



The Role of Interpersonal Communication in The Family Environment of Persons With Disabilities: Case Study of Wajak Village, Malang Regency

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Abstract

Interpersonal communication between parents and children with disabilities is needed in fostering positive behavior in children. A quality relationship given by parents to their children, can determine how the resulting quality in the child's personality. This study aims to determine and describe how interpersonal communication between parents and children with disabilities in the family environment, especially in Ngembal Village, Wajak District, Malang Regency in shaping positive behavior. The type of research used by researchers is an explorative qualitative method. The results of this study indicate that from some of the information obtained, each parent has a different way of communicating and teaching something to children with disabilities, including some who communicate through sign language, some communicate with everyday language but are more emphasized. From the above differences, it does not rule out the possibility that children with disabilities can still communicate well in the family environment. This interpersonal communication built by parents is a form of how parents produce positive behavior for children with disabilities.

Keywords: Interpersonal Communication, Children with Disabilities, Parents

1. Introduction

Communication in the family is an activity carried out by the family to exchange information, activities and knowledge with the aim of strengthening the intimacy or togetherness of each family member. According to Frank (in Ramsey, Waithaka, & Gitimu, 2016) of the many relationships formed in life, the relationship between mother and child is the most important relationship. Mothers have a deeper attachment to their children than fathers because mothers who have been pregnant for nine months and give birth to children have an intense relationship.

The family environment is the smallest environment but has a tremendous influence on children. Therefore, the development of a child is seen from the communication applied in a family. Not having good communication will have various impacts, such as information cannot be conveyed properly and the relationship between parents and children is less harmonious (Novarita & Yamin, 2018). In addition, some children are born with physical and psychological imperfections that have been experienced since the beginning of development and or during growth, which are referred to as children with disabilities (children with special needs) (Faradina, 2016). According to Law No. 8/2016 on Persons with Disabilities, a person with a disability is any person who experiences physical, intellectual, mental, and or sensory limitations for a long period



of time who in interacting with the environment may experience obstacles and difficulties to participate fully and effectively with other citizens based on equal rights (Santoso & Apsari, 2017).

Interpersonal communication and interpersonal relationships in the family are important to understand because they influence each other. The occurrence of interpersonal communication between parents and children is expected to change the confidence, attitudes, and behavior of children in a family, especially the psychological state of children. A problem that often occurs in Indonesia is discrimination against children with disabilities. This affects the psychology of children with disabilities, namely not confident in carrying out their daily activities. There is often a negative stigma regarding people with disabilities, due to a lack of knowledge and public attention regarding people with disabilities.

Interpersonal communication can be said to be of high quality if it meets the five characteristics of effective interpersonal communication, namely openness, empathy, support, positive feelings and similarity (DeVito, 2008). From these five positive attitudes, it will be seen how the quality of interpersonal communication that exists between parents and children with disabilities. If the five positive attitudes have been implemented, it is hoped that a harmonious relationship will be created between parents and children so that parents as communicators get direct feedback during the interpersonal communication process they carry out with children (DeVito, 2008).

In addition, in communication there are two basic forms of communication that are commonly used, namely verbal and non-verbal communication. According to Suranto (2015) verbal communication is the process of sending messages with language, both oral and written. According to Liliweri (1997) non-verbal communication is the process of transmitting messages without the pronunciation of words, sometimes called body language, messages can be communicated through facial expressions, gestures, gaze, touch, posture and artifact objects which include clothing, hairstyles, jewelry, shoes, and other props. Meanwhile, the communication process is described as a process that connects the sender with the receiver of the message. The process consists of six steps, namely the desire to communicate, encoding by the communicator, sending messages, receiving messages, decoding by the communicant, and feedback (Suranto, 2015).

In this case, the limitations experienced by children with disabilities can affect their development, because of their motoric inability to receive auditory stimuli and how children interact in daily activities, children become difficult to control their emotions, lack of understanding of language, there are also problems in cognition, and limited social interaction (Widjaya, 2015: 09). The child's personality or attitude is formed from the way parents educate and the environment that influences each other, if the two influences are in line, then a positive personality occurs (Endah, 2011: 144).



