Additionally, exploring additional factors that influence ASD students' learning success, such as family involvement and peer interactions, could provide a more comprehensive understanding of their educational needs and outcomes.

3.2 Discussion

Teachers in interacting with autistic students must have the ability to communicate effectively, both through words and body expressions (verbal and non-verbal), so that students can understand what is conveyed by the teacher and vice versa. This is important because each student has their own way of conveying messages, and teachers need to be sensitive to these differences (Huda et al., 2022). This is so that autistic students can develop social skills that are important for them. As the theory states that autistic children often experience barriers in the development of social and communication skills, therefore, interpersonal communication efforts made by teachers can be key to helping them overcome these barriers and achieve progress (White et al., 2006).

A. Interpersonal Communication Patterns of Teachers with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) Students at SLB C Autis Negeri Kedungkandang Kota Malang

1. Openness Aspect

Openness in interpersonal communication is the ability to honestly and uninhibitedly convey thoughts, feelings, and views. This openness plays an important role in forming trust and deepening relations between individuals. Openness can also facilitate better understanding between individuals (De Vito, 2016). It is known through the observations made that the openness carried out by the subject is able to increase mutual trust and deep emotional bonds with autistic students. This can be seen when the subject is teaching in the

classroom, the subject shows close communication with ASD students as a whole without exception, even though in the classroom there are students with other barriers, it is not an obstacle for the subject to build two-way communication with ASD students.

2. Empathy Aspect

Consistently showing empathy is an important aspect of communicating with ASD students. It is the ability to understand and perceive another person's feelings, views or experiences from their own perspective. Empathy allows individuals to respond more appropriately and understand the needs and feelings of others. Interpersonal communication carried out by teachers is a step in fostering effective interactions with ASD students (Fajrin & Rustini, 2022). As applied by the subject, teachers put themselves in the position of ASD students. So that teachers can understand each student's learning needs and characteristics. Teachers can also arrange adaptive learning and adapt to the abilities of ASD students. This is so that students can learn and understand the material more easily.

3. Positive Attitude Aspect

The subject shows a positive attitude towards ASD students by providing special attention and affection, as well as giving rewards when students show positive behavior. Subject IA also instilled positive habits in social interaction by placing reinforcement on simple actions such as greeting others politely in the school environment. Consistently, the subject gives ASD students a direct example of the importance of good social interaction. Besides teaching positive values through words, the subject also applies them in real actions. This helps build a positive relation between the subject and the ASD student, and strengthens the student's social development within the school environment. Teachers can be confident that during the learning process, ASD students will gain a deeper understanding. When children perform activities that are often modeled by teachers in terms of developing social skills of ASD children, teachers show positive attitudes by providing positive reinforcement in the form of praise and thanks to students (Ayasrah, 2022).

4. Supportive Attitude Aspect

Supportive attitudes involve mutual support between the message sender and the message receiver, where both respect, appreciate, motivate, and provide constructive feedback to each other. An individual's supportive attitude greatly influences their behavior when communicating and conveying messages to others (Sihotang, 2018). As well as the results of observations that show teachers supportively support learning and facilitate ASD students, this is done in the form of providing ASD students with group learning activities so that ASD students have the opportunity to interact with their peers. For example, at the beginning of the semester the teacher held introductory activities with a circular seating position so that all students could face each other and there was interaction and communication with each other. Although ASD students have not fully developed to be able to communicate verbally, the teacher painstakingly accompanies and helps ASD students to be able to express themselves.

5. Equality Aspect

Interpersonal communication will be more effective if the atmosphere created is an atmosphere of equality, where there is a tacit recognition that both parties have the same value

and worth, and that each party has an important contribution to make (Fajrin & Rustini, 2022). In this case, the teacher positions himself as a friend with ASD students, thus creating teachers who are more skilled in dealing with ASD students because they can recognize the various characteristics of students. In addition, ASD students also feel comfortable undergoing learning activities with teachers who are able to understand them. Teachers become more skillful in dealing with ASD students' situations in the classroom, helping them focus on learning, maintaining mood stability, and applying appropriate learning methods.

