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Interpersonal Communication Of Children With Special Needs(A Case Study at Pembina Kesejahteraan Keluarga Special School, Lampung)

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the interpersonal communication of children with special needs at SLB PKK Lampung Province. Preliminary survey results, obtained through interviews with teachers at SLB PKK Lampung Province, revealed that interpersonal communication between children with special needs and their surrounding environment including teachers and peers faces unique challenges influenced by each child's communication abilities and the methods used by teachers. The research method employed is qualitative descriptive. Data were collected through guided interviews with teachers and parents of the students. The data analysis technique used was qualitative descriptive analysis. The results show that the interpersonal communication applied by students at SLB PKK Lampung Province is generally simple and concrete, requiring special approaches tailored to their needs. Most students use verbal language to a limited extent, so their communication relies heavily on body gestures, facial expressions, and communication aids such as pictures and assistive technology. The dominant form of communication emphasizes expressing basic needs, emotional expression, and socially guided interactions to support the gradual and effective development of interpersonal skills. The roles of teachers and the school environment are very strategic in supporting the development of interpersonal communication among students with special needs at SLB PKK Lampung Province.

Keywords: Interpersonal Communication, Special Needs Children .

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INTRODUCTION

Communication is a natural need for every human being to survive. From birth, humans require communication to convey their intentions and desires, just as a baby cries to communicate with its parents when it is hungry, thirsty, hot, needs to use the bathroom, or has other needs. As the baby grows, its ability to communicate and interact with its surroundings also develops (Rustan dan Nurhakki, 2019).

Communication is a fundamental element of human life, enabling individuals to interact, understand, and collaborate. However, for children with special needs (ABK), communication often presents a significant barrier due to physical, cognitive, or emotional limitations (Nasrullah, 2020).

2022 data from the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (Kemendikbudristek) , there are more than 150,000 students with special needs in Indonesia , with various types of needs, such as autism, visual impairment, deafness, physical disabilities, and other developmental disorders. Lampung Province alone has more than 5,000 students with special needs enrolled in inclusive and special schools (SLB).

The Lampung Province Special Needs Family Welfare School (SLB PKK) is an institution committed to educating children with special needs through a personalized approach and interpersonal interactions. However, challenges in interpersonal communication patterns remain a major issue. Teachers, students, and parents often struggle to build shared understanding due to limited communication media tailored to students' needs. Initial interviews with SLB PKK teachers revealed that most students with special needs exhibit communication gaps that impact their social and academic development.

Previous research has extensively discussed communication techniques for children with special needs, but most have focused on technical approaches, such as the use of assistive technology *or* visual methods. In-depth studies of the dynamics of everyday interpersonal communication in school environments through cultural and interactional perspectives have been limited, particularly in Indonesia. Previous studies have shown that interpersonal communication for children with special needs requires a specific approach. According to Smith *et al* ., visual and sensory-based communication strategies are highly effective for students with autism spectrum disorders (Smith *et al*, 2018). Another study by Lee and Kim emphasized the importance of an individualized approach in building positive interpersonal relationships with children with special needs (Lee dan Kim, 2021).

Symbolic Interactionism theory , humans construct meaning through symbolic interaction.

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This is particularly relevant for children with special needs, who often use unique symbols in communication, both verbal and non-verbal. This theory provides a framework for understanding how children with special needs and their environment create distinctive interpersonal communication patterns. In this context, an ethnographic approach is important because it allows researchers to directly observe communication patterns occurring in the students' natural environment.

This research is novel because it focuses on interpersonal communication conducted by children with special needs (ABK) as the main subject, not solely from the perspective of teachers or parents as is common in previous research. By taking a case study at the Special Needs Special Needs School (SLB PKK) in Lampung Province, this research presents a local context that has not been widely explored, thus allowing the discovery of unique communication patterns influenced by the local culture and social environment. In addition, this study also reveals the forms of nonverbal communication used by ABK, such as facial expressions, body movements, or visual symbols, which have so far received less attention in communication studies. These findings are expected to provide practical contributions in the development of more inclusive communication strategies for educators, parents, and the environment surrounding children with special needs.