The problems that occur with children with disabilities in Ngembal Village, Wajak Sub-district, Malang Regency, originate from the economic inability of families which has a negative impact on their children, especially since Ngembal Village is a disadvantaged village in Wajak Sub-district with the most people with disabilities. Disabilities that occur because many poor families do not meet their nutritional needs during pregnancy, patriarchal factors that make pregnant women experience stress, to viruses in pregnant women that cause disabilities in children, low levels of education, so there is no knowledge of how to care for children with disabilities, to discrimination against children with disabilities who are not allowed to socialize with their environment.

The above conditions indicate low social support provided by parents/family and the community as the child's closest environment. When viewed from aspects of social support such as instrumental support which is manifested in the fulfillment of children's physical needs such as food, clothing, shelter and health care, as well as financial provision for children. The case that arises is that sometimes ADD is put on the back burner. ADD is considered not to provide benefits, or cannot be developed, so the family prioritizes meeting the needs of their normal children. Informational support in the form of providing advice, counsel, guidance and instructions. This form of support in reality can be hampered due to the lack of knowledge of the mother and father, especially about the problems of disability and ADD parenting.

Similarly, emotional support and support for self-esteem will make children feel more comfortable, feel cared for and loved. For families who reject or cannot accept their child's disability, emotional support and support for self-esteem are very poorly received by the child, so the child feels unnoticed and even worse about their condition. The lack of knowledge of parents who have children with disabilities has a very bad impact, especially in terms of communication, which results in the child's psychology not developing, and makes the person with a disability underestimated in their environment so that they cannot get their rights.

Based on the above background, this study aims to provide in-depth insight into the dynamics of interpersonal communication in families of people with disabilities. This can help researchers in exploring individual experiences and the uniqueness of each situation. In addition, this research can also serve as a foundation to empower the local community by increasing their understanding of the importance of interpersonal communication in supporting families of people with disabilities.

2. Research Method

This research uses exploratory qualitative methods. Creswell (2014) explains that exploratory qualitative research is an approach to exploring and understanding the meaning of individuals or groups in responding to social or human problems. Carmel (in Howitt, 2010) also explains that exploratory qualitative research tries to generate information and knowledge in areas



that have previously been under-researched. This approach seeks basic knowledge and ideas in the new field. In the process, this exploratory qualitative research uses open questions and is complemented by observations and interviews. This exploratory qualitative research further uses a phenomenological design. Creswell (2014) explains that phenomenological research is a question design derived from philosophy and psychology in which the researcher describes an individual's lived experience of a phenomenon described by the subject or interviewee himself.

The primary subjects in this study are parents who have one speech impaired child and one Down syndrome child. The secondary subject is the family. The object of research is communication carried out by parents who have children with special needs in the family environment. In this study, the data validity check used by researchers is using reference materials from interviews and photos. And this research uses Creswell's (2014) explorative qualitative methods, namely narrative, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, and case study.

The data collection techniques carried out include 3 activities, namely (1) Interviews are conducted by asking questions to the subject. The form of questions given is closed or open questions. In-depth interviews are the main data collection technique in phenomenological research (Creswell, 2007). The aim is to describe the meaning of the phenomenon that occurs for several individuals who have experienced it. Interviews can be conducted repeatedly with the same subject to deepen understanding of the subject. In this study, the researcher used semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews will be conducted by asking open-ended questions, noting important points in the questions, recording the interview process, and transcribing the interview results (Creswell, 2007).

Questions will be given based on the basic guidelines that have been compiled previously. (2) Qualitative observation is a data collection technique where researchers make notes related to field conditions regarding the behavior and activities of subjects at the research location (Supratiknya, 2015). Creswell (2007) says that observation requires handling problems such as deception by the subject, managing the subject's impression, and the potential limits of the researcher in strange circumstances. Observation in this study will be carried out when interacting with the subject as well as when the subject interacts with his environment. (3) This literature review is taken from relevant journals and articles. These articles and journals are obtained from mass media such as the internet and supporting books. (4) Documentation in the form of data collection in the form of photos or videos which will be used to obtain all information related to the visual communication process.



