

Interpersonal Communication Between Shadow Teachers and Students with Special Needs in Inclusive Schools

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze interpersonal communication between students with special needs and shadow teachers in inclusive schools, specifically at State Junior High School 31 Surabaya. Using a qualitative descriptive approach with in-depth interviews and literature review techniques, this study involved six informants: five ninth-grade students with special needs and one special shadow teacher serving as the inclusion coordinator with a background in Guidance and Counseling. Data analysis was based on DeVito's humanistic approach theory, which encompasses openness, empathy, supportiveness, positiveness, and equality. The results indicate that the shadow teacher successfully established effective interpersonal communication by applying these five humanistic aspects, characterized by consistent informal communication, acting as a problem solver, using adaptive teaching methods, Sensitivity to students' emotional conditions, and implementing differentiated instruction. The interpersonal communication established has a positive impact on the psychological condition and learning motivation of students with special needs. On the other hand, the study also identified four communication barriers: physical barriers in the form of classroom noise; physiological barriers due to students' biological limitations; psychological barriers in the form of social anxiety; and semantic barriers resulting from the complexity of the subject matter.

Keywords: Interpersonal Communication, Humanistic Approach Theory, Shadow Teachers, Students with Special Needs, Inclusive School

INTRODUCTION

Communication is the primary foundation of every learning process. One of the most influential forms of communication in an educational context is interpersonal communication, which is the process of exchanging messages between two individuals or within a small group that allows for direct responses (Rahmadinata, 2020). According to DeVito (2016), interpersonal communication plays a crucial role in forming effective relationships through the exchange of both verbal and nonverbal messages. Furthermore, effective communication is not limited to merely conveying a message but also ensuring that the message is understood in accordance with its intended purpose. Therefore, the quality of interpersonal communication between teachers and students is a key factor in creating effective learning interactions.

In inclusive education, interpersonal communication is becoming increasingly important. This is because inclusive education places students with special needs in regular schools to learn alongside typical students, which requires shadow teachers to possess adaptive, empathetic, and responsive communication skills. Data from the 2020 Population Census Long Form published by the Central Statistics Agency (BPS) indicates that more than 75 percent of children with special needs in Indonesia have not yet gained access to adequate education. In the 13–15 age group (at the junior high school level), 28.93 percent of students with special needs have never attended school, in stark contrast to children without disabilities, where the figure is only 1.04 percent (Direktorat Statistik Kependudukan dan Ketenagakerjaan, 2024).

The Indonesian government has responded to this challenge through various regulations, including Minister of National Education Regulation No. 70 of 2009 on Inclusive Education and Law No. 8 of 2016 on Persons with Disabilities. In the city of Surabaya, the implementation of these policies has progressed rapidly. Starting in the 2024/2025 school year, the Surabaya City Education Office established an inclusive zoning policy requiring all public schools from early childhood education (PAUD) through junior high school (SMP) to admit students with special needs. It is recorded that 60 out of 402 junior high schools (SMP/MTs) in Surabaya are designated as inclusive schools, serving 1,092 students with special needs (Dinas Pendidikan Kota Surabaya, 2025).

However, this surge in numbers has triggered a shortage of Special Education Teachers (GPK). The high number of teachers retiring, approximately 1,700 in recent years has prompted the Surabaya Education Office to take emergency measures by providing training to general teachers, particularly Guidance and Counseling and classroom teachers (Jatimtoday.co.id, 2025). This situation affects the quality of support because these teachers do not hold official GPK certification.

State Junior High School 31 Surabaya has been a pilot school for inclusion since 2014 and serving 40 students with special needs. The characteristics of students with special needs at this school are highly varied, including intellectual disabilities, down syndrome, and slow learners. The fact that all five of the shadow teachers have backgrounds in Guidance and Counseling and Psychology, rather than Special Education, makes this school a real world example of the complex dynamics of interpersonal communication between shadow teachers and students with special needs within an inclusive school.