The results of a pre-survey through interviews with teachers of the Lampung Province PKK Special Needs School (SLB PKK) revealed that interpersonal communication between children with special needs and their surroundings, including teachers and peers, presents unique challenges that are influenced by each child's communication skills and the methods used by the teacher. The teachers also stated that an effective interpersonal approach can increase children's engagement in learning and daily social interactions. Furthermore, interviews with two parents of children with special needs at the Lampung Province PKK Special Needs School (SLB PKK) indicated a strong desire among parents to understand more deeply the best ways to build interpersonal communication with their children. Parents expressed that each child has unique needs, so a more structured and empathy-based communication model is essential.

Based on this pre-survey data, it appears that research on interpersonal communication for children with special needs can significantly contribute to understanding their communication dynamics, while also offering practical recommendations for teachers, parents, and school environments in supporting child development. This demonstrates that research with this title is not only relevant but also has the potential to provide tangible benefits for improving the quality of education and social interactions for children with special needs.

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Overview of Interpersonal Communication Theory (DeVito)

According to Joseph A. DeVito (2019), interpersonal communication is the process of sending and receiving messages directly between two or more people, which is personal and occurs within the context of a mutually influential relationship. The main characteristics of interpersonal communication are emotional involvement, reciprocity, and a dynamic exchange of meaning. DeVito explains that interpersonal communication is not just about conveying information, but also building and maintaining relationships between individuals through a process of mutual understanding (DeVito, 2019).

DeVito's concept of relational context also emphasizes that communication does not occur in a vacuum but is always influenced by the social, cultural, and psychological backgrounds of the individuals interacting. In the case of children with special needs (ABK) in special schools (SLB), their interpersonal relationships with teachers and peers are often formed through a long process that requires consistency and adaptation. Therefore, the communication strategy implemented must consider the child's individual needs and the surrounding social context (Rizki & Mulyani, 2023).

Overall, DeVito's interpersonal communication theory provides a strong theoretical framework for understanding the interactions between children with special needs and their social environment. This theory highlights not only the technical process of sending messages but also the affective and social dimensions of communication, which are highly relevant in special education. By adapting the basic principles of interpersonal communication, educators and caregivers can build more meaningful and functional relationships with children with special needs.

Overview of Symbolic Interactionism Theory

Symbolic Interactionism theory , first developed by George Herbert Mead and systematically constructed by Herbert Blumer, starts from the assumption that meaning is not automatically attached to an object or action, but is formed and interpreted through social interaction. In this context, individuals act toward something based on the meaning they assign to it. This means that meaning is a product of a social process that continues to develop through interactions with others (Blumer, 1969; Rizky & Ardianto, 2020).

The basic principles of this theory are highly relevant when applied to the study of interpersonal communication in children with special needs (ABK), especially those who experience verbal communication barriers. ABK often use nonverbal symbols such as hand

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gestures, facial expressions, communication aids (such as pictures or symbol boards), and certain sounds to convey meaning and build relationships. From a symbolic interactionist perspective, these symbols are not only considered a means of communication but also part of the child's process of creating meaning and social identity (Yunita & Wahyuni, 2021).

Thus, symbolic interactionism theory provides a strong theoretical foundation for understanding interpersonal communication in children with special needs as an active, symbolic, and evolving social process. The use of nonverbal symbols by children with special needs not only demonstrates their ability to convey messages but also demonstrates their active participation in the process of constructing social meaning. This is crucial for creating an inclusive educational environment that is responsive to diverse communication needs.

Overview of the Theory of Social Construction of Reality

Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, in their landmark work, *The Social Construction of Reality* (1966), explain that social reality is not objective and fixed, but rather is continuously shaped through social interaction. Individuals and society collectively create, maintain, and transform social reality through language, symbols, and everyday actions. This process involves three main stages: externalization, objectivation, and internalization, in which individuals create meaning, that meaning becomes a shared social reality, and is then reabsorbed by individuals in shaping their consciousness (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Wijaya & Wibowo, 2021).

The social construction of reality also demonstrates that identity is not something innate, but rather is formed through everyday social dialogue. Therefore, educational approaches for children with special needs must provide space for them to actively participate in creating meaning. In practice, this can be implemented through communication strategies based on direct experience, collaborative activities, and open dialogue that allows children to express their own perspectives and experiences (Santoso & Hidayat, 2021).

