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Multidimensional Communication Analysis: A Transformative Approach to Mitigating Social Skill Deficits in Adolescents with Emotional and Behavioural Disorders

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ABSTRACT

This study shows that fifteen-year-old adolescents face difficulties in interacting with their peers. These difficulties are reflected in the subject's interaction patterns, which tend to follow the guidance of friends, show little initiative in socializing, remain withdrawn, limit their circle of friends, and exhibit heightened sensitivity and an inability to express opinions effectively. The study employs a qualitative approach with a literature review method. Based on the primary issue related to the subject's difficulty in expressing opinions, assertive communication training can help improve communication skills and reduce anxiety that arises in social interactions. The assertive communication training techniques used are tailored to the needs of the field, incorporating a combination of self-assertion techniques, journaling, and role-playing.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Social skills refer to an individual's ability to communicate effectively with others, both verbally and non-verbally, according to the situational context at hand (Alfalathi et al., 2020). These skills are learned behaviors. Social skills positively contribute to an individual's emotional well-being, which is reflected in positive communication interactions with others (Abdaniati & Rohani, 2020). Children with good social skills tend to be capable of managing issues in social interactions and interacting positively with others without difficulties in communication (Aurelia, Fitriani, & Nuroniah, 2024). On the other hand, children with low social skills may struggle to read social cues, communicate effectively, or understand social norms in play contexts. Children with poor social skills and attitudes, such as a lack of attention to others, unpleasant interactions, low self-esteem, and limited communication abilities, often feel uncomfortable in learning processes due to a lack of external motivation (Alpian & Mulyani, 2020). Inadequate achievement of adolescent developmental tasks may indicate social isolation and feelings of loneliness, which can significantly impact their mental health and ability to adapt socially (Putri, 2024).

Field findings show that 15-year-old adolescents often exhibit poor social skills, reflected in behaviors such as withdrawal, limited friendships, avoidance of social activities, difficulties in emotional management, and an inability to resist peer pressure. In addition, these individuals often have low academic performance, and psychological test results categorize them as 'slow learners.' The lack of social skills affects their learning motivation, as social skills are closely linked to the ability to collaborate in groups, interact with peers, build friendships, resolve conflicts, and learn to collaborate (Alpian & Mulyani, 2020). Given the communication issues contributing to the low social skills of the subjects, intervention strategies focusing on the development of emotional and social skills are needed. These interventions aim not only to improve academic performance but also to enhance adolescents' emotional well-being and their social relationships with others. One intervention that can be implemented is assertive communication training, which aims to improve interpersonal communication skills. With assertive communication, individuals are expected to express their opinions confidently and comfortably without offending others. This study will further examine the importance of assertive communication training as an effort to enhance social skills in adolescents in Malang City Junior High Schools.

Previous studies on social skills and assertive communication have revealed effective strategies for improving adolescents' social and communication competencies. Comprehensive study in Jakarta, successfully explored social skills interventions with a cognitive-behavioral approach, showing a significant improvement in interpersonal communication through role-playing and social simulations (Rodriguez et al., 2021). Chen & Wang (2022) contributed theoretically by analyzing the determinants of low social skills, revealing a substantial correlation between emotional intelligence and social competence. Meanwhile, Thompson et al (2020) conducted a longitudinal experiment focused on assertive communication interventions, providing empirical findings on improvements in learning motivation and social adaptation among slow learner adolescents.

Additionally, research by Nakamura et al (2022) provided a different perspective by focusing on the influence of the social environment on adolescent communication skill development, emphasizing the significant contribution of family, peer groups, and educational institutions in shaping social skills. Murali & Srinivasan (2022) explored the impact of social skills training on adolescents' psychological well-being in Bali, revealing a positive correlation between communication interventions and reduced social isolation risk.

The fundamental difference from previous studies lies in the proposed holistic approach, which integrates various psychological, pedagogical, and sociological perspectives to analyze and intervene in the social skills of slow learner adolescents. The novelty of this research will lie in the development of an innovative, responsive, and adaptive assertive communication intervention model that addresses the specific needs of adolescents in Malang City. The research will include the development of multilevel strategies targeting not only the enhancement of social skills but also learning motivation, emotional well-being, and social adaptation. The quasi-experimental approach with an advanced research design enables comprehensive and continuous measurement of the changes that occur. The local context of Malang City provides a unique perspective in understanding adolescent social skill dynamics, resulting in an intervention model that can be tailored to the local socio-cultural characteristics. The combination of role-playing, interactive simulations, and narrative therapy within the framework of assertive communication offers an innovative approach different from conventional methods.

This research has the potential to produce a strategic model for developing the potential of learners, particularly slow learner adolescents, by providing comprehensive interventions that are sensitive to individual needs. The theoretical and practical significance of this research lies in its ability to generate intervention strategies that not only improve social skills but also support adolescents' psychological and academic well-being. Therefore, this research offers a substantial contribution to the field of educational psychology and development, providing a new perspective on understanding and intervening in the social skill challenges faced by slow learner adolescents in the Indonesian education context.

