Interpersonal Communication, Empathy, and Learning Motivation of Indonesian University Students

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to investigate the effect that interpersonal communication and empathy have on boosting the learning motivation of university students in Indonesia. In order to collect data, a qualitative descriptive approach was utilized, and interviews and observations were conducted with five lecturers. A sense of belonging, emotional connection, and understanding are all fostered within the learning community through successful interpersonal communication, according to the research. Empathy, which is an emotive dimension, enables lecturers to perceive the feelings and difficulties that students are experiencing in their learning, which in turn allows them to create an environment that is encouraging and maintains motivation. It was discovered that the synergy between communication and empathy not only promotes academic engagement but also promotes moral and social qualities such as respect, cooperation, and tolerance. This study can be applied to teaching techniques that use empathy-based communication in order to increase motivation and learning results. The study concludes that empathic communication acts as an important pedagogical strategy for promoting both the cognitive and affective growth of students.

Keywords: Communication, Emotional, Empathy, Interpersonal, Motivation

INTRODUCTION

In the realm of higher education, academic performance is not just dictated by students' cognitive skills; it is significantly shaped by emotional and social factors as well. The emotional parts, including being aware of your feelings, having empathy, and being motivated, work with intellectual engagement to make students more willing to participate, work together, and keep working hard in school (Petrovici & Dobrescu, 2014). The social aspect, on the other hand, stresses that engagement and creating relationships are important parts of learning. When students are emotionally linked and socially involved, they are more likely to internalize learning goals and acquire a genuine interest in their studies (Decety & Yoder, 2016). So, combining emotional and social abilities with cognitive skills makes learning complete and more meaningful.

Interpersonal communication is very important in this process since it is the basis for good interactions between students and teachers and between students and their classmates (Xie & Derakhshan, 2021). Students can share ideas, hear other people's points of view, and clear up misunderstandings in positive ways by talking to each other openly, respectfully, and with empathy. Good communication helps people in the academic community understand each other better, feel more connected to each other, and feel like they belong (Joe et al., 2017; Sasabone et al., 2024). These are all things that greatly increase motivation and engagement. When interpersonal communication is encouraged in schools, it helps children grow in many ways, including their cognitive abilities, emotional strength, ability to work with others, and overall academic performance.

Communication represents an indirect interaction between the sender and the recipient of a communication (Mayfield et al., 2015). Its objective is to guarantee that the desired message is adequately transmitted and comprehended by both parties. From the initial stages of childhood, individuals begin to cultivate communication abilities through interactions with their surroundings. These skills progressively enhance, influenced by the individual's expanding experiences. In an educational context, communication activities are vital for fostering interaction between lecturers and students to effectively attain the desired learning objectives.

Empathy, as an emotional aspect of interpersonal communication, helps students see things from other people's points of view, control their emotional responses, and have meaningful interactions with other students and in class (Decety & Yoder, 2016). In higher education, empathy connects cognitive knowledge and emotional intelligence, which helps students interact with their teachers and classmates in a kinder and respectful way. By recognizing and valuing different points of view, empathetic students learn how to read signals beyond what is spoken, taking into account feelings, intentions, and the subtleties of the situation (Aldrup et al., 2022). This emotional sensitivity not only

makes the classroom more peaceful, but it also encourages acceptance and respect for others, which are important parts of a good and helpful learning community.

Students who show empathy are also more likely to take part in debates, think about what others say, and make friends with other students who help them learn. Empathy helps students get out of their own heads and work together, listen actively, and have good conversations (Goroshit & Hen, 2016). As a result, empathic students tend to stay motivated to learn since they feel emotionally engaged in the process and encouraged by their classmates. Empathy not only enhances relationships between people, but it also sparks intrinsic motivation, engagement, and long-term academic achievement in higher education settings.

The shift to hybrid and digital learning environments in Indonesia has made it harder for university students (Dewi & Hasmirati, 2022), to keep in touch with each other and develop empathy. Because people do not engage with each other as often in online contexts, there are fewer chances for spontaneous conversation, emotional expression, and social bonding (Main et al., 2017; Ratnadewi, 2019). These things are important for creating trust and understanding. When most communication happens through digital media, students may feel alone, disconnected, or less involved. These circumstances underscore the necessity for educators and institutions to design ways that safeguard the humanistic dimensions of learning, guaranteeing that empathy, collaboration, and social presence continue to be fundamental elements of the educational experience, notwithstanding technology mediation.

It is important to understand how these socio-emotional aspects affect learning motivation because motivation is a key factor in academic performance and persistence (Balaskas et al., 2023). When students feel emotionally supported and linked to their peers in a learning community, they are more likely to be motivated to learn and committed to it (Devitriana & Wijirahayu, 2025). On the other hand, a lack of sympathetic interaction and interpersonal engagement might cause less enthusiasm, less participation, and worse academic results. Consequently, examining the relationship among interpersonal communication, empathy, and motivation within Indonesia's developing digital education environment provides significant insights for creating innovative, supportive, and emotionally attuned pedagogical interventions that improve both student welfare and academic performance (Dewi et al., 2024).