Thus, the theory of the social construction of reality provides a strong foundation for understanding interpersonal communication in children with special needs as a process of self-formation that occurs through social experiences. Communication is not only a tool for conveying ideas, but also a primary medium for constructing social realities that children internalize in understanding the world around them and themselves.

Overview of Cognitive Development Theory (Jean Piaget)

The theory of cognitive development developed by Jean Piaget explains that children

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experience four main stages of cognitive development: sensorimotor (0–2 years), preoperational (2–7 years), concrete operational (7–11 years), and formal operational (11 years and above). Each stage demonstrates changes in how children understand the world around them, including their understanding of symbols, language, and social concepts. Piaget emphasized that cognitive development occurs through active interaction between children and their environment, where they form mental structures through the processes of assimilation and accommodation (Piaget, 1973; Sari & Pramudita, 2020).

In educational practice at special needs schools (SLB), the application of Piaget's theory can help educators design communication methods appropriate to children's cognitive stages. For example, at the concrete operational stage, children are able to understand cause-and-effect relationships and the concept of time, allowing teachers to use a logical approach and clear structure. Conversely, at the preoperational stage, play-based approaches, symbolic imitation, and the use of visual media are more effective in fostering positive interpersonal communication (Wijayanti & Hidayah, 2023).

Thus, Piaget's theory of cognitive development provides an important framework for understanding the communication dynamics of children with special needs. It not only helps explain potential limitations but also provides guidance on how to structure interactions that align with the child's cognitive developmental capacities. Interpersonal communication that aligns with the child's developmental stage will enhance the effectiveness of learning, social relationships, and the development of the child's potential.

Overview of the Theory of Multiple Intelligences

The Multiple Intelligences Theory, developed by Howard Gardner, states that human intelligence is not a single entity, but rather consists of various independent yet complementary types of intelligence. In his book * *Frames of Mind* * (1983), Gardner identified at least eight types of intelligence: linguistic, logical-mathematical, visual-spatial, musical, kinesthetic, interpersonal, intrapersonal, and naturalistic. This theory rejects the traditional view that measures intelligence solely based on academic ability or IQ scores, instead emphasizing the uniqueness and strengths of each individual (Gardner, 2011; Fitriani & Syahputra, 2022).

It's also important to understand that intelligence isn't static. Gardner emphasized that intelligence can be developed if the environment provides appropriate stimulation. Therefore, daily interpersonal interactions with teachers, parents, and peers should be a means of developing the social and emotional intelligence of children with special needs. Interactions that support and

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appreciate children's unique strengths will gradually strengthen their communication skills (Fadhillah & Maulana, 2022).

Thus, the theory of multiple intelligences offers an optimistic and constructive perspective for understanding the diverse communication styles of children with special needs. Through an approach tailored to their dominant intelligences, interpersonal communication becomes more meaningful, inclusive, and humane. This also serves as a basis for designing educational and social interaction models that focus not solely on impairments but instead empower children's full potential.

Mindfulness Theory in Communication

Mindfulness theory in communication was developed by Ellen Langer , a psychology professor at Harvard University, who emphasizes the importance of present awareness *in* every social interaction. Langer defines *mindfulness* not simply as meditation, but as a mental state that is aware, open, and responsive to the context and changes in the communication situation. Mindful communication *allows* individuals to be more sensitive to differences, nuances of meaning, and expressions that may not be immediately apparent in everyday situations (Langer, 2014; Astuti & Maulana, 2021).

Mindfulness benefits not only children with special needs but also all parties involved. Teachers who communicate mindfully tend to be more empathetic, patient, and adaptive. This improves the quality of interpersonal relationships in the classroom and creates a conducive learning environment. Several studies also show that *mindful communication training* can increase communication satisfaction and strengthen social relationships, particularly in the context of inclusive education (Rahmah & Firdaus, 2023).

Thus, *mindfulness theory* in communication serves not only as a practical approach but also as an ethical framework for building relationships with children with special needs. *Mindful communication* requires complete presence, respect for differences, and a willingness to continuously learn from ongoing interactions. Through this approach, the communication process becomes not only a means of conveying information but also a bridge for building authentic and meaningful relationships.

