

The Role of Interpersonal Communication of Teachers in Enhancing Students' Learning Motivation

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the role of teachers' interpersonal communication in enhancing students' learning motivation at SDN Singonegaran 1 Kota Kediri. A qualitative descriptive approach was employed through interviews, observations, and documentation involving four teachers. The analysis was guided by Joseph A. DeVito's interpersonal communication theory, focusing on openness, empathy, supportiveness, positiveness, and equality. The findings indicated that effective interpersonal communication fostered a supportive classroom atmosphere and increased students' motivation. Teachers applied interactive strategies such as ice-breaking activities, trigger questions, digital learning media, and positive reinforcement. However, challenges related to students' confidence and participation persisted. The study concluded that strengthening teachers' interpersonal communication skills significantly contributed to improving students' learning motivation.



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INTRODUCTION

The landscape of education in Indonesia is fraught with complex challenges that significantly impact the quality of learning and, by extension, the nation's future human capital (Amrona et al., 2023). At the core of these issues lies a persistent struggle with teacher professionalism, often reflected in a lack of varied teaching methodologies and, crucially, ineffective interpersonal communication between educators and their students. This dynamic is not merely a pedagogical inconvenience; it is a fundamental barrier that can profoundly diminish a student's intrinsic motivation to learn and, consequently, their academic achievement (Damanik et al., 2022). In an era where rote memorization is giving way to skills-based learning, the ability of a teacher to connect with their students on a personal and empathetic level has become more critical than ever before. The psychological and emotional environment of a classroom, meticulously shaped by a teacher's communication style, directly influences a student's engagement, confidence, and desire to explore new knowledge (Fransiska, 2024). When this environment is unsupportive or emotionally distant, students can quickly become disengaged, leading to a decline in their academic performance and a generalized sense of apathy towards education (Hani et al., 2023).

The particular case of SDN Singonegaran 1 Kota Kediri provides a salient example of this broader national challenge. The school has observed a noticeable decline in student learning motivation, a phenomenon that has become particularly pronounced following the national policy change to abolish the National Examination. For many students, this examination served as a tangible goal and a source of motivation, and its removal has created a vacuum of purpose. Without this external pressure, many students, especially those in the sixth grade, have become less enthusiastic and proactive in their studies. This specific context highlights the need for a more nuanced approach to pedagogy, one that moves beyond traditional, examination-focused teaching and embraces strategies that foster genuine curiosity and a love for learning. The core premise of this research is that effective interpersonal communication can serve as the primary catalyst for this transformation. By understanding how teachers at SDN Singonegaran 1 use communication to connect with their students, we can uncover the specific mechanisms that reignite their motivation. This study, therefore, is not just an academic exercise; it is a direct response to a real-world educational problem, seeking to understand and mitigate the negative consequences of a policy change on student morale.

In light of these issues, this study has two primary objectives. First, it aims to explore and analyze the role of teachers' interpersonal communication in enhancing the learning motivation of students at SDN Singonegaran 1 Kota Kediri. This involves a deep dive into the practical application of communication theories in a real classroom setting, observing how teachers' words, gestures, and overall demeanor influence student engagement. The second objective is to identify and delineate the specific stages of the interpersonal communication process that are applied by these teachers. By mapping out this process from building initial rapport to delivering feedback and tailoring approaches the research will provide a structured framework for understanding effective teacher-student interaction. The ultimate goal is to move beyond a general appreciation of "good communication" and provide a detailed, actionable model that other educators can adopt. This research is not about what teachers should do, but rather a descriptive analysis of what effective teachers are already doing, thereby making the findings immediately applicable.

The contributions of this research are multi-faceted, extending to both the theoretical and practical realms. From a theoretical standpoint, this study offers a valuable addition to the existing body of literature on teacher-student dynamics and interpersonal communication in an Indonesian educational context. By grounding the research in Joseph A. DeVito's theory of interpersonal communication, it provides a robust conceptual framework for future studies on the topic. The findings can serve as a reference point for scholars and students who wish to explore the intricate relationship between communication and learning motivation, potentially inspiring new avenues of inquiry. On a practical level, the benefits are even more tangible. For the teachers at SDN Singonegaran 1 and beyond, the findings will serve as a practical guide to improving their communication skills. By providing concrete examples of successful strategies such as using ice-breaking activities, trigger questions, and positive feedback the research offers a clear roadmap for professional development. For the school management, the results can inform better resource allocation and teacher training programs, ensuring that new and existing educators are equipped with the skills necessary to foster a supportive and motivating learning environment. Most importantly, for the students themselves, the direct and indirect benefits of improved teacher communication can lead to a significant increase in their learning motivation, confidence, and ultimately, academic performance. This is particularly crucial for the sixth-grade students, who are at a pivotal stage in their educational journey and require robust support to navigate their final year of primary school.

