

## Conference Paper

# Interpersonal Communication Between Special Educational Needs Teachers and Parents of Special-needs Student During Covid-19 Pandemic

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## Abstract.

The pandemic has had a significant impact on all sectors, especially on education which has a systemic impact. The changing pattern of teaching, learning, and the consequences endured are also a problem, especially in schools that administer inclusive education. This results in a changing pattern of communication between teachers, special-needs students, and parents. The study aims to illustrate the interpersonal communication dynamics inherent between a teacher and a parent as a central figure in the study of courage for special-needs students. The type of method used was a qualitative method with a case study approach. The study included five participants, three with details of special educational needs teachers and two for parents of special-needs students. The study was conducted in a data search phase through observation, documentation, and interviews. To strengthen the results, the focus group discussion included the five participants directly. For data analysis Miles and Huberman method was applied, whereas for data credibility data triangulation was used. The results of this study indicated that interpersonal communication had a significant impact in helping special-needs students to learn and to survive the pandemic.

**Keywords:** special educational needs teacher, interpersonal communication, parents of special needs students

## 1. Introduction

The covid-19 has a real effect on all aspects of life, as well as on education. The usual performance of learning that doing physically in class, should be transferred in distance through application or simply by using social media like WhatsApp. Online classes became something new to most educators. In effect, many people have been found that it is difficult to survive distance learning from the sides of the educators, students, and infrastructure that support distance learning.

The barrier that facing distance learning are experienced not only by public schools but also by special schools like schools that open inclusive classes. Wahana Inklusif

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Indonesia foundation reports four barriers in distance learning [1]. First, the minimum of material exploration because of time constraints. Second, the limited skills and knowledge of the special need students. Third, the use and development of technologies and communication tools that are less than sufficient by teachers and students. Fourth, less of parent involvement because of miss understanding the importance of parental involvement to special needs children [1]. Parental involvement in the learning process of special needs student become an absolute necessity. The most important involvement is in the aspect of communication. This aspect is the key to successful distance learning because communication with special children requires special ways, so that the learning process is effective. This is demonstrated by the experience of a teacher who face the trouble when accompanying children with special in learning process [2].

Problems in communicating with special needs children happened before the pandemic struck. Communication with special needs children occurs not only between parents and children but also between special needs children and teachers. The presence of the pandemic created a new problem, whereby the involvement being a key in online learning activities. This requires that teachers should communicate with parents, so the learning process run to the fullest. This form of communication is known by the term interpersonal communication. Interpersonal communication is communication between the persons who has a clear relationship both verbally and non-verbally and has an impact on the agreed sections to get the desired results for both parties [3].

Many studies claim that interpersonal communication has had a positive effect on the development of special needs children. Angelia [4] and Francisca and Sunarto [5] see the interpersonal communications between teachers and special needs students can create a good self-concept of students through non-verbal communication. Interpersonal communication can also help the deaf build self-openness [6]. Hasan [7] found the results that interpersonal communication can increase communication levels by special needs students. Interpersonal communication is also an effective form of communication in families with special needs children ([8]; [9]; [10]; [11]), religious habitual ([10]; [12]; [13]; [14]; [15]; [16]; [17]) and social skills [18]. Interpersonal communication can also help to solve problems faced by special needs children [19].

The foregoing proves interpersonal communication is one of the most effective ways to communicate with special needs children. Both in the pandemic and before the pandemic, interpersonal communication has been shown to be a bridge between the teacher and the child with special needs and the parent with the child with special needs. On this side, the primary focus is on understanding which the child can reach and what the child wants to tell the teacher or the parent.

At the time of the pandemic, the focus was limited because special children could not see the teacher physically. In the learning activities, children with special needs must be accompanied by parents. It is a new experience for parents because they handle most of the student time of learning. The condition requires teachers communicate with parents to help convey the learning materials. A good communication between teacher and parent are needed. The study attempts to reflect the interpersonal communication dynamics developed between teachers and students during the pandemic. The study also seeks to see the dominant aspect of the interpersonal communication process developed between teachers and the parents of special-needs students.