General Overview of the Definition of Communication

Communication is a dynamic and complex process that involves the exchange of information, ideas, emotions, and meaning between two or more parties through various

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channels, both verbal and nonverbal. Not limited to speaking and writing, communication also includes facial expressions, gestures, eye contact, vocal intonation, and visual symbols that can convey messages implicitly. In everyday interactions, effective communication is key to creating shared understanding, as it allows each party to adjust perceptions, provide feedback, and manage emotions appropriately. More than just the transfer of information, communication also plays a vital role in forming healthy, respectful, and empathetic interpersonal relationships. Therefore, the ability to communicate consciously and adaptively is crucial for the quality of social relationships, especially in contexts involving diverse communication styles, such as those involving children with special needs (Martha, A dan Sihotang, M.H, 2024).

Communication is a system consisting of key elements such as sender (communicator), receiver (communicant), message, channel, and feedback, all of which take place within a specific context such as a social, cultural, or psychological situation. The sender has a primary role in formulating and conveying messages through the most effective channels, whether in the form of spoken words, written words, or nonverbal symbols such as gestures or facial expressions (Devito, J. A., 2013).

Based on the above description, it can be concluded that communication is a dynamic, interactive, and contextual process, involving the exchange of information, ideas, or messages between two or more parties with the aim of building a shared understanding. This process consists of several important elements, namely the sender, recipient, message, channel, and feedback, which interact with each other and influence the effectiveness of communication. The success of communication is determined not only by the content of the message, but also by how the message is delivered, received, and responded to in certain situations. Effective communication can strengthen interpersonal relationships, create harmonious collaboration, and become an important tool in achieving goals in both personal, social, and professional life.

Overview of Interpersonal Communication

Interpersonal communication is a form of interaction that occurs between two individuals, where a direct and dynamic exchange of messages occurs. In this communication, the messages conveyed can be verbal, such as in the form of spoken conversation that uses words to convey meaning, or nonverbal, such as through facial expressions, gestures, voice intonation, or eye contact that depict certain emotions and attitudes. The interpersonal communication process not only allows both parties to provide direct and spontaneous responses, but also creates space for the creation of deeper understanding. With this two-way interaction, interpersonal

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communication plays an important role in building emotional closeness, strengthening personal relationships, and encouraging the creation of trust and harmony in social relationships (DeVito, 2019).

Interpersonal communication is a form of interaction that involves an intimate, personal relationship based on deep empathy. In this communication, both individuals go beyond simply exchanging information, but also actively engage in building genuine emotional closeness and understanding each other's feelings and perspectives. Through empathetic communication, individuals can create a safe and comfortable space to openly share their experiences, feelings, and needs. This type of communication not only strengthens emotional bonds but also plays a crucial role in building mutual trust, reducing the potential for misunderstandings, and creating an atmosphere conducive to the growth of harmonious and mutually supportive relationships. The success of empathy-based interpersonal communication provides a solid foundation for the formation of meaningful and lasting relationships (Gamble, T. K., & Gamble, M, 2018).

The conclusion of interpersonal communication is a direct interaction process between two individuals involving the exchange of verbal and nonverbal messages, with important elements such as sender, receiver, message, media, and context that play a role in building understanding and closer relationships. However, this process can be hampered by various factors such as physical barriers, for example environmental disturbances or distance; psychological barriers, such as prejudice, stress, or lack of confidence; and cultural barriers, such as differences in values, language, or social norms. However, effective interpersonal communication remains an important key to creating emotional bonds, increasing trust, and strengthening relationships between individuals, by relying on awareness and communication skills to overcome these various barriers.

Overview of Interpersonal Communication for Children with Special Needs

Children with special needs have unique characteristics that can include cognitive, emotional, or physical limitations, which can affect their communication patterns. Cognitive limitations may make it difficult for children to understand or process information quickly, while emotional limitations can hinder their ability to express feelings appropriately. On the other hand, physical limitations, such as hearing or vision impairments, can affect how children interact with others. Therefore, it is important to use a more patient, flexible, and tailored communication approach to each child's needs so they can optimally develop their social and communication skills.