UNESCO (2020) emphasizes that creating an inclusive school climate and providing emotional support from teachers are crucial aspects of the success of inclusive education, as these play a vital role in fostering a sense of belonging and supporting student engagement. Conversely, rejection or a lack of acceptance from teachers and the school environment not only negatively impacts academic achievement and the inappropriateness of learning strategies but also has the potential to strain relationships and foster feelings of isolation among students with special needs. This phenomenon underscores the importance of periodic evaluation of teachers' attitudes and interaction patterns at school to minimize the risk of social alienation and ensure that all students feel accepted within the inclusive environment.

Therefore, this study aims to analyze the dynamics of interpersonal communication between students with special needs and shadow teachers in an inclusive school setting, identify the communication strategies applied based on DeVito's (2016) humanistic approach, and examine the communication barriers that emerge during the interaction process at State Junior High School 31 Surabaya.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Interpersonal Communication

Interpersonal communication is the process of conveying and receiving messages that takes place between two individuals or within a small group, characterized by direct, real-time responses (Rahmadinata, 2020). DeVito (2016) defines it as the process of sending and receiving messages that produces effects and allows for immediate feedback. This communication focuses not only on the transmission of messages but also on how messages are understood, interpreted, and given meaning by the individuals involved.

Interpersonal communication serves multiple purposes in relational contexts. DeVito (2016) identifies five primary goals of interpersonal communication: *to learn*, *to relate*, *to influence*, *to play*, and *to help*. In educational settings, the goals of *to relate* and *to help* are particularly salient, as teachers must build meaningful relationships and provide individualized guidance for students whose communicative and cognitive characteristics vary significantly. This relational dimension of interpersonal communication is especially critical in inclusive education, where the diversity of student needs demands a consistently adaptive and empathetic communicative approach.

In inclusive education, interpersonal communication must be adaptive because every student with special needs has different conditions, whether in terms of cognitive, language, or social-emotional abilities. Mismatches in message delivery can lead to differences in interpretation and barriers to interaction that impact the academic achievement and psychological well-being of students with special needs.

Several empirical studies confirm the centrality of adaptive interpersonal communication in educational contexts, particularly for students with special needs. Ade et al. (2022) examined teacher communication with Down Syndrome students in a state special school and found that effective teachers systematically adapt both verbal messages, using simplified language and iterative repetition and nonverbal channels, including gesture, facial expression, and physical modeling, to match each student's cognitive and emotional profile. Rohman et al. (2023) similarly established that in non-traditional educational settings, sustained two-way communication calibrated to the learner's comprehension level is the decisive differentiator between successful and unsuccessful instruction. Elga et al. (2017) further demonstrated that the quality of interpersonal communication between academic guidance teachers and students, particularly when characterized by openness and active listening, directly influences students' academic performance and sense of belonging in the school environment. Additionally, Lando et al. (2021) showed that consistent interpersonal communication in a learning context strengthens relational bonds and fosters children's motivation to learn in an online learning environment at home. Taken together, these studies affirm that in educational settings involving students with complex and diverse needs, interpersonal communication functions not merely as a conduit for information but as the foundational relational infrastructure through which learning, trust, and psychological safety are simultaneously constructed.

Humanistic Approach Theory

DeVito (2016) states that the effectiveness of interpersonal communication can be analyzed through a humanistic approach encompassing five aspects: (1) Openness, which refers to an individual's willingness to be honest, transparent, and responsive; (2) Empathy, which refers to the ability to understand others' feelings and perspectives; (3) Supportiveness, which refers to the creation of a safe and non-judgmental communication environment; (4) Positiveness, which refers to constructive views and feelings toward

oneself, the conversation partner, and the situation; and (5) Equality, which refers to the recognition that every individual possesses equal value and makes equally important contributions. These five aspects are interrelated and play a role in creating meaningful interactions, minimizing misunderstandings, and supporting the formation of quality communication relationships between individuals.