## 2. Literature Review

Devito [3] stated that interpersonal communication involves five aspects. They were openness, empathy, support, positiveness, and equality. The five aspects determine the success of interpersonal communication built between the parties. Many studies claim that interpersonal communication has had a positive effect on the development of special needs children. During the pandemic, interpersonal communication became one of the most significant forms of communication. Wicaksana [20] has seen interpersonal communication between parents and children with special needs was successfully implemented with an emotional approach. Yosephine [21] sees interpersonal communication as way to motivate special needs children survive the pandemic.

Huda et.al [22] also explains that the aspect of empathy in interpersonal communication has an impact on student development. Pratiwi [23] explained that interpersonal communication is a strategy used by elementary school teachers in Klaten as a solution to the difficulties faced during the distance learning process during the pandemic. Although interpersonal communication is a secondary communication pattern, it still has an important role as a form of communication during distance learning during the pandemic [24]. This is also in line with Lanes, Warouw and Mingkid [25] who explain interpersonal communication as a way for parents to communicate with their children during distance learning during a pandemic. Long before, Yati and Fadhli [26] found interpersonal communication as an effective way for parents to understand the condition of children with special needs.

### 3. Method

The study was conducted with a qualitative method and case study approach. Case studies were selected to look at the theoretical basis of the facts experienced by participants in this study. As for the participants in the research was the three persons of special educational needs teachers and two parents of special needs students. The study was carried out in July till December 2021. Data research techniques in this study used observation, documentation, and interviews. Observation and documentation were used to search for the data triangulation, while interviews were conducted with two models. First, interviews conducted separately for each participant and the second, interviews conducted in the form of focus group discussion to see the consistency of the responses of the participants. Credibility data test techniques used data triangulation of researchers and sources. The data analysis produced by Miles, Huberman, and Saldana [27] that involved data reduction, data presentation and conclusion.

### 4. Result and Discussion

#### 4.1. Result

To make it easier to see the results, teachers are given codes as GPK 1, 2 and 3. GPK 1 is 48 years old, female. GPK 2 is 38 years old, female and GPK 3 is 30 years old, female. Parents were given the codes as WS 1 and WS 2. WS 1 ages 32 years old and WS 2 ages 35 years old. As for the obtained results it can be seen as follows:

#### 4.2. The aspect of openness

In this aspect, GPK 1 and 2 explained that there was a WhatsApp Group for special needs students. This group was differed from the whole group class because the special need students had the different evaluation model. In communicating using the WhatsApp group, teacher had three obstacles. There were parents did not have smartphone so they could not join the WhatsApp Group. The second one, parents had smartphone and WhatsApp, but they ignore the student's information that resulted unawareness of how the student development in learning. Third, the smartphone that parents had had to carry to their work when teaching learning begins, so the students could not join the process of learning. The solution for parents who did not have smartphone were should go to school to pick up papers or materials for students. GPK 1 and 2 always presented

the process and results of enticing learning, according to the subject. GPK 1 and 2 also always looked for other significant processes and results achieved by special-needs students. GPK 1 and 2 explained if there were some assignments of the special needs of students who need perform or assist from the parents. GPK 1 explained to parents that children are trained to have answers from themselves. GPK 1 suggested parents of special-needs students to add the other lessons outside school on such basic matters as letter and number recognition.

WS 1, 2 and 3 always delivered the students condition as it was. They recognize the importance of knowledge on the children development especially for special-need students. WS 1, 2 and 3 also conveyed their limitations and obstacles, such as smartphones that were used in shifts until they had no Internet package to do a communication with teachers. WS 1.2 and 3 were always communicated flaws in each child to help the teacher in the teaching learning process.

### 4.3. Aspects of positiveness

GPK 1 presented the students development as the real condition, but it was communicated in a different way to make the parents of special-needs students know their child's development as a report to the parents of special-needs students. GPK 1 was trying to find out more about the special needs of the student condition such as trying to know the kind of specialities that students had to help them create and modify the strategies of learning and assessment that appropriate for students. GPK 1 was pleased when special-needs students were able to achieve a better learning process, in academic or non-academic field. GPK 1 tried to understand the condition of parents who did not fully understand the condition of their children. GPK 2 seek to unify periodically to the gathering of students' assignment to make sure that it was not to be forgotten. GPK 2 also saw many parents who were not fully acquainted with the learning process, there were still many of them who oriented in result of learning.

