

The Friendship Circle Phenomenon: A Case Study at MTs Surya Buana Malang

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Abstract

Friendships play a crucial role in shaping the well-being and development of adolescents. Nowadays, friendships often form within groups known as friendship circles. However, these friendship circles can have both positive and negative effects. At MTs Surya Buana, several issues have arisen due to these circles, such as self-isolation, lack of self-confidence, feelings of alienation, and withdrawal from social interaction. This study aims to investigate additional aspects of friendship circles, such as social skills, concern, and empathy experienced by individuals both inside and outside the circles. The research method used is qualitative with a case study approach, involving students and educators from MTs Surya Buana. Data were collected through unstructured interviews with three informants selected based on the criteria of the research subjects. The results show that students within friendship circles still exhibit low levels of social skills, concern, and empathy, indicating the need for more effective and efficient efforts to improve these areas.

Keywords: friendship circles; social skills; concern; empath

1. Introduction

Friendship plays an important role in shaping the well-being and development of adolescents. Friendship is defined as a relationship between two or more people based on the desire for mutual support, empathy, sympathy, honesty, and understanding (Khotimah & Wahyuningsih, 2020). According to Soekoto, Muttaqin, & Tondok (2020), adolescent social relationships begin when they join peer groups, providing opportunities to learn how to interact, adapt to the environment, control behavior, and develop their skills. Peer groups today are better known as friendship circles, which are groups of close friends within a limited social circle. Friendship circles are formed based on shared characteristics such as age, gender, social status, interests, and activities. They also have internal rules that must be followed by group members (Suratman, Munir, & Salamah, 2014). The presence of these friendship circles helps adolescents improve their communication and individual social interaction skills.

However, it is undeniable that friendship circles have both positive and negative impacts. On the positive side, friendship circles can enhance social skills, self-confidence, and leadership abilities, while also serving as a place to share experiences (Astuti, 2024). On the negative side, friendship circles can limit interactions with the outside world, focusing attention only on the circle's environment (Muthohharoh, et al., 2024) and psychologically causing anxiety about rejection or exclusion (Amodeo, 2014). Individuals within friendship circles tend to follow the norms within the circle, including behavior that excludes outsiders, even if only as passive observers (Aminah & Nurdianah, 2019). According to Aminah & Nurdianah (2019), solidarity and interaction within friendship circles can solidify group members' identities. Therefore, the phenomenon of friendship circles has become a concern in the field of education.

Schools play a role as educational environments that shape students' characters, particularly in terms of interaction and communication among peers. Interaction with others is a basic human need, including during adolescence, when they seek self-identity and learn to adapt to their surroundings (Benner in Fikrie, Hermina, & Ariani, 2021). Socializing in school plays a key role in this process, forming close relationships among students and helping them interact with the environment (Dongoran & Boiliu, 2020). At MTs Surya Buana, several students have formed friendship circles to gain support and motivation in facing school life. According to Buber in Liliweri (2015), human interaction can occur at three levels: I-It (treating individuals as objects), I-You (ordinary interaction), and I-Thou (recognizing individuals as important persons). Although communication among students in school appears to be at the I-Thou level, those not included in friendship circles may experience interaction at the I-You or even I-It level, where they are seen as objects within the friendship circle. This can make them more likely to be quiet, withdrawn, and lack self-confidence.

According to a previous study by Rachim, Yuliejatiningsih, & Wahyuni (2023), titled "The Phenomenon of Friendship Circles and Bullying Behavior in Schools," it was found that 80% of female students at SMK Negeri 6 Semarang were part of friendship circles. The study indicated that friendship circles could influence bullying behavior in schools. On the other hand, a study by Novita, Hasmawati, & Fitri (2023) titled "Analysis of Communication in Student Friendship Circles and Changes" found that friendship circles can shape individual self-concept regarding changes in attitudes and behaviors within their circle. This is due to the trust among friendship circle members. However, another study by Muthohharoh, Azizah, Holihah, & Anggraini (2024) titled "The Impact of Friendship Circles on Student Learning Processes" showed that friendship circles could negatively impact those not included, leading to feelings of alienation in the circle's environment.

From previous research, it is evident that there has been no specific focus on social skills, concern, and empathy within the context of friendship circles among junior high school students. Therefore, this study aims to explore these aspects in friendship circles, whether individuals are inside or outside the circle. It is hoped that this research will provide new insights in the field of guidance and counseling, particularly in understanding the phenomenon of friendship circles experienced by students and significantly contributing to developing supportive strategies for junior high school/MTs students in strengthening social skills, concern, and empathy.