The relevance of this humanistic framework has been validated across various interpersonal communication contexts. Berliana et al. (2022) confirms that in a coach-athlete relationship, the five humanistic qualities, particularly empathy, openness, and equality, play a significant role in building trust and enhancing motivation, as communication functions not merely as an instructional tool but as a relational medium. Similarly, Arianti (2025) demonstrates that in a caregiving context, the application of supportiveness and positiveness by caregivers resulted in cooperative and emotionally responsive behavior from individuals under their care. Both findings affirm the broad explanatory power of DeVito's humanistic framework and justify its application in the present study, which examines the similarly relational and asymmetric communication between shadow teachers and students with special needs in an inclusive school.

Communication Barriers

DeVito (2016) identifies four types of communication barriers: (1) Physical barriers, such as external disturbances like noise; (2) Physiological barriers, stemming from the communicator's physical condition, such as speech or hearing impairments; (3) Psychological Barriers, related to mental states such as anxiety and prejudice; and (4) Semantic Barriers, resulting from differences in the interpretation of linguistic symbols.

In inclusive educational settings, these four barriers manifest in particularly complex ways due to the diverse characteristics of students with special needs. Ade et al. (2022) document that teachers in special education frequently encounter physiological barriers, specifically, the limited verbal articulation capacity of students with down syndrome, which compel them to rely extensively on nonverbal cues, gestural communication, and repeated message delivery to ensure comprehension. Semantic barriers also arise not merely from linguistic differences but from the cognitive gap between the instructional language used and the mental age of students with special needs, rendering vocabulary selection and message simplification essential communicative competencies for shadow teachers. Psychological barriers, including social anxiety and initial reticence, are likewise prevalent and tend to diminish gradually as the intensity and quality of positive interaction increases over time.

Inclusive Education and the Role of Shadow Teachers

Inclusive education is essentially an educational system that provides opportunities for all students, including those students with special needs, to learn together in a regular school setting without discrimination (Sapon-Shevin, 2007). Within this inclusive ecosystem, the role of the shadow teachers is highly strategic. Shadow teachers not only act as learning facilitators and mediators of social interaction but also serve as pillars of emotional support for students with special needs, helping them adapt to the dynamics of a regular classroom.

More comprehensively, Sari and Rudiyaniti in (Rahmaniar, 2016) explain that a shadow teachers responsibilities encompass a broad and multi-layered scope of tasks. These tasks include managing specialized administrative duties, conducting periodic assessments, and developing Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) tailored to the

students with special needs unique characteristics. Additionally, they are responsible for providing inclusive instructional support, managing the use of assistive devices, and organizing counseling services for students with special needs families. Through the integration of these roles, the shadow teachers serves as a critical bridge that actualizes the fundamental principles of inclusive education at the operational classroom level.

Theoretical Framework

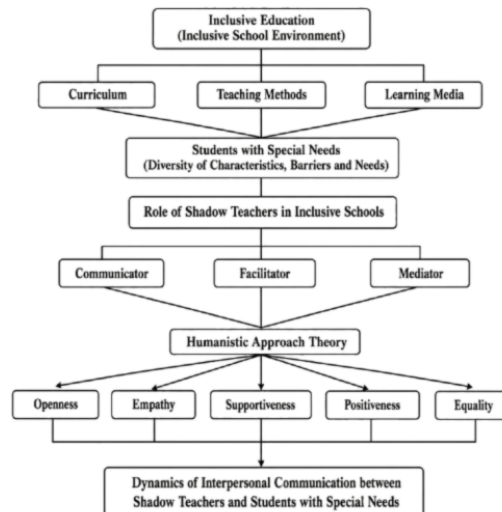


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

Inclusive education at State Junior High School 31 Surabaya, as a Child Friendly School with a full inclusive model, creates heterogeneous classrooms accommodating approximately 40 students with special needs facing complex physical, cognitive, and emotional challenges. This reality demands the reconstruction of an adaptive instructional system through curriculum modifications relevant to students with special needs cognitive capacities, flexible teaching methods, and the optimization of adaptive media and resource room facilities to bridge their sensory and cognitive limitations.