B. Social Skills Development of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) Students at SLB C Autis Negeri Kedungkandang Kota Malang

1. Peer Relation

Peer relations are reflected through positive actions towards fellow friends, such as giving praise or advice, offering help, and playing together (Merrel & Gimpel, 1998). In this aspect, although not fully developed, as a student with ASD, the subject has shown positive relations with his peers. For example, ASD students show an open attitude and accept help from their classmates sincerely. After receiving help from peers in doing the task, the ASD student warmly said the word thank you. This reflects significant progress in the ASD student's social interaction with his peers at school. Not only during learning time, even during break time ASD students show an attitude of wanting to share their cake or food with their peers. This simple act not only illustrates generosity, but also creates a deeper social bond between ASD students and their classmates or peers. In the school environment, ASD students also have the opportunity to have more social interaction and communication with other individuals such as teachers and their peers. These interactions can boost autistic children's self-esteem, helping them overcome shyness or lack of confidence related to their disability (Elviana, 2017).

2. Academic

Academic ability, reflected in one's ability to complete tasks independently, complete individual work well, and follow teacher directions appropriately (Merrel & Gimpel, 1998). It reflects an individual's ability to understand and apply subject matter independently, demonstrate responsibility in completing tasks effectively, and the ability to follow instructions accurately from teachers or instructors. These academic abilities are important in achieving academic success and holistic personal development. ASD students' academic abilities stand out in their adaptability in the school environment, with the ability to follow instructions as well as compliance, showing a strong orientation towards tasks, and earnestness in completing each task. For example, when the teacher asks the student to cut out the worksheet and paste it on the notebook, the ASD student can perform the task without the need for repeated instructions from the teacher. Interpersonal communication between teachers and students has a significant positive impact on students' learning behavior, which in turn affects their learning achievement. Therefore, to improve students' learning achievement, it is important to improve their learning behavior by strengthening interpersonal communication between teachers and students (Fathurrohman, 2018).

3. Compliance

The compliance aspect of social skills includes the ability to follow instructions appropriately from authorities or others according to the context (Tita, 2015). It also includes

respect for the rules, norms and regulations that have been established by the authority or social environment. In addition, consistency and accuracy in completing assigned tasks or responsibilities within a set time are also part of compliance in the context of social skills. These three aspects are important foundations in shaping effective compliance and social skills in interacting with others and in various social situations. ASD students' compliance in completing assignments on time reflects their responsibility towards school work, also showing consistency and commitment in complying with deadlines set by teachers. In addition, ASD students show respect and courtesy towards the school environment by complying with the various rules that have been set, such as entering class on time, respecting teachers, and following the break schedule. This reflects a responsible personality and respect for social norms in the school environment. Meanwhile, ASD students also show good compliance with school rules, which are taught by teachers through habituation and direct examples to students such as starting school by lining up in front of the class first, reading prayers, and participating in literacy activities. This has a positive impact especially on autistic students, who need habituation and concrete examples to understand and absorb the material well.

C. The Role of Teacher's Interpersonal Communication on the Development of Social Skills of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) Students at SLB C Autis Negeri Kedungkandang Kota Malang

1. The Role of Equality and Openness in Teachers' Interpersonal Communication on the Development of Peer Relation Skills of Students with ASD

One of the main roles of teachers is as educators. In carrying out this role, teachers are expected to be a source of inspiration and maintain discipline in the classroom. As a source of inspiration, teachers provide motivation to all students regardless of their intellectual ability or level of motivation to learn. Teachers are also expected to make every student feel comfortable interacting with them, both inside and outside the classroom. Of course, this requires a high degree of flexibility, where teachers' attention and actions must be tailored to the individual needs of each student (Arianti, 2019). In an effort to facilitate the development of social skills of students on the autistic spectrum (ASD), especially in the aspect of relations with peers, teachers play an important role in forming a safe and trusting relation between teachers and students. This is done by applying openness in interpersonal communication, which aims to build a strong emotional bond between the two. Teachers also emphasize the aspect of equality in this relation, by positioning themselves as friends to students, which aims to help students deal with learning situations, maintain focus, emotional stability, and mood, and apply learning methods that are in accordance with the characteristics and needs of ASD students.

In addition, teachers also integrate positive attitudes in learning, by providing concrete examples and habituation to ASD students. For example, students are taught to greet friends or teachers when they meet at school, which is necessary because ASD students tend to need repeated explanations and concrete examples to understand and apply these positive attitudes.