3. Results and Discussions

Verbal Communication and Non Verbal Communication

Communication is closely related to human life, especially in the context of family and neighborhood environments. Each individual in a sphere has a different way of communicating with each other. Likewise, a child with a disability has a way of communicating with his parents. As parents of children with disabilities, of course there are many ways that parents communicate with them. This is because not all children with disabilities understand sign language. For example, when communicating with a child with a disability, even though the child can speak with verbal language, the parents must communicate slowly because of the condition of children with disabilities who have limited thinking functions and / or adaptive functions due to below-average intelligence levels, so that children with disabilities can understand what parents want. This is in line with the explanation of informant Mrs. Komang as the parent of Dani, a child with a disability:

“In communicating, I often use verbal language, and it is not impossible for me to use non-verbal language. In this case, my non-verbal language is not sign language because Dani and I are not yet fluent in sign language. Therefore, my husband and I may use non-verbal language, namely gestures that Dani can understand. For example, when eating, I practice eating by putting my hand to my mouth, which makes it easier for me to communicate with Dani. For Dani's own response, she usually nods her head or shakes her head when she refuses. This simple communication is enough to help me as a parent to know Dani's condition. The beginning was not easy but over time we were able to communicate well with Dani.” (Tina, interview August 11, 2024)

Every parent with a disability has a different way of communicating with their child. There are many challenges that they must face every day when communicating with them, not to mention that children with disabilities have erratic emotional levels. As with parents of children with Down syndrome. This was also conveyed by Mrs. Nurul, a parent of Kholilah, a child with Down syndrome, where she said that:

“For my communication with Kholilah, I use verbal language or daily language. This is because kholilah herself goes to a public school for other children. So I use verbal language or daily language. It's just that because children with Down syndrome have a high emotional level, I have to be more careful in communicating. It could be that if I am less patient in communicating with Kholilah, she becomes more rebellious and imitates the harsh words that come out of my mouth” (Tina, interview August 11, 2024).

At the time of the research, the activities were carried out on Sundays at 13.00 to 15.00 with the material of writing, sticking, composing and practicing batik ciprat. From this activity, it is hoped that it can hone motor and sensory abilities, especially for children with disabilities. From the results of research with participatory data collection and direct involvement in the community,



it was found that there were several children who were constrained in carrying out writing activities, sticking to arranging due to weak muscle conditions, to disability factors, in the process of ciprat batik there were several children who were still unable to control their emotions properly.

As parents of people with Down syndrome, their communication uses a lot of verbal language. This is because children with Down syndrome can actually communicate clearly as well as other children, it's just that they have emotional advantages that cannot be controlled easily and health that they have not perfectly obtained. Both have quite significant differences in terms of daily communication. It can be said that every child with disabilities has differences in communication. Dani uses non-verbal language while Kholilah uses verbal language.

Interpersonal Communication

According to DeVito (2008), interpersonal communication is the delivery of messages by one person and the reception of messages by another person or small group of people with various opportunities to provide immediate feedback. There are six stages that humans go through when communicating, but in reality humans as actors of interpersonal communication never think in too much detail about the communication process. This is because communication activities are routine activities that we always do everyday, so we no longer feel the need to arrange certain steps intentionally when communicating.

The Interpersonal communication process between parents and children with disabilities runs smoothly. This communication runs smoothly because of the openness of children with disabilities to parents, and vice versa. With communication that runs effectively, parents can understand the wishes of children with disabilities. So that it adds to the familiarity and closeness between parents and children with disabilities. This is in accordance with what was conveyed by the informant Mrs. Komang as the mother of Dani, a child with a hearing disability.

“Our communication as parents with Dani is fairly good, because what I say and what I do he can respond well, his response to what I say is also in accordance with what I tell him. I do this every day by trying to understand everything Dani wants, that way Dani and I become closer so that Dani understands what I say and I have also understood a lot of what Dani wants.” (Tina, interview August 11, 2024).

Communication that runs smoothly can be seen from the communication process that runs between the communicator and the communicant. Communication that runs smoothly will produce feedback from communicants. With feedback, communicators can evaluate the effectiveness of communication. Feedback is also the beginning of a new communication.



However, as parents who have children with Down Syndrome disabilities in communicating there may still be obstacles. One of them is as conveyed by Mrs. Nurul, the parent of Kholilah, a child with Down Syndrome disability:

“Actually, our communication with Kholilah goes well, but there are some obstacles where because of the difficulty of controlling Kholilah's emotions, she often rebels if we tell her. For example, if we don't let her play she often gets angry and that makes our communication sometimes hampered because we are waiting for her emotional state to improve” (Tina, interview August 11, 2024).