2. Method

This study employs a qualitative approach, chosen because its aim is to describe and analyze the phenomenon of friendship circles, including social activities, attitudes, beliefs, perceptions, and thoughts of individuals or groups (Darwis, et al., 2020). Qualitative methods, as described by Mehta (2020), are used to collect non-numeric data to understand beliefs, experiences, attitudes, behaviors, and interactions in depth. The study does not aim to produce numeric data but rather descriptive data that is interpreted through coding, transcription, and analysis using rigorous and systematic themes. This research also utilizes a case study approach, which according to Nur'aini (2020), is used to investigate contemporary phenomena in real-life contexts supported by various types of evidence such as documentation, interviews, and observations. The study was conducted at MTs Surya Buana in Malang City during participation in the Free Campus Program with specific research subjects: a) MTs Surya Buana students, b) students inside and outside friendship circles, c) educators and educational staff at MTs Surya Buana, and d) those willing to participate as research subjects. Key characteristics of the case

study in this research include focusing on a single case studied in real-life contexts, explaining causal relationships, and relying on various sources of evidence (Groat & Wang, 2013). According to Yin (in Nur'aini, 2020), the case study method is suitable as a research strategy that answers "how" and "why" questions.

In employing the case study approach for this research, the steps involved are: 1) selecting the research theme or topic, 2) reviewing relevant theories, 3) formulating the research problem to be investigated, 4) collecting data through interviews, observations, and documentation, 5) processing and analyzing the collected data, and 6) drawing conclusions and preparing the research report (Suwartono, 2014). The main advantage of using a case study is its ability to provide in-depth and accurate understanding of a case, allowing research findings to be interpreted in a broader context or to solve specific problems, thus achieving more precise and comprehensive results (Hidayat, 2019).

Data analysis is a process of giving meaning to data by organizing, sorting, grouping, coding or labeling, and categorizing it into specific parts to obtain findings related to the formulated research problem (Assyakurrohim, et al., 2023). The analysis technique used in this research is the Miles and Huberman model, which includes data reduction, data display, and drawing conclusions or verification (Saleh, 2017).

1. **Data Reduction** Data reduction involves the process of selecting relevant and meaningful data, focusing on simplification, abstraction, and transformation of "raw" data from field notes. During this process, only findings relevant to the research problem are retained, while data unrelated to the research issue are discarded.
2. **Data Display** Data display is the process of creating reports on the results of data and information discovered during the data collection process. The purpose of data display is to integrate information to depict the existing situation. Data display can take the form of written text or words, graphs, pictures, and tables.
3. **Drawing Conclusions/Verification** Drawing conclusions in this research is derived from data obtained through interviews, observations, and documentation during the research process. After sufficient data has been collected, preliminary conclusions are drawn, and once data is fully complete, final conclusions are made. These conclusions are also verified through the analyst's reflection during the writing process.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Result

Based on interviews conducted by the researcher regarding friendship circles at MTs Surya Buana, particularly in the context of social skills within and outside these circles, the interviews involved several subjects: AS, SH, and HDY. These interviews describe the interaction and communication conditions between individuals inside the friendship circles and those outside them.

According to AS, "The existence of circles is due to the frequency of interactions among each other. Typically, interactions within the same circle are very close because they feel compatible. Whereas, interactions outside the circle can sometimes be awkward due to boundaries" (ASBK280524). In contrast, SH further explained, "Communication is still good, but only a few are willing to talk to me, and not every day, because sometimes I'm afraid that if I want to talk to those in a circle, I won't be accepted" (SHBK300524). From the interviews, HDY conveyed the conditions in class and at school succinctly, stating, "Interactions and communications are not seen as good, and there have been problems last year related to these circles. Even the student affairs dealt with it. Sometimes those who are not in the circle still feel

awkward in their communication, and they sometimes choose friends if the teacher didn't form a group" (HDYPUS290524).

Alongside these interactions and communications, there are undoubtedly driving factors for forming friendship circles as a support to maintain life and feel comfortable at school. This is echoed by AS's statement, "Certainly, it's the frequency, because if the frequencies don't match, the conversations won't connect" (ASBK280524). HDY similarly stated, "They form circles with one mind, one topic, yes, basically one frequency. So, they feel comfortable because they are compatible" (HDYPUS290524). Although having friendship circles can lead to problems, whether minor or major. AS mentioned problems within and outside friendship circles, "The problem is differences in opinions, sometimes being stubborn. When that happens, no one backs down. Usually, they will isolate themselves first. In my class, the problems are still at a low level and can be resolved" (ASBK280524). Similarly, SH stated, "I'm not in the circle, so I only know from the outside. Once I had a problem with a kid from the circle, but he still talked to me. The issue was just a misunderstanding, but because of that, he didn't want to talk to me until now" (SHBK300524).

Furthermore, regarding the concern and empathy shown by friendship circles towards those outside them, AS said, "Hmm, if they're still concerned and empathetic. In class, if someone is sick, they ask and take them to the health center. But if someone gets teased, everyone just stays quiet, afraid to intervene" (ASBK280524). Similarly, SH mentioned, "It depends, but if there's a group assignment, no one cares about me. In class, I'm always alone because the others join their circles. Once, I was teased until my chair fell, but no one helped and they laughed at me" (SHBK300524). HDY supported these statements by saying, "Thankfully, concern and empathy are still there in individuals, but they easily mock if it doesn't meet their desires" (HDY290524).

Based on the interviews highlighting social skill conditions in interaction and communication within friendship circles among several research subjects, it is concluded that friendship circles influence individuals' actions and words in shaping their characters and personalities. This can cause discomfort for individuals outside the circle to interact with those inside, due to specific limitations and criteria for entering these circles. Moreover, individuals outside the circle tend to lack confidence and isolate themselves. Meanwhile, concern and empathy within these friendship circles are only directed towards friends within their circle, while outsiders are often seen as bystanders or ignored.