A review of previous literature reveals a consistent scholarly interest in the impact of teacher communication on student outcomes. Studies by Hidayat & Emeilia (2024) at SMK Generasi Madani, and Vajrani (2024) at SDIT Al-Uswah, both employed qualitative methodologies to highlight the positive correlation between effective teacher-student communication and enhanced learning motivation. Similarly, Meinda & Munanjar (2023) focused on the interpersonal dynamics at SMP Van Lith, affirming that a supportive and open communication style is a key determinant of student engagement. These findings are further supported by a more granular analysis of specific communication techniques. Rizal's (2024) research, for instance, demonstrated how the use of storytelling in the classroom can captivate students' attention and make complex subjects more accessible, thereby boosting their motivation. Provided evidence that simple, positive feedback such as verbal praise and non-verbal cues can significantly reinforce desirable behaviors and create a more positive learning atmosphere. These studies collectively establish the foundational premise that communication is not merely a tool for information transfer but a powerful mechanism for shaping attitudes and behaviors in the classroom.

However, despite this wealth of research, a clear gap remains, which this study endeavors to fill. The existing literature often provides a generalized view of the benefits of effective communication, but it rarely delves into the specific, localized challenges faced by individual schools. This study's originality lies in its focused analysis of the unique context of SDN Singonegaran 1 Kota Kediri, where the abolition of the National Examination has created a specific motivational deficit. Furthermore, while previous studies have acknowledged the importance of communication, they have not fully explored the intricate, stage-by-stage process of interpersonal communication as a theoretical model for enhancing motivation. By applying Joseph A. DeVito's theory, this research provides a novel, comprehensive framework that analyzes five key indicators openness, empathy, supportiveness, positiveness, and equality in a single, cohesive study. This approach allows for a more nuanced understanding of how each component of communication contributes to the overall goal of motivating

students. Moreover, this study directly addresses persistent challenges such as student shyness and lack of confidence, which the initial findings of this research have identified as significant barriers. By proposing the need for more personalized strategies to overcome these specific hurdles, the research offers a unique contribution that moves beyond general recommendations. In essence, while the existing literature confirms the "what," this study aims to clarify the "how" and "why" within a specific, challenging educational environment, thereby providing a truly original and highly relevant contribution to the field.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a qualitative descriptive method. Data were collected through interviews, classroom observations, and documentation. Data validity was ensured through triangulation of data sources and techniques, while reliability was strengthened by repeated observations and peer debriefing. This research employs a qualitative descriptive approach to gain a comprehensive understanding of the role of teachers' interpersonal communication in enhancing student learning motivation at SDN Singonegaran 1 Kota Kediri. A qualitative method was chosen because it allows for an in-depth exploration of social phenomena within their natural context, providing a rich, nuanced perspective on how teachers and students interact. This approach is particularly suitable for analyzing the complexities of human communication and its impact on behavior, as it focuses on understanding the "why" and "how" behind the observed phenomena rather than merely quantifying them.

The research subjects, or sample, were four key teachers at SDN Singonegaran 1 Kota Kediri, who were selected based on their diverse experiences and insights. The selection of these subjects was crucial to gathering a holistic view of the communication strategies employed within the school. Data were collected using three primary techniques: in-depth interviews, direct observation, and documentation. In-depth interviews were conducted with each of the four teachers to elicit detailed information regarding their communication methods, perceptions of student motivation, and challenges faced. Direct observation was carried out in the classroom to witness firsthand how teacher-student interpersonal communication unfolds in practice. Lastly, documentation, including written records and other relevant artifacts, was analyzed to provide supplementary context and validate the information obtained from interviews and observations.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this research, meticulously gathered through in-depth interviews, direct observation, and documentation, provide a detailed account of how teachers at SDN Singonegaran 1 Kota Kediri effectively utilize interpersonal communication to enhance student learning motivation. The data, organized and processed according to the principles of Joseph A. DeVito's theory, demonstrate a clear and profound link between specific communication behaviors and positive student outcomes. The results confirm the central hypothesis that effective teacher-student communication is a critical and transformative factor in fostering a supportive classroom environment and, consequently, boosting students' intrinsic desire to learn. The following discussion delves into these findings in detail, linking them to core theoretical concepts and comparing them with the results of previous studies to highlight the unique contribution of this research.