Communication for children with special needs often requires adjustments to

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accommodate their unique needs. This includes the use of more specific communication methods, such as sign language, pictures, or communication aids, which can help the child better understand messages. These adjustments also involve a more patient and empathetic approach from teachers or parents, who must be sensitive to how the child absorbs information and responds to communication. With the right adjustments, children with special needs can interact more easily and develop the communication skills necessary for everyday life (Hallahan, D. P., Kauffman, J. M., & Pullen, P. C., 2020).

The communication patterns of children with special needs can vary depending on their specific needs. Children with autism, for example, often use visual symbols as a communication aid to help them convey messages or understand information. Using these symbols or images allows them to interact and communicate more easily without relying on their verbal abilities. On the other hand, children with hearing impairments tend to use sign language as their primary means of communication, allowing them to convey and receive messages even though they cannot use verbal communication. Adapting these communication patterns is important to ensure that each child can develop communication skills appropriate to their abilities and needs (Schlosser, R. W., 2019).

DISCUSSION

Interpersonal Communication Applied by PKK Special Needs School Students in Lampung Province

A combination of simple words and gestures is the most common form of communication used by children with special needs. Due to limitations in complex verbal skills, children tend to convey messages by saying one or two words while pointing, pulling their hands, or using other body expressions to clarify their meaning. This communication pattern indicates that the child is in an early developmental stage, where verbal and nonverbal language complement each other to create interactions that are understandable to those around them. This combination is not only an effective way for children to communicate, but also demonstrates the potential for language development that can be enhanced through consistent practice and appropriate responses from the environment. A sensitive approach to this form of communication will help build more mature social interaction skills later in life .

Based on the interview results above, this is in line with the opinion of Joseph A. DeVito who stated that interpersonal communication is the process of conveying messages that can be verbal or nonverbal, which takes place between two or more people to build and maintain social

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relationships. The findings in this study indicate that most students with special needs (ABK) at the PKK Special Needs School in Lampung Province rely more on nonverbal forms of communication, such as gestures, facial expressions, eye contact, and the use of visual aids in conveying their intentions and feelings. Limitations in verbal communication make them very dependent on the responses and sensitivity of their interlocutors, especially teachers and parents, to form effective interactions. Therefore, the process of learning interpersonal communication in ABK students requires assistance, guidance, and a consistent approach so that they are not only able to convey messages, but also form meaningful social relationships with their surroundings .

Based on the Symbolic Interactionism Theory developed by George Herbert Mead, communication is formed through social interaction in which symbols such as words, gestures, and facial expressions acquire meaning that is constructed collectively. In the context of students with special needs at the PKK Special Needs School in Lampung Province, the use of picture cards, hand gestures, facial expressions, and concrete objects shows that they build communication through symbols that are collectively understood by them and those around them. These symbols are not only a means of conveying messages, but also a bridge for the creation of repeated and internalized social understanding. When a child points to a picture of food to express hunger, or waves as a sign of greeting, he is using a social symbol whose meaning is understood through repeated interactions with teachers, parents, and peers. This finding supports Mead's view that meaning is not inherently inherent in symbols, but is formed through dynamic social processes. Therefore, strengthening this symbolic meaning needs to be continuously developed through habituation, empathy, and consistent interaction so that students' interpersonal communication skills can grow optimally .

Based on the Theory of Social Construction of Reality proposed by Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, social reality does not emerge automatically, but is formed and constructed through continuous social experiences and interactions. In the context of students with special needs (ABK) at the PKK Special Needs School in Lampung Province, the communication patterns they exhibit are the result of social construction that is consistently built through interactive relationships with teachers and parents. Student communication, whether through simple words, gestures, picture cards, or facial expressions, does not arise from an individual process alone, but rather is a form of collective meaning formed from daily routines, symbolic reinforcement, and repeated social responses. Teachers and parents play a central role in shaping a “communication reality” that can be understood and applied by children according to their conditions. Empathetic, consistent, and experience-based interactions make student communication a living social

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construction that develops along with the dynamics of their relationships with their surroundings. This shows that interpersonal communication of students with special needs is not merely a technical skill, but a form of social reality constructed through shared practices in their daily lives.