3.2 Discussion

Social Skills in Interaction and Communication

Social skills are the abilities that enable an individual to interact socially with others in ways that are acceptable to society and beneficial to both the individual and others (Annisa & Supriatna, 2022). These skills are essential in daily life for interacting and building interpersonal relationships. Social skills encompass self-control, adaptation, tolerance, communication, and participation in community life (Ulum, 2018). Some aspects of social skills include the ability to communicate, share, cooperate, and participate in community groups. These skills are not acquired naturally; instead, they are learned through interactions with parents, peers, and the surrounding environment (Bali, 2017).

Social skills play a significant role in communication, linking closely with various aspects. For instance, research indicates a positive relationship between peer social interaction and social acceptance. The higher the peer social interaction, the higher the social acceptance among students (Andangjati et al., 2021). Other studies also suggest that social

skills and self-control are crucial for peer acceptance. Together, social skills and self-control relate to peer acceptance, subsequently affecting students' social lives (Jannah et al., 2022). An individual who spends more time with peers within a group will inadvertently form bonds of friendship with those individuals. Peer social interaction is defined as the relationship between individuals in a group where members are of the same age and maturity level, characterized by mutual interest, attention, and influence (Hasti & Nurfahanah, 2013).

As adolescents in middle school/junior high school (SMP/MTs) adjust to their environment, they begin to recognize and understand social norms different from those at home (Elbrahim, 2017). Adolescents live in diverse environments, not limited to friendships with same-age peers. Modern adolescent life involves groups of peers experiencing acceptance or rejection. Peer acceptance and rejection influence adolescents' social development. Peer acceptance can enhance an individual's ability to interact, participate, and learn about others, especially peers. Conversely, peer rejection narrows the scope of peer interactions, leading to introversion, low self-confidence, and difficulty collaborating with others (Jannah et al., 2022).

Having many friends within a friendship circle can add quality and value to one's life. It's essential to recognize that, besides positive influences, friends or groups can also have negative impacts (Soemarsosno & Tutiasri, 2023). The positive impacts of friendships are evident as individual behaviors change within their friendship circle compared to outside it (Novita et al., 2023). Within the circle, individuals tend to be more confident due to equality, but outside the circle, their behavior changes; those who were expressive within the circle become more reserved and withdrawn. Nowadays, friendship circles are vital sources of intimacy, as individuals rely more on their friends (Yau & Reich, 2018).

Empathy and Concern

Humans are inherently social beings who cannot separate their lives from others. Every individual has interests that intersect with others, leading to interactions, especially in friendships (Isnaini & Ningsih, 2021). Through interaction, people learn to respect, care for, and consider various surrounding circumstances. Caring can be defined as actions or activities that impact others' interests or specific situations, such as behavior demonstrating affection, interest, or empathy (Jumini, Ali, & Miranda, 2015). Social caring behavior includes efforts to help those in need (Aditia, Hamiyati, & Rusilanti, 2016). Social caring can be expressed through sharing, helping, and collaborating with friends or people around (Retnasari et al., 2023). In Indonesia's character education, fundamental social caring values like respect, empathy, willingness to apologize, and helping others are emphasized (Aini et al., 2023).

Individuals who exhibit social caring can adapt to their environment, showing positive traits such as sympathy, concern for others' difficulties, and alleviating others' suffering. Friendship circles play a role in shaping various characteristics, particularly social caring, which can be fostered through habits like helping friends in need, offering solutions, especially in academic tasks, and even personal problems (Desiani, 2020). Empathy is crucial for building good relationships, especially with peers. It teaches us how to behave in our environment, understand peers, and assist friends facing problems (Liza, 2020).

Empathy is the ability to understand others' feelings and problems, consider their perspectives, and appreciate differences (Yaqin, 2021). Empathetic individuals are sensitive to their surroundings, both in interactions with peers and in responding to various events. There is a correlation between empathy and friendship quality, leaning towards positive relationships (Sovitriana et al., 2021). Successful friendships are influenced by social

interactions with peers when linked to empathy. Each individual exhibits different levels of empathy, which are regulated by emotional control in responding to others in need (Gordon, 2014). Often, adolescents misunderstand conflicts in friendships and resolve them incorrectly; thus, empathy can help mitigate conflicts.

4. Conclusion

Based on the data analysis presented, the following conclusions can be drawn for the student friendship groups, the social skills observed indicate a lack of effective communication both within and outside the circle. This can lead to individuals feeling less confident and isolated. Additionally, mismatched or harsh speech can result from this lack of cohesion. And the concern and empathy within student friendship circles are primarily directed toward those within their circle. Those outside the circle are often ignored or merely observed without intervention. Furthermore, individuals outside the circle who struggle and seek help do not receive support from those within the circle. Based on the conclusions provided by the respondents, it can be inferred that students within friendship circles still exhibit low levels of social skills, concern, and empathy. Therefore, more effective and efficient efforts are needed to improve these areas.

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