Amid the shortage of formally trained special education teachers, the role of support in this school has been delegated to teachers qualified in Guidance and Counseling (BK) and Psychology. This situation requires support teachers to optimize their adaptive interpersonal communication competencies through three strategic roles: as facilitators who develop Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) tailored to students with special needs mental age, as mediators of socio-emotional and academic interactions with the school environment, and as adaptive communicators capable of aligning communication codes and messages.

To analyze these dynamics, this study employs Joseph A. DeVito's Humanistic Approach to Interpersonal Communication, which measures the effectiveness of interactions through five key aspects. First, openness is manifested through the creation of a safe space for students with special needs to express their learning difficulties. Second, empathy utilizes the teacher's psychological background to understand the emotional state of students with special needs. Third and fourth, supportiveness and positiveness are implemented through the provision of motivation, rewards, and instructional patience. Fifth, equality is manifested through the fulfillment of fair learning rights, such as differentiating the difficulty level of assessments by providing Type A, B, and C exams tailored to the individual capacities of students with special needs.

This conceptual framework demonstrates that the application of DeVito's five humanistic qualities by non-special shadow teachers serves as a key instrument for minimizing various communication barriers (physical, psychological, and semantic) in the resource room. It is this dynamic of humanistic and effective interpersonal communication that constitutes the primary focus of this research, as well as a critical determinant in realizing an accommodative learning process and supporting the sustainability of a child-friendly, inclusive school ecosystem.

METHODS

This study employs a qualitative descriptive approach aimed at describing and analyzing research findings, though it is not intended to draw broader conclusions (Sugiyono, 2023). This approach was chosen because it allows the researcher to deeply understand the phenomena experienced by the subjects through their experiences, actions, and interactions regarding daily activities. Qualitative research aims to understand phenomena in depth through explanations tailored to field conditions (Moleong, 2017). This approach is grounded in the post-positivist paradigm, which positions the researcher as the primary subject of data collection.

The research was conducted at State Junior High School 31 Surabaya in April 2026. The location was selected through purposive sampling because this school has been a pioneer in inclusive education since 2014, with a large number of students with special needs (40 students) and a diversity of types of needs. Research subjects were determined using purposive sampling. The primary subjects were five students with special needs in the 9th grade who actively participated in resource room and were able to communicate both verbally and non-verbally. The five student informants represent a range of special need categories: three students with mild intellectual disabilities, one student with moderate intellectual disability, and one student with slow learner characteristics. This intentional diversity was designed to capture the full spectrum of communication experiences within the inclusive classroom. The supporting subject was one shadow teacher with a background in guidance and counseling who had actively supported 9th-grade students with special needs for at least one semester and served as the school's inclusion coordinator.

Primary data were collected through semi-structured interviews (in-depth interviews). The researcher used an interview guide based on DeVito's five humanistic aspects and four types of communication barriers. The interviews were conducted in person within the school setting. Secondary data were obtained through a literature review comprising books, scientific journals, and relevant educational policies.

This study employs the data analysis model by Matthew B. Miles and A. Michael Huberman, as described by Sarosa (2021), which encompasses three stages: (1) data reduction, involving the selection and focusing of relevant data; (2) data presentation in the form of descriptive narratives and interview excerpts; and (3) drawing and verifying conclusions. Data validity was ensured through source triangulation by comparing information from all informants and relating it to the literature.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the in-depth interviews, interpersonal communication between students with special needs and the shadow teacher took place intensively, particularly in the Resource Room (Ruang Pintar) as the primary space for academic and emotional interaction. Findings are analyzed through two main aspects: (1) the effectiveness of

interpersonal communication across five dimensions of DeVito's humanistic approach, and (2) communication barriers that emerged during the interaction process.