2. METHODS

This study employs a qualitative approach with a literature review method. The research process began with an article search conducted through Google Scholar. The search utilized keywords such as “assertive communication,” “social skills,” and “emotional and behavioral barriers.” The articles found were then selected based on the criterion of being published within the last 10 years to ensure the relevance and currency of the information used. The initial search resulted in 894 journal articles discussing topics related to the impact of assertive communication training on improving social skills in children with emotional and behavioral barriers.



Fig. 1 Research Flow

Subsequently, the found articles were reselected to ensure their relevance to the analysis required for this study. This selection process resulted in 25 journal articles deemed most suitable for further analysis. The selected articles were then analyzed to identify patterns and relationships between assertive communication, social skills, and emotional and behavioral barriers in children.

The validity of the data in this study was examined through data triangulation in the discussion section. The triangulation process was carried out by comparing findings across various articles that were analyzed to ensure the consistency and reliability of the information obtained. Through this approach, the literature analysis results provide a deeper understanding of the relationship between assertive communication training and social skills in children with emotional and behavioral barriers.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Result

The results of the study indicate that there is a 15-year-old adolescent who faces difficulties in interacting with peers. These difficulties are evident in the subject's interaction patterns, which tend to follow the direction of friends, show little initiative in socializing, remain quiet, limit their circle of friends, and exhibit sensitivity and an inability to express opinions effectively. Further investigation revealed that the subject's social life has been problematic since seventh grade, when they had no classmates and were often ostracized. Classmates observed that the subject had difficulty following the flow of conversations during discussions. Psychological test results categorized the subject as a slow learner, which contributed to their poor academic performance.

The academic problems worsened when the subject showed reluctance to attend school. This pattern of school refusal was identified as emerging when the subject faced conflicts with peers, such as disagreements, bullying, and frustration due to an inability to refuse peer pressure. The issues the subject faced at school often affected their behavior at home, where they would frequently become angry over trivial matters and had a tendency to self-harm, even developing suicidal thoughts. Interviews with the subject revealed that their parents' parenting style was permissive, with parents tending to indulge and overprotect the subject rather than guiding them to find solutions. Economically, the subject comes from a lower-middle-class family and lives with both parents and an older sibling.

Based on an interview with the school's guidance counselor, the subject's main issue lies in their inability to express opinions assertively, or in other words, they have significant difficulty behaving assertively. In addition, the subject also displayed emotional exhaustion, shown by verbal outbursts at home and a tendency to self-harm. In order for the subject to express their opinions confidently, say "no" comfortably, and manage their emotions well, they require assertive communication intervention using techniques such as Self-Affirmation, Journaling, and Role-Playing.

The essence of assertiveness is the ability to express oneself confidently. The Self-Affirmation technique helps individuals develop this skill by teaching them how to communicate their thoughts, feelings, and needs clearly and assertively without hurting others. This involves practicing the use of "I-statements" and avoiding blame language. The Journaling technique helps the subject identify thought and behavior patterns that hinder their assertiveness and find ways to overcome these challenges by increasing self-awareness. Role-Playing helps the subject build confidence and overcome their fear of communication by simulating social situations.

3.2 Discussion

Adolescents exhibit intense emotional characteristics, accompanied by self-regulation that is not yet fully matured, which often results in them being described as being in a "storm and stress" period (Usman et al., 2023). In this developmental stage, adolescents frequently experience socio-psychological tendencies such as self-isolation, which can significantly lead to alienation and social marginalization. This psychological phenomenon is characterized by the emergence of subjective perceptions of personal meaninglessness, accompanied by feelings of being marginalized and neglected within social interaction systems (Susanti, 2019).

In the psychosocial developmental phase, adolescents undergo a transformation in relational orientation, marked by differentiation from the family system and intensification of interactions with peer groups as alternative social entities (Majdi, 2024). Social interactions among adolescents generally manifest in the form of gatherings and joint activities, often within groups or gangs formed to fulfill shared interests (Chen, 2022). However, despite building relationships with peers, adolescents may face difficulties in establishing and maintaining healthy relationships, which can potentially lead to social isolation.

According to Istiqomah & Wahyuni (2023), deficiencies in emotional development have the potential to hinder an individual's psychosocial adaptation capacity, which can significantly affect the quality of social interactions and mental health. Such emotional dysregulation poses clinical risks in the form of psychological disorders, including depression and anxiety, which can disrupt an individual's psychological and social functioning. Furthermore, adolescents may tend to avoid challenging social situations, which exacerbates their inability to manage emotions. Within the framework of coping mechanisms, an individual's inability to regulate emotions adaptively tends to result in psychological responses such as avoidance strategies, which can further weaken the ability to resolve internal and external conflicts (Andriyani, 2019).

In line with field findings, a 15-year-old adolescent refused to attend school due to a less satisfactory social life. The subject experienced difficulties interacting with peers, as evident in the interaction pattern where they tended to follow the direction of others, showed little initiative in socializing, were quiet, limited their circle of friends, and exhibited sensitivity and an inability to express opinions effectively. Further investigation revealed that the subject's social life had been problematic since seventh grade, when they had no classmates and were often ostracized.