WS 1, 2, and 3 tried to understand the developing abilities of children as remarkable. Parents could accept the student's achievement both academic and non-academic, although these achievements needed a longer process than others.

### 4.4. The aspect of empathy

In providing development results for the special-need student, GPK 1 seek to understand the parents' condition before show the result. GPK 1 tried to understand the protests of

special-needs student parents when they found the different situation at home with what happened at school with direct evidence and explanations. GPK 1 could understand the direction and goals that the parents of special-needs students want to achieve. Unlike GPK 2, there were parents who did not care about their children development. These parents acted overdue response or did not give response, in contrast with the parents of other special-needs students who quickly answer the messages and information from school. GPK 2 was familiar with the condition and business of each parent of the special-needs students, so parents should not had collected the assignment at the same time. Parent could collect it more flexible as their ready time, but GPK gave a specific deadline. GPK 2 tried to understand the condition of a parent who had different activities and therefore could not accompany students in the learning process. GPK 2 listened to the obstacles parents had in accompanying their children while study.

WS 1, 2, and 3 could understand that teachers had limitations in accompanying their children. Parents realized that the way handled dan communicated with special-need children needed a special way. WS 1. 2. And 3 tried to accept the condition of their children although it was not easy. The acceptance because many parents around them still had not been yet accept the condition of the special children.

#### 4.5. The aspects of support

GPK 1 has always tried to provide concrete evidence for the development of the special-needs student, so that the parents could properly understand the children condition. The GPK 1 gave information on the children different abilities and the possibility of other potential that suitable according to the children talents and interests. GPK 1 always gave special needs development reports in private, not through the WhatsApp group and explained these reports. The GPK 1 was also trying to reach out to any media, over the phone, asking the neighbours, brothers or anyone who could be a middleman in delivering messages regarding child development. The GPK 1 used to involve parents directly when a child cannot receive proper instruction, such as helping to create a breaking line to write a letter. GPK 1 always highlighted the outstanding strengths or potentials or talents and interests of special-needs students and GPK was not focus on the children flaws and weaknesses. GPK 1 attempted to establish relationship with the parents of special-needs students through a good communication using chat WhatsApp or phone call in the pandemic.

WS 1, 2, and 3 were encouraged by responsive teachers. Moreover, teachers provided feedback on children development. Teachers and parents supported each other in

accompanying special-need students in learning. WS 1 and 2 subsequently asked for advice on handling their children outside of school activities.

#### 4.6. The aspect of equality

GPk 1 conveyed the results of students' development according to the weaknesses or obstacles students face with the purpose of the information presented more precisely. GPk 1 motivated parents of special-needs students to look at other positive aspects that child had. GPk 1 tried to give advice that matches the students condition, especially for parents who are not fully aware of the children condition. GPk 2 tried to state the condition of parents in presenting information, but the burden was on the uncooperative parents who did not give feedback in the communication.