Interpersonal Communication Quality

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Openness

The quality of interpersonal communication is an important aspect, because if interpersonal communication is effective, then the input we want will be achieved. To measure the effectiveness of one of them we can see how openness of each individual. This attitude has a huge influence in fostering effective interpersonal communication. For example, as stated by Mrs. Nurul, a parent of a child with Down Syndrome:

“Usually after school I often ask Kholilah how she is doing at school like, what she learned today and Kholilah also likes to tell me about her friends and teachers at her school” (Tina, interview August 11, 2024).

With openness between parents and children with disabilities such as Down Syndrome, it is hoped that children will not feel neglected. They can be more comfortable and open about things that they think are not like other children.

Empathy

Feelings of empathy for children with disabilities need to be supported. Support here can be characterized by being willing to hear opposing views and willing to change positions if necessary. This can be seen when parents give advice or opinions to the child, then the child will



support and be willing to do what the mother says. An example of this is what Mrs. Komang, a parent of Dani with a disability, does:

“Dani is now able to work together well, sometimes when I ask him to help me get something by pointing my finger at the item I want Dani already understands and wants to help me get the item, it's just that he does it if he is not tired” (Tina, interview August 11, 2024).

Support

Supportive attitudes can be seen from children with disabilities who are willing to do what their parents want. However, in giving directions or orders to children with disabilities, parents must use techniques that are slow, gentle but still firm. This is because children with disabilities have unstable emotions. This is in line with Mrs. Nurul's statement as the parent of Kholilah, a child with Down Syndrome:

“Kholilah often helps me if I am doing something, usually when I cook she also likes to help even though sometimes the things she does are not right but I try to keep supporting her, so that she still does what she can” (Tina, interview August 11, 2024).

Positive Feelings

The positive attitude of a child with disabilities towards their parents can be seen through the positive encouragement a child gives to their parents, as well as the positive encouragement that parents provide to their child. This positive encouragement can take the form of rewards, praise, and the behavior of a child that parents hope for. Parents should have a positive attitude and feelings towards the situations they experience, so that they can maintain patience in communicating with their children and keep the harmony between parents and children intact. This is in line with the explanation from informant Mrs. Komang, the mother of Dani, a child with intellectual disabilities:

“Dani's development is now very good; he no longer fusses when learning with his friends. Like yesterday, when he was studying with the Omah Gembira team, he didn't look for me when I left the room. I always appreciate him because now he has the courage to learn on his own without being by my side.” (Tina, wawancara 11 Agustus 2024)

Similarity or equality

Interpersonal communication will be of higher quality when each individual acknowledges their similarities. When parents want to share something important with their child, the child will also want to share what they consider important with their parents. The existence of a silent acknowledgment between parents and children means that both parties are equally valuable and precious, and that each side has something important to discuss. The more open individuals are in



expressing themselves, the more accurate their perception of others and themselves becomes. This is as stated by Mrs. Nurul, the mother of Kholilah, a child with Down Syndrome:

"I often involve Kholilah in my activities these days, like taking her to study sessions, and I let her know where the study session is taking place today." I do this so that he feels equal in organizing with the people in his surroundings. "From that, he often expresses that he enjoys meeting and playing with new friends." (Tina, wawancara 11 Agustus 2024)

4. Conclusions

Based on the results of this study, it can be concluded that interpersonal communication between parents and children with disabilities depends on the verbal and non-verbal communication that takes place. This research highlights the importance of communication in building strong relationships between parents and children with disabilities. Communication is the foundation for a healthy and happy relationship between parents and children, including children with disabilities. With a better understanding of communication dynamics and consistent efforts, parents can create an environment that supports the optimal growth and development of their children.

Where this plays a very important role in the interaction between parents and children with disabilities. Despite various challenges, such as differences in cognitive and emotional abilities, effective communication can still be established through adjustments made by parents and children with disabilities, who need to adapt their communication methods according to the child's abilities and needs. Open and honest communication can also create strong bonds, and understanding a child's feelings and perspectives is crucial in building effective communication. In addition, providing unconditional support also helps children feel safe and confident. The communication process with children with disabilities requires a high level of patience.

Therefore, quality communication is beneficial not only for children but also for parents. Parents can feel more at ease and happy when they see their children growing and developing well. In addition, effective communication can also help parents seek support from the community and other professionals.



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