Table 1: Profile of Research Informants

Informant	Initial	Age	Gender	Special Need/Role
1.	N.A.Y.	15 Years	Female	Mild Intellectual Disability
2.	H.T.D.Z.	15 Years	Female	Slow Learner
3.	M.Z.A.I.	16 Years	Male	Mild Intellectual Disability
4.	A.P.	16 Years	Female	Mild Intellectual Disability
5.	N.W.S.	15 Years	Female	Moderate Intellectual Disability
6.	S.H.	34 Years	Female	Inclusive Coordinator & Shadow Teacher

Informal Communication as the Foundation of Interpersonal Relationships

The first finding indicates that interpersonal communication between shadow teachers and students with special needs at State Junior High School 31 Surabaya does not only occur within the context of formal learning but is also actively fostered through informal communication beyond academic needs. Shadow teachers build interactions through casual conversations, jokes, and light-hearted chats about the daily lives of students with special needs, both in the classroom and outside of class hours. This finding reflects the aspect of openness according to DeVito (2016).

Informant 1 stated, "We usually talk about lessons and problems in a polite and respectful way, and when there's an issue, we usually talk it out too." Informal communication even continues outside of school hours via WhatsApp. The inclusion coordinator (Ms. S.H.) explained, "Even long before we ask, the children usually reach out to us on their own if something isn't right." Consistent informal communication has been shown to reduce the psychological barriers for students with special needs to open up.

This phenomenon aligns with the Social Penetration Theory proposed by Altman and Taylor in (Almeilia Aghina Nur Annisa, 2026), which explains that interpersonal relationships develop through gradual self disclosure, moving from general topics to more personal ones. The intensity of the interactions maintained by the shadow teachers every day is a key factor influencing the closeness of the relationship, as confirmed by informant 6, "Perhaps the reason we've grown closer is that spending so much time teaching her has certainly influenced the closeness with the shadow teachers."

The Shadow Teacher as a Problem Solver

The shadow teachers does not merely fulfill an academic role but also actively serves as the first point of contact to receive, listen to, and address the social issues of students with special needs. This role reflects two humanistic aspects identified by DeVito (2016): a supportiveness and empathy.

The bullying incidents experienced by Informant 1 and Informant 2 were directly addressed by the shadow teacher by summoning the perpetrators to the guidance counseling room and relocating the victims to the smart room. Informant 1 stated, "The shadow teacher's response was to call the children to the guidance counseling room and follow up on the matter. After that incident, I studied in the resource room so I wouldn't get bullied." This responsive action fosters a deep sense of safety for students with special needs.

The shadow teachers also address behavioral issues such as truancy (as experienced by informant 4) through a non-judgmental counseling approach. Informant 4 stated, "When I was counseled, I didn't feel angry but rather accepted it as if it were indeed my mistake." This approach aligns with DeVito's (2016) concept of supportiveness, which emphasizes a safe and descriptive communication environment, rather than a judgmental one.

Additionally, the aspect of empathy is evident in how the shadow teachers understands and responds to the emotional states of each student with special needs. The shadow teachers does not merely listen passively but actively identifies the needs of students with special needs, including helping those who struggle to express their feelings, as experienced by Informant 3, "When I was having trouble with my schoolwork, I didn't say anything, but the shadow teachers helped me express my difficulty so that I could be assisted later."

Adaptive Learning Methods

The shadow teachers apply three main approaches in adaptive learning methods: (1) the use of repetitive methods, (2) the use of concrete learning media, and (3) simplification of language. Together, these three approaches reflect the aspects of equality and openness in interpersonal communication.