The psychological dynamics of rejection may potentially lead to emotional dysregulation in adolescents, which can result in affective escalation and aggressive behavior as a psychological compensation mechanism (Potterton, et al., 2022). According to contemporary epidemiological studies, social rejection presents a significant risk to adolescent mental health, with the potential to escalate into suicidal ideation and behaviors as a psychological response to social pressures (Lewis & Danese, 2023).

Another impact of the failure to fulfill emotional developmental tasks in adolescents is the low academic achievement experienced by the subject. Psychological test results on the subject indicated that they are categorized as a slow learner, with significant difficulty in completing nearly all subjects. This reflects that emotional challenges can hinder cognitive abilities and information absorption, which are crucial in the learning process. According to Kirkpatrick et al (2020), feelings of alienation can affect concentration and motivation to learn, potentially leading to significant academic underachievement. Based on current empirical evidence, emotional dysregulation in the negative domain—including anxiety, frustration, and depression—can cause significant disruptions in cognitive processes, directly affecting attention capacity, decreasing motivation to learn, and having a substantial impact on academic performance (Quílez-Robres et al., 2023).

Furthermore, unmanaged negative emotions can create a detrimental cycle in which low academic achievement further exacerbates the adolescent's emotional condition. A decrease in self-confidence and feelings of alienation from peers often intensify anxiety and depression, making it even more difficult for adolescents to participate in both academic and social activities. Research by Bowers et al (2022) indicates that adolescents who struggle with emotional regulation are more vulnerable to poor academic outcomes and an increased risk of behavioral problems at school. Therefore, it is crucial to identify and address these emotional issues with a comprehensive approach. Intervention strategies focusing on the development of emotional and social skills can help adolescents not only improve academic performance but also achieve better emotional well-being.

Interviews with the school's guidance counselor revealed that the main issue faced by the subject lies in their inability to express opinions assertively, indicating difficulty in behaving assertively. Additionally, the subject also showed signs of emotional exhaustion, reflected through verbal outbursts at home and a tendency to self-harm. To improve the subject's ability to express opinions confidently, say "no" comfortably, and effectively manage emotions, assertive communication interventions are needed, including techniques such as Self-Affirmation, Journaling, and Role-Playing.

Assertive communication training is a structured psychological intervention aimed at optimizing interpersonal communication competence through the development of constructive, dignified, and reciprocal self-expression strategies, focusing on enhancing an individual's ability to communicate personal needs, perspectives, and boundaries effectively and with dignity (Wheeler, 2021). Assertive communication is a psychosocial interaction modality that facilitates optimal self-expression, allowing individuals to communicate their internal constructs—cognitive, affective, and personal needs—constructively, with dignity, and reciprocally, without resorting to aggression or experiencing psychological subordination (Thompson R. A., 2021).

Given the difficulties faced by the subject, techniques such as Self-Affirmation, Journaling, and Role-Playing are deemed suitable for application. The Self-Affirmation technique can help the subject learn to express their needs and desires clearly without feeling pressured or fearing rejection. Additionally, Journaling serves as a reflection tool that allows the subject to identify thought and behavioral patterns that hinder assertiveness and helps them understand how their emotions affect their communication style.

Role-Playing provides an opportunity for the subject to practice social situations in a safe and controlled environment. By participating in simulations of relevant social situations, the subject can hone their communication skills, boost their confidence, and learn to overcome fears related to interacting with others. Research has shown that this practice-based approach can significantly enhance a child's ability to express themselves and interact with others (Kern & McClain, 2020).

Therefore, analyzing the need for assertive communication training becomes crucial to understand how effectively these techniques can be applied in improving communication skills in children facing emotional and behavioral challenges. Further research is required to evaluate the effectiveness of these training methods in the specific context of this population, with the aim of designing more effective and tailored intervention programs. With proper implementation, assertive communication training can serve not only as a tool to improve communication skills but also as a means to support the emotional and behavioral development of the subject, which in turn can enhance their functioning in social and academic environments.

4. CONCLUSION

This study indicates that adolescents with difficulties in emotional regulation and social skills tend to face challenges in interacting with peers, which may lead to social isolation and a decline in academic performance. These difficulties can be exacerbated by the inability to express opinions assertively, as well as feelings of alienation that affect concentration and learning motivation. Therefore, interventions focusing on the development of emotional and social skills, such as assertive communication training, are crucial in helping adolescents address emotional issues and enhance their social abilities. Techniques such as Self-Affirmation, Journaling, and Role-Playing have proven effective in teaching adolescents to manage emotions, communicate assertively, and build self-confidence. Further research is needed to evaluate the effectiveness of these methods in a broader context to design more targeted interventions. The application of assertive communication can not only improve adolescents' social and communication skills but also contribute to their emotional well-being and academic success.

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6. AUTHORS' NOTE

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