Based on Jean Piaget's Cognitive Development Theory, children develop through specific cognitive stages, and children with special needs are generally in the preoperational or concrete operational stage. In the preoperational stage, children tend to think egocentrically, using simple symbols, but still have difficulty understanding abstract concepts. Meanwhile, in the concrete operational stage, children begin to be able to think logically, but are still limited to things that are real and concrete. In this context, the communication of children with special needs at the PKK Special Needs School in Lampung Province tends to be concrete, contextual, and not abstract. They more easily understand messages conveyed through visual approaches, direct activities, and the use of real objects or images as representations of meaning. Therefore, the communication strategies used by teachers and parents must be adapted to these developmental characteristics, emphasizing practical, visual, and repetitive methods. These findings strengthen the relevance of a direct experience-based learning approach in supporting the development of interpersonal communication in children with special needs .

Based on Howard Gardner's Theory of Multiple Intelligences, every individual possesses various types of intelligence, not just linguistic or logical. In the context of students with special needs (ABK) at the PKK Special Needs School in Lampung Province, their intelligence potential often manifests itself in visual, musical, or kinesthetic forms. This is evident in how they respond to images, music, or gestures more actively and meaningfully than verbal communication. Therefore, the communication strategy developed must take into account this diversity of intelligence, utilizing visual aids such as picture cards, learning songs, and motor activities that support message comprehension. Through an approach that aligns with the child's dominant intelligence, the communication process becomes more effective and tailored to their learning style. These findings suggest that communication among students with special needs can develop significantly when the methods used are not limited to a single verbal pathway, but are open to various forms of expression and alternative communication channels that suit each child's individual intelligence potential .

Mindfulness Theory in Communication, effective communication practices occur when individuals, in this case teachers and parents, demonstrate full presence , empathy, and patience in every interaction. In the context of students with special needs (ABK) at the PKK Special Needs School (SLB PKK) in Lampung Province, this *mindful approach* has proven highly relevant and

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beneficial. Teachers and parents who are able to be fully present in conversations with their children, not only physically but also emotionally and mentally, provide a significant sense of security and psychological support for the children. Empathetic, non-judgmental attitudes, and patience in understanding the children's often indirect or limited responses, enable the creation of a warm and inclusive communication space. With this approach, children feel valued and accepted for who they are, so that they gradually become more comfortable, confident, and courageous in communicating according to their capacity. Mindful communication practices *not* only strengthen interpersonal relationships between children and their caregivers but also serve as an important foundation for the ongoing development of children's communication skills.

Interpersonal communication among students with special needs at the PKK Special Needs School (SLB PKK) in Lampung Province is simple, contextual, and highly dependent on the support of their surrounding environment . Students develop communication skills through guided, empathetic, and consistent interactions, both with teachers at school and parents at home. Although many students experience verbal limitations, they still have the potential to communicate functionally with the help of visual symbols, gestures, and other media. The role of teachers and families is crucial in creating a safe, productive, and meaningful communication space for children. Therefore, a collaborative approach that considers cognitive, emotional, and social aspects is the main foundation in developing interpersonal communication in students with special needs.

Based on the description above, it can be analyzed that the interpersonal communication applied by the PKK Special Needs School students of Lampung Province has unique characteristics **, namely that it tends to be** simple, concrete, and requires an adaptive individual approach according to the disability conditions of each student **. The communication carried out does not only depend on verbal language skills, but also relies heavily on** nonverbal forms of communication **, such as** Body gestures, facial expressions, eye contact, and other body language **are the primary means of conveying messages and establishing social interactions. Most students show** limitations in verbal structure and vocabulary **, so the use of** communication aids **, such as** Pictures, symbol cards, communication boards, and assistive technology **(e.g., voice apps or alternative communication devices) are crucial in facilitating the delivery of meaning. The communication methods employed emphasize the** expression of basic needs **, such as hunger, the desire to play, or the need for assistance, and also involve** the expression of simple emotions **such as happiness, sadness, anger, or fear. Furthermore, the interactions generally take place** in a guided manner **, with teachers and companions playing a significant role in facilitating the**

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communication process, both as communication models and as supportive environmental providers. This demonstrates that interpersonal communication among students with special needs at the PKK Special Needs School in Lampung Province is inseparable from the role of a responsive environment and a personal and sustainable pedagogical approach **.**The Role of Teachers and the School Environment in Supporting Interpersonal Communication of Students with Special Needs (ABK) at the PKK Special Needs School in Lampung Province

This role is evident through various learning strategies, personal approaches, and an inclusive and adaptive school atmosphere.