The use of repetitive habituation methods helps autistic children to strengthen social skills and daily living skills. By doing repetitive exercises, autistic children can internalize and practice new skills consistently (Azizi & Afrinaldi, 2023). For example, subject A, an ASD student, showed positive development by accepting help from his peers in group activities, as well as being able to say thank you for the help. Similarly, subjects S, D and AZ voluntarily

shared cookies with their friends during recess, showing close and close interaction between them. Interaction between ASD students and their peers is also seen in various activities at school, such as when they hold hands to get to class or mumble the same tune during gymnastics together. All of this shows the importance of the teacher's role in forming positive and supportive relations between ASD students and their peers and in developing their social skills.

2. The Role of Empathy and Supportive Attitudes in Teachers' Interpersonal Communication on the Development of Academic Social Skills of ASD Students

Compassion-centered education encourages individuals to develop empathy towards autistic children and take responsibility for guiding them towards independence, social skill development and good morality with dedication (Nahampun, 2017). Teachers must have a high level of empathy in order to understand the learning needs of each student, including students on the autistic spectrum (ASD). This allows teachers to put themselves in the shoes of ASD students and design adaptive learning according to their needs, abilities and characteristics. Teachers IA and IE, for example, always use teaching methods and materials tailored to the needs of ASD students, while creating a fun learning atmosphere. They also ensure that students' moods are stable before starting learning, even using games to motivate students if needed. ASD children often have difficulty in understanding and using verbal language well. Visual media can be an effective alternative for conveying information and instructions, thus helping autistic children to understand the subject matter (Wicaksana et al., 2021). Therefore, teachers also use learning methods that facilitate ASD students' understanding, such as the use of visual media support. Visual media is very important for ASD students because it helps them understand the material better. Teachers also actively create supportive and fun learning, including activities such as doing tasks, singing, watching interactive learning videos, and so on. Thus, they succeed in fostering academic orientation in ASD students, as seen in the development of subject A who is able to understand and complete tasks well, and actively seek help from teachers when needed. However, there are also teachers like PB who still use conventional teaching methods without using visual support. This has an impact on the development of academic social skills of subjects S, D, and AZ, who tend to be passive and less focused during learning. Therefore, it is important for teachers to better understand students' learning needs and characteristics in order to develop learning methods that suit them.

3. The Role of Postitive Attitudes in Teachers' Interpersonal Communication on the Development of Social Skills Compliance of Students with ASD

Teachers play an important role in integrating positive attitudes through habituation activities to teach school rules to ASD students. For example, teachers familiarize students to do greetings when meeting teachers in the school environment. At first, subject A did not understand the concept of greetings like his peers, but with habituation by the teacher and examples of positive attitudes given, subject A began to show progress. The application of habituation to create positive behavior is very important for autistic children because they tend to respond well to consistency, structure and repetition in their learning environment (Halimatussa'diah & Napitupulu, 2023). Now, subject A is used to greeting all teachers at school, not just the homeroom teacher. In addition, subject A also understands the rules about break time, such as tidying up his food and preparing to continue the lesson after the break bell rings. The same thing also happened to subjects S, D and AZ, where teachers accustomed them

to obeying school rules with various direct examples, such as lining up in front of the class before the lesson starts, greeting the homeroom teacher, and engaging in literacy activities before the lesson starts. From this, it can be concluded that through positive and consistent learning, teachers can shape the desired positive behavior of ASD students through habituation.

4. Conclusion

Effective interpersonal communication between teachers and autistic students is essential for the development of their social skills. Teachers should be able to communicate both verbally and non-verbally, showing openness, empathy, positive attitude, supportive, and equality in relations with students. Openness and compassion from teachers can form a strong emotional bond, make students feel comfortable and trust the teacher, and help them overcome barriers in social development and communication. The development of autistic students' social skills is influenced by positive peer relations, academic ability, and compliance with school rules. Good interpersonal relations between teachers and students also play an important role in shaping the learning behavior and academic achievement of autistic students. Therefore, strengthening interpersonal communication between teachers and students is key in improving their learning achievement. Teachers use a variety of verbal and non-verbal communication strategies, such as visual support, body cues and physical contact, to support the development of autistic students' social skills. Visual support and habituation of good behaviors help students overcome limitations in verbal comprehension and expression, and form positive and routine habits. An approach that emphasizes modeling and habituation helps autistic students gradually develop their social and communication skills.

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