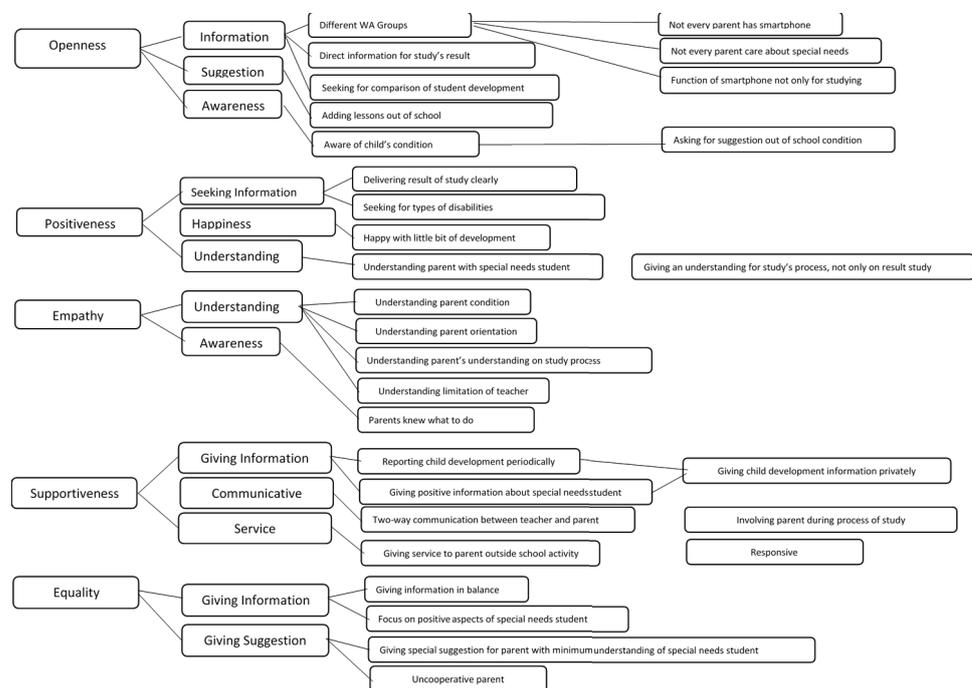


Figure 1: Aspects of Interpersonal Communication.

### 5. Discussion

The foregoing results suggest that interpersonal communication between special educational need teachers and the parents of special needs students includes the five aspects as described by Devito [3]. In the aspect of openness, between teachers and parents of special-needs students always share information with the purpose of getting

both parties into the notes for children development. Both parties endeavoured to convey things to be appreciated and things to work on.

On the positiveness aspect, both teachers and parents of special-needs students were able to observe a positive view of children development. Teachers saw special-needs students based on students interests or potential in other areas of academic. According to parents, the happiness came when the children could step forward reaching the next phase of their development. It meant that both parties could see positive developments in a special-need children despite the focus were different. This can be seen also in the research conducted by Angelia [4] and Fransisca and Sunarto [5] which saw positive interpersonal communication capable of forming children's independence in the form of a good self-concept.

On the aspect of empathy, teachers tried to convey information in a clear and smooth way so that the parents of special-needs students can receive the children true condition. The teacher considered some matters relating to the time and words used so that the parents will be able to capture the children development information well. So did the parents, they understood that the teachers also had limitations, so that parents did not demand quick development of their children and realized that the responsibilities to handled dan guided children were in both parties. Both parties strived to understand each other condition by maximizing the existing learning process along the pandemic. This is in accordance with the results of Yati and Fadhli's research [26] which saw that interpersonal communication was able to open insight for parents of children with special needs to understand the actual condition of their children.

As for the support aspect, teachers were never tired in providing motivation for parents of special-needs students to understand the children condition and continue to help the process learning. Teachers always conveyed the positive potential that students had to make parents feel the positive vibes in guiding the children. By showing the positive aspects of children, parents would have the same mindset that focus on children excessive, and potential were the key to gaining success in learning. Teachers even took precautions outside the work hour to give support for parents in helping and accompanying children in learning at home. Likewise, what was found by Wicaksana [20] and Yosephine [21], they saw interpersonal communication to approach children emotionally and a form of motivation for children during the pandemic.

The last one, on the aspect of equality, teachers had never compared one parent with others. The teacher distinguished how to communicate with the extent of the ability of parents in his or her needed in receiving information. This way of communication had the purpose of making it easier for the parents of the special-needs students to receive and

understand the information presented by the teacher. One of the impacts, interpersonal communication can unravel the problems faced by parents and children with special needs in communicating [19].

## 6. Conclusion

It could be deduced that interpersonal communication developed between a special educational need teacher and the parents of special-needs students falls into a good category. Both sides appeared to need each other, help each other, and have the same goal for the success of the online learning process during the pandemic for special-need students. This conformed to the principle of interpersonal communication that requires both parties to achieve a common goal together.

The limitation of this study was to focus only on students with the special needs of the slow learner categories. This limitation was also set back by the willingness of parents to participate in the study when there were other specialised children in the school category. Theoretically, the study proved that interpersonal communication had excellent results in achieving a goal, as the attachment and commonality of expectations of those who communicate with one another. In practice, the study had shown how good communication exists between teachers, parents and special-needs students becomes one that must be given special attention to achieve shared goals.

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