Some previous studies have found that this study may inform educational approaches that promote justice, morality, and fairness if replicated. Instead of emphasizing emotional sharing with others' misfortune, which can cause personal distress and not motivate justice for all, perspective taking and reasoning may be more effective (Decety & Yoder, 2016). Educators with effective communication skills will foster a more successful teaching and learning environment for students. Conversely, someone possessing exceptional

communication abilities can exert influence over others, and proficient communication tactics will result in success. Communication skills and job motivation significantly impact the teaching domain. The teacher's communication style can affect students' interest and attitude, fostering an engaging and educational environment (Duta et al., 2015). To take a look at some examples of exceptional leaders using motivational language in their everyday lives (Mayfield et al., 2015).

The function of communication and empathy in education is receiving an increasing amount of attention; nevertheless, there is a lack of knowledge regarding how these aspects interact to influence the learning motivation of students in the setting of higher education in Indonesia. There is a gap in our understanding of how students' own interpersonal communication and empathy help to maintain their motivation, in contrast to the majority of the previous studies, which concentrate on the communication skills of teachers or general motivating tactics. This divide becomes more apparent when educational institutions move toward hybrid and digital learning, which frequently results in a reduction in the amount of emotional connection and social engagement.

Furthermore, the purpose of this study is to investigate how interpersonal communication and empathy influence learning motivation in a context where this is still very low. To fill that void by investigating the connection between these characteristics to offering advice on how to create learning environments that are more stimulating and encouraging.

METHOD

This study utilized a qualitative descriptive research approach to examine the dynamics of interpersonal communication, empathy, and learning motivation among lecturers in higher education. The qualitative descriptive approach was selected for its capacity to provide a comprehensive, nuanced, and contextual comprehension of participants' actual experiences, free from stringent theoretical limitations (Mezmir, 2020). This study sought to elucidate how lecturers perceive and utilize interpersonal communication and empathy to augment student motivation in the teaching and learning process.

The study was conducted in the Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Universitas Islam Makassar, with the participation of five lecturers chosen via purposive sampling. The criteria for selection were: (1) possessing at least five years of teaching experience, (2) actively employing student-centered instructional methodologies, and (3) a willingness to collaborate and share experiences candidly. This group was deemed representative in offering profound and contemplative views regarding interpersonal dynamics and motivational techniques within the university educational context.

The principal tool in this study was the researcher, supplemented by semi-structured interview guidelines. The interview protocol included open-ended questions concentrating on three principal areas: (1) lecturers' communication

patterns and strategies during student interactions, (2) manifestations and practices of empathy within classroom or mentoring settings, and (3) perceived impacts of these socio-emotional factors on students' learning motivation. To make the data richer, the interviews were followed up with observation notes and document analysis, including class interaction recordings, feedback notes, or reflective diaries.

We collected data by doing in-depth interviews with each speaker that lasted around 45 to 60 minutes. Depending on the participants' schedules, these interviews may be done in person or online. All interviews were audio-recorded with consent and subsequently transcribed verbatim. Field notes were recorded to document non-verbal clues, emotional nuances, and environmental specifics during the interaction.

Researchers used the Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., & Saldaña, J, (2014) approach for data analysis, which involves data reduction, data display, and drawing and checking conclusions. During the data reduction phase, the researcher classified and organized the transcribed data to find important patterns and themes that came up again and again in the areas of communication, empathy, and motivation. The data display stage required putting the categorized data into thematic matrices so that relationships could be seen and new insights could be understood. The conclusion-drawing phase concentrated on amalgamating facts to formulate significant conclusions regarding the integration of empathy and communication by lecturers to enhance students' learning motivation.

Interpersonal communication, empathy, and learning motivation were taken into consideration by the tools that were utilized in this research project. Reflective field notes, classroom observations, and semi-structured interviews were the methods that were utilized to collect the data. Through the use of verbal and nonverbal behaviors, such as giving clear explanations, actively listening to students, and providing motivated feedback, the interpersonal communication instrument investigated how lecturers communicate with students. By focusing on both the cognitive and affective dimensions of empathy, the empathy instrument evaluated the lecturers' capacity to comprehend and respond to the feelings and obstacles that students were experiencing in their learning. The learning motivation instrument, on the other hand, explored how communication and empathy influence the passion, engagement, and perseverance of students in their educational pursuits. In both in-person and online learning environments, these tools, when taken as a whole, offered a comprehensive understanding of the ways in which the communicative and empathic behaviors of lecturers influence the motivation and participation of students in the classroom.

The study included various validation procedures to ensure trustworthiness and reliability, including triangulation of data sources (interviews, observations, and documents), member checking by verifying interpretations with participants, and

the maintenance of an audit record of the research process (Elliott, 2018). Ethical principles were upheld during the study, safeguarding confidentiality, assuring voluntary participation, and honoring participants' viewpoints.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study identified three principal themes elucidating the role of interpersonal communication and empathy in enhancing learning motivation among lecturers at the Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Universitas Islam Makassar. These topics encompass: (1) interpersonal communication as a conduit to learning engagement, (2) empathy as an emotional foundation for teaching, and (3) the amalgamation of communication and empathy as catalysts for learning motivation.