Regarding the repetitive method, the shadow teachers consistently reviews the material down to the level of spelling out each letter for students with special needs who cannot yet read. Informant 6 stated, "We have to spell it out letter by letter, especially since they can't read yet, so many of them can only look and copy." Meanwhile, concrete learning materials are used to bridge abstract concepts, such as using money for math and making a wall clock from cardboard to learn how to read an analog clock. Through this approach, the shadow teachers ensures that every student with special needs has equal access to understanding the material, regardless of the differences in their abilities. This approach aligns with the principle of equality as defined by DeVito (2016), who emphasizes that equality does not mean treating all individuals identically, but rather acknowledging that every individual holds equal value and makes equally important contributions to the communication process.

Language simplification is applied as the guiding principle of the shadow teacher's communication. Informant 6 explained, "We must use simple language, language they can understand and explain things thoroughly until they grasp the concept." This finding aligns with the research by Ade et al. (2022), which shows that teachers who successfully establish effective communication with students with special needs are those who can adapt communication systems, both verbal and non verbal to the characteristics and cognitive capacities of each individual.

Building Interpersonal Closeness through Emotional Support

Interpersonal closeness is built through three complementary dimensions: physical touch, emotional attention, and consistency of interaction. These three dimensions reflect the aspects of empathy and positiveness in DeVito's (2016) theory.

Simple physical touch, such as rubbing the back, is applied adaptively according to the needs and comfort of each student with special needs. Informant 1 stated, "Usually, the shadow teachers also often rub my back to calm me down and make me feel comfortable." Emotional attention through routine greetings has a significant psychological impact, especially for informant 5, who shared, "I really feel cared for, you know, because at home, hardly anyone asks me things like that."

Consistent interaction has proven to transform the relationship from one that was initially tense into an open one. According to informant 2, "At first, I felt scared and shy because I didn't know anyone, but now that we've gotten to know each other and feel comfortable, I'm more confident speaking up." This change aligns with Altman and Taylor's Social Penetration Theory in (Almeilia Aghina Nuur Annisa, 2026), which posits that interpersonal relationships develop as trust increases.

Differentiated Instruction and Building Interpersonal Closeness

The shadow teachers classifies students with special needs into three types (A, B, C) based on learning ability to determine the appropriate question types, methods, and media. This system reflects the aspect of equality according to DeVito (2016). Informant 6 explained, "For exams like that, we create three types of questions: type A for students who are capable and can still keep up; type B for those who haven't mastered reading yet but can still be supported and guided; and type C for those who truly cannot do it at all." Nevertheless, when students with special needs face difficulties, the shadow teachers provides equal attention. Informant 2 stated, "When I and my friends are having trouble, we're all helped, we're not treated differently."

Furthermore, all student informants with special needs felt they were treated fairly, as stated by Informant 5, "The shadow teachers treats everyone fairly, for example, when I was being noisy and one of my friends was also being noisy, both of us were reprimanded, no favoritism." This finding confirms that appropriate differentiation of learning content actually strengthens, rather than weakens, the sense of equality and fairness felt by students with special needs.

Impact of Interpersonal Relationships on Psychological Well-being and Learning Motivation

Positive interpersonal communication has a significant impact on the psychological well-being and learning motivation of students with special needs. These effects include a growing sense of being valued, a sense of security, self-confidence, reduced psychological stress, and increased motivation. These findings reflect the aspect of positiveness in DeVito's (2016) theory.

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This finding is supported by Self Determination Theory, as outlined by Deci & Ryan in (Indra Wahyudi, 2026), which states that intrinsic motivation develops optimally when the need for relatedness is met. Warm interpersonal relationships between shadow teachers and students with special needs fulfill this need for relatedness, fostering the growth of intrinsic motivation to learn. When analyzed through the perspective of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs in (Tika Dwi Aprilia, 2025), the resource room functions as an environment that fulfills the needs for safety and belonging for students with special needs who previously experienced bullying in regular classrooms.