1. The Role of Teachers in the Interpersonal Communication Process

   Teachers act as primary facilitators, adapting communication strategies to suit individual student characteristics . Several teachers mentioned that the methods they use vary widely, from repetition, visual media (pictures, cards), consistent routines , to speech therapy . Furthermore, teachers also function as communication models , demonstrating how to convey messages, respond to questions, and express emotions appropriately. Furthermore, teachers build emotional closeness with students, which is an important foundation for children to feel safe in communicating. Teachers demonstrate empathy, patience, and *mindfulness* when dealing with children's behaviors or responses that cannot be immediately understood verbally.

2. An Inclusive and Supportive School Environment

   The Lampung Province PKK Special Needs School provides various facilities and environmental structures that support students' interpersonal communication , such as speech therapy rooms, communication aids (pictures, symbols, technology), and visual media installed in various areas of the school. The layout is also designed to be easily accessible to students with motor or sensory impairments. In addition to physical facilities, the school's social climate also plays a crucial role. Joint activities such as ceremonies, skills training, and group play provide natural avenues for children to practice communication. In these activities, students are encouraged to greet each other, wait their turn, express their desires, and work together. The involvement of peers , both fellow children with special needs and students who function as " *peer tutors* ," has been shown to increase students' courage in expressing themselves. The social interactions that occur not only train functional communication but also strengthen relationships between individuals in the context of inclusive education.

According to the Social Construction of Reality Theory proposed by Berger and Luckmann, teachers and the school environment play an active role in shaping social realities and

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communication patterns that can be understood and internalized by students with special needs (ABK). In this context, the school environment is not merely a physical place for learning, but also a social arena where the meaning of communication symbols, such as language, gestures, and expressions, is constructed together through ongoing interactions. Teachers, as primary facilitators, help students interpret and give meaning to these symbols, so that students can develop understanding and communication skills relevant to their social lives. This process of meaning construction enables students with special needs to adapt and participate in the social community more effectively, making the school a dynamic space for the development of their interpersonal and social communication.

According to the Symbolic Interactionism Theory proposed by George Herbert Mead, symbols such as gestures, images, and facial expressions used in learning at the Lampung Province PKK Special Needs School are understood and given meaning through repeated interactions between students and teachers. In this context, teachers act as *significant others* , important figures who influence the development of children's social meanings. Through continuous interaction , teachers help children interpret these symbols so that students are able to understand the messages conveyed and use them in everyday communication. This process allows children to build a shared understanding of symbolic meaning, which forms the basis for the development of their interpersonal communication skills. Thus, symbolic interaction in schools is a primary foundation in the formation and development of communication among students with special needs.

According to Howard Gardner's Theory of Multiple Intelligences, the role of teachers in identifying each child's dominant intelligence is crucial to supporting effective learning and interpersonal communication. At the Lampung Province PKK Special Needs School, teachers strive to identify students' primary intelligences, such as visual, kinesthetic, or interpersonal intelligence, so that learning materials and communication methods can be tailored to these characteristics. For example, for children with dominant visual intelligence, the use of images and visual media will greatly assist understanding and communication expression; while for children with kinesthetic intelligence, approaches involving movement and physical activity will be more effective. With personalized strategies that are aligned with these multiple intelligences, teachers are able to build interpersonal communication that is not only efficient but also maximizes each student's potential to interact and learn optimally.

Mindfulness Theory in Communication, teachers who interact with full awareness (*mindfulness*) are more likely to create warm, empathetic, and effective relationships with

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students. At the PKK Special Needs School in Lampung Province, *mindful communication practices* are demonstrated through full attention, genuine empathy, and consistent patience in facing the communication challenges of students with special needs. These elements are key to building meaningful and in-depth communication, where students feel valued and heard, thus encouraging them to be more open and active participants. A *mindful approach* also enables teachers to respond to students' emotional and communication needs more sensitively and adaptively, thus creating an inclusive and supportive learning environment that positively contributes to the development of children's interpersonal communication.