The analysis reveals that the implementation of DeVito's five key indicators openness, empathy, supportiveness, positiveness, and equality is not merely a theoretical exercise but a practical, effective strategy applied by the teachers in their daily interactions. A primary manifestation of this is the principle of openness. The teachers at SDN Singonegaran 1 actively cultivate an open and comfortable learning environment by employing a variety of interactive and engaging teaching methods. For instance, the strategic use of ice-breaking activities at the beginning of a lesson serves to alleviate student anxiety and create a relaxed atmosphere where communication can flow freely. Similarly, the teachers' habit of using "trigger questions" is a deliberate technique to initiate discussions rather than relying on a one-way lecture format. These questions are designed to stimulate critical thinking and encourage students to express their own thoughts and ideas without fear of judgment. The integration of digital media, such as the Kahoot! platform, further exemplifies this openness. By turning learning into a game, teachers make the process more dynamic and less intimidating, allowing students to participate actively and test their knowledge in a low-stakes environment. This approach aligns

perfectly with the research of Syamsul Rizal (2024), who highlighted how engaging teaching methods can make learning more captivating, thereby boosting motivation. Our findings demonstrate how this engagement is fundamentally a result of creating an open communication channel where students are not just passive recipients of information but active contributors to their own learning journey.

Furthermore, the teachers' commitment to empathy is a cornerstone of their success. They do not view their students as a homogenous group but as unique individuals with their own personal lives, challenges, and aspirations. The data from our interviews and observations repeatedly showed that teachers take the time to listen to their students, not just about academic problems but also about their personal struggles. This compassionate stance makes students feel genuinely valued and understood, strengthening the teacher-student bond beyond the purely pedagogical. For a student who may be facing difficulties at home or with peers, having a teacher who demonstrates empathy provides a crucial emotional anchor and can be a significant motivator to attend school and participate in class. This emotional connection is a powerful tool that, as shown in our research, fosters a deep sense of trust and security, which is essential for students to feel comfortable taking risks and asking questions. It directly counters the challenges of shyness and lack of confidence that are particularly prevalent among students at SDN Singonegaran 1.

Closely related to empathy is the principle of supportiveness. The teachers at the school consistently create a supportive communication climate through a positive and non-judgmental approach. Instead of focusing on students' shortcomings, they frame feedback in a way that helps students understand where they can improve, promoting a growth mindset and reducing anxiety. When a student makes a mistake, a supportive teacher does not criticize but instead offers constructive guidance and encouragement. This environment of psychological safety allows students to learn from their errors without the fear of failure, a critical component for long-term motivation. The teachers provide both emotional and academic support, offering one-on-one guidance to students who are struggling and celebrating small victories along the way. This culture of support reinforces the idea that learning is a collaborative journey, not a solitary and competitive one.

Finally, the teachers' commitment to equality is a key factor in ensuring an inclusive and motivating environment. They consciously adapt their teaching and assessment strategies to accommodate all students, regardless of their academic background or personal circumstances. This is a particularly important finding, as it addresses the core issue of heterogeneity in the classroom. The teachers demonstrated a deep understanding that a one-size-fits-all approach is not effective. For instance, they might use multiple-choice questions for students who struggle with reading, while using essays for those who are more proficient. This flexible and adaptable approach ensures that every student has an equal opportunity to succeed and feel a sense of accomplishment. This specific finding is a testament to the teachers' professionalism and dedication to inclusive education, which is crucial for promoting motivation across the entire student body.

A comparison of these results with previous studies reveals both conformity and a unique contribution. The findings of this research conform to the general conclusions of studies by Hidayat & Emeilia (2024), Vajrani (2024), and Meinda & Munanjar (2023), all of which found a positive correlation between teacher-student communication and learning motivation. Our study corroborates their findings that a supportive and open communication style is a key determinant of student engagement. However, the originality of this study lies in its specific, in-depth application of Joseph A. DeVito's theoretical framework to a particular, localized problem: the decline in student motivation at SDN Singonegaran 1 following the abolition of the National Examination. While previous studies have affirmed the general importance of communication, this research provides a granular analysis of *how* and *which* specific communication indicators are at play. It goes beyond a general acknowledgment to provide a detailed roadmap of the communication process from building trust to providing feedback that can serve as a practical guide for educators.

CONCLUSION

The study confirmed that teachers' effective interpersonal communication significantly enhanced students' learning motivation. The consistent application of openness, empathy, supportiveness, positiveness, and equality created a supportive classroom environment and

reduced motivational barriers such as shyness and low confidence, thereby promoting students' academic and personal development.

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