Furthermore, the support teacher actively utilizes simple rewards as a strategy to maintain the enthusiasm and motivation for learning among students with special needs. Informant 6, the shadow teacher, confirmed that support teachers intentionally design moments for awarding rewards as part of a strategy to foster a positive learning atmosphere. This was expressed in the following statement, “Actually, there are certain days when we hold competitions or games like that. The rewards might not be something expensive, like getting a snack or something just that makes them happy.”

Communication Barriers in Inclusive Learning

The study identified four communication barriers based on DeVito’s (2016) classification that consistently emerged in interactions between support teachers and students with special needs. For the first, physical barriers stem from noise in the smart classroom caused by the behavior of other students with special needs. According to informant 1, “I’ve had trouble hearing when my classmates were noisy at the start of class.” This barrier is situational and heavily influenced by the presence of the shadow teachers, as the resource room becomes more manageable when the shadow teachers is present.

Second, physiological barriers stem from the physical limitations of students with special needs, such as unclear speech articulation. Informant 6 explained, “Usually, with physiological barriers, their speech isn’t always clear during communication, so I make sure to clarify it.” These barriers extend to the digital realm, where students with special needs often struggle to make their WhatsApp voice notes understandable, and this has even led to serious miscommunications.

Third, psychological barriers arise from the feelings of shame and fear experienced by students with special needs, particularly at the beginning of their relationship with their shadow teachers. Informant 3 revealed a tendency to keep difficulties to themselves and share them with friends rather than directly with the teacher. These barriers are not permanent and can be overcome as the intensity of positive interactions increases.

The last one, semantic barriers are triggered by the large number of subjects that students with special needs must understand simultaneously. Informant 1 stated that they often felt confused due to the rapid changes in subject contexts, while informant 2 felt overwhelmed by the sheer number of subjects. These barriers are directly related to the limited information processing capacity of students with special needs.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that interpersonal communication between students with special needs and their shadow teachers at State Junior High School 31 Surabaya is intense, adaptive, and oriented toward the individual needs of students with special needs. Shadow teachers successfully established effective interpersonal communication by applying the five aspects of DeVito’s (2016) humanistic approach: (1) Openness is fostered through consistent informal communication both inside and outside the school; (2) Empathy is demonstrated through sensitivity to the emotional state of students with special needs, as reflected in facial expressions and behavior; (3) A supportive attitude is demonstrated through an active role as a problem solver in addressing social issues; (4) A positive attitude is implemented through the provision of simple rewards and interactive moments; and (5) Equality is applied through adaptive learning methods and proportional instructional differentiation.

The impacts of the interpersonal communication established include the development of a sense of being valued, a sense of safety, self-confidence, reduced psychological stress, and increased learning motivation among students with special needs. On the other hand, the study identified four communication barriers: physical (classroom noise), physiological (biological limitations of students with special needs), psychological (social anxiety), and semantic (subject complexity). Shadow teachers respond to these barriers adaptively and creatively, affirming their role not only as conveyors of information but also as responsive managers of communication barriers in inclusive education.

Theoretically, this study reinforces the relevance of DeVito's (2016) Humanistic Approach in inclusive special education and expands the application of Social Penetration Theory by demonstrating that consistent informal self-disclosure, including through WhatsApp, can effectively erode psychological barriers in students with special needs. Practically, the humanistic communication competencies of guidance and counseling teachers can serve as an effective compensatory bridge amid the shortage of certified Special Education Teachers in Surabaya; these findings can inform the development of shadow teacher training modules by the Surabaya City Education Office. The resource room has also proven to be a vital instrument for meeting students with special needs psychological needs for safety and belonging, particularly for those who experienced bullying in regular classrooms. Future research should explore these dynamics through mixed-method designs on a broader scale, conduct comparative studies between certified and non-certified shadow teachers, examine digital communication patterns of students with special needs, and track the longitudinal impact of warm interpersonal relationships on students with special needs transitions to higher levels of education or the community environment.

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