Interpersonal communication in students with special needs cannot develop optimally without strong systemic support from teachers and the school environment. Teachers at the Special Needs for Children (SLB PKK) in Lampung Province play more than just instructors; they also serve as psychosocial companions who understand the complexity of each student's communication needs holistically. Children's communication success is largely determined by the creation of a safe environment, rich in appropriate stimuli, and providing ample space for student social participation. This supportive school environment is not only limited to adequate physical facilities but also encompasses an inclusive school culture that values diversity and encourages positive interactions among all members of the school community. A collaborative approach involving teachers, students, and peers builds a natural and sustainable interpersonal communication system. Thus, the progress of interpersonal communication in the Special Needs for Children (SLB PKK) in Lampung Province is the result of a harmonious synergy between individual student aspects, teacher pedagogical strategies, and a supportive social environment.

Based on the description above, it can be analyzed that the role of teachers and the school environment is very strategic in supporting the formation of interpersonal communication among students with special needs (ABK) at the PKK Special Needs School in Lampung Province. Teachers not only act as learning facilitators, but also as primary companions who understand the individual characteristics of each student, thereby being able to create an inclusive, communicative, and supportive learning atmosphere. The approach taken by teachers tends to be individual, flexible, and responsive to students' communication barriers, both verbally and nonverbally. In this context, teachers also play a role in building emotional closeness and trust in students, which are important foundations for creating effective communication. The application of learning methods tailored to students' needs and abilities, such as the use of visual media, social simulations, and multisensory approaches, provides space for students to develop self-expression and social skills gradually.

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In addition to the role of teachers, an inclusive and adaptive school environment significantly contributes to strengthening the interpersonal communication skills of students with special needs (ABK) at the PKK Special Needs School in Lampung Province. The presence of various supporting facilities, such as speech therapy rooms, occupational therapy rooms, visual media, and special areas for social interaction, provide opportunities for students to practice and develop their communication skills in a real and meaningful context. Furthermore, the involvement of peers, both fellow students with special needs and regular students who act as peer tutors, also enriches students' communication experiences in a natural and contextual way. Thus, the synergistic collaboration between teachers, a friendly physical school environment and supporting facilities, and an inclusive culture built collectively by the entire school community are the main foundations in shaping and optimizing the interpersonal communication skills of students at the PKK Special Needs School in Lampung Province.

CONCLUSION

The interpersonal communication practiced by students at the Lampung Province PKK Special Needs School is generally simple and concrete, requiring a specific approach tailored to their needs. Most students use verbal language in a limited capacity, so their communication relies more on gestures, facial expressions, and communication aids such as pictures and assistive technology. The dominant form of communication emphasizes the expression of basic needs, emotional expression, and guided social interaction to support the gradual and effective development of interpersonal skills. The role of teachers and the school environment is very strategic in supporting the development of interpersonal communication for students with special needs at the Lampung Province PKK Special Needs School. Teachers not only create a communicative learning atmosphere but also build emotional closeness with students and apply individualized learning methods tailored to each child's needs. Furthermore, an inclusive school environment, complete with supporting facilities such as therapy rooms, visual media, and active peer involvement, also makes a significant positive contribution to strengthening students' interpersonal communication skills overall.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Schools are advised to continue improving teacher training in alternative and augmentative communication to strengthen their competency in supporting students with special needs. Furthermore, schools need to provide more adequate and innovative support facilities,

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such as communication application-based technology, visual communication boards, and other communication aids, so that the communication methods applied can be more varied and effective in enriching students' interpersonal communication skills. Parents and the community are expected to increase their active involvement in the process of developing interpersonal communication for children with special needs, both through participation in parenting programs organized by schools and by creating a supportive environment at home and in the community. Close synergy and collaboration between parents, teachers, and the surrounding community are the main keys to optimizing the communication potential of students with special needs, so that they can grow and develop optimally in various aspects of life.

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