Understanding the Role of Interpersonal Communication in Fostering Learning Engagement

Strong interpersonal interaction is a vital pillar that facilitates student involvement and active participation within the learning process, according to each and every one of the five lecturers, who were in complete and utter agreement with this statement. Specifically, they highlighted that communication in the classroom should go beyond the simple sharing of knowledge; it should also be supportive, respectful, and interactive in nature. Students can feel confident enough to share their viewpoints, express doubts, and seek clarification without fear of being judged when communication between teachers and students is founded on mutual respect and empathy, as stated by the lecturers. This contributes to the development of an environment that is more open and collaborative. Both intellectual curiosity and a sense of trust are important for meaningful learning experiences, and such an atmosphere nurtures both of these qualities in its inhabitants.

In their presentations, lecturers discussed how effective communication enables them to better comprehend the requirements, feelings, and difficulties that students have in their educational development.

"When I speak to my students with respect and openness, they are not hesitant to share their ideas or admit when they do not understand something," said one lecturer (Lecturer 2), explaining the phenomenon. In addition, another lecturer stated:

"I can better appreciate what my students genuinely require and how they feel about the course through open communication" (Lecturer 4).

These comments bring to light the fact that communication requires not only the transmission of information but also the development of connections that enable students to take an active part in their own education.

Furthermore, the lecturers emphasized the significance of maintaining positive verbal and non-verbal communication cues, such as eye contact, tone of voice, gestures, and facial expressions, in order to preserve a sense of connection and

belonging among the students. This was done during both in-person and online sessions involving the students. Because of the restricted physical presence in digital learning environments, they realized that verbal gestures of caring and encouragement became much more important than they had been before. In the words of one of the lecturers

"Even when I am teaching students online, I make it a point to welcome them by their names and use words of encouragement so that they feel appreciated and valued" (Lecturer 1). According to the participants, this technique helps to create interpersonal ties, lessens the anxiety that students feel about participating, and supports the development of a learning environment that is more inclusive and emotionally supportive.

Interpersonal communication is not only a pedagogical instrument; rather, it is a relational practice that bridges the emotional and intellectual elements of learning, as the lecturers' experiences have demonstrated so convincingly. Students respond with increased engagement, motivation, and a deeper sense of belonging within the academic community when teachers communicate with empathy, respect, and sincerity throughout classroom interactions.

Empathy as an Affective Foundation for Teaching

Empathy became an essential emotional aspect of the lecturers' pedagogical approaches, influencing their perceptions, responses, and support for students across many academic and personal situations. Everyone agreed that empathy is more than just feeling sorry for someone or being concerned about their feelings. It is understanding how pupils see things, identifying their problems, and responding with compassion and fairness. Lecturers stressed that empathy helps them figure out why students act the way they do and have trouble learning, which lets them teach in a way that is more responsive and open to all students. One teacher said, *"Sometimes students are silent not because they are lazy, but because they have problems at home or with themselves." "That is something I need to know as a teacher" (Lecturer 3).* Another person respondent said that:

"Empathy helps me know when to push my students harder and when to give them space to recover" (Lecturer 5).

These statements indicate that empathy is crucial in reconciling academic demands with emotional sensitivity, guaranteeing that each student receives fair attention and support.

Furthermore, empathy was regarded as a crucial element in fostering an emotionally secure and inspiring classroom atmosphere. The teachers said that tiny acts of kindness, like listening carefully, giving helpful comments, or recognizing small successes, can have a big effect on how students feel about themselves and how they fit in.

Lecturer 4 said, *"When students know that I really care about their achievement, they are more likely to try their best."*

Another participant said, "*Even a simple remark like 'I am proud of your effort' can help students feel seen and valued*" *(Lecturer 1).*

The teachers also said that empathy helps lower stress in the classroom, stops misunderstandings, and builds trust between students and teachers. By being empathic, they were able to get students to talk about their learning problems and take charge of their own academic advancement. Empathy was both an emotional anchor and a source of motivation. It helped teachers create a friendly, inclusive, and humanistic learning environment that encourages students to get involved and do well.

Communication and Empathy as Drivers of Learning Motivation

Researchers showed that the combination of communication and empathy was very important for keeping and boosting students' willingness to study. The lecturer agreed that the best way to communicate when teaching is with empathy, which means being clear but also being aware of and sensitive to students' needs. They said that empathic communication is when you explain things clearly, listen actively, encourage them, and give them customized feedback. All of these things help students feel supported and appreciated. One participant said, "*I always try to use encouraging statements like 'you can do it' or 'I believe in your potential'; it truly improves their attitude toward learning*" *(Lecturer 2).*

Another lecturer said, "*Students get more excited when they feel that the teacher really understands their problems and believes they can get better*" *(Lecturer 5).*

People said that these kinds of empathetic communication not only made pupils more interested, but also made them surer of their ability to learn.

The teachers also noticed that communication that is emotionally supportive helps kids get over their fear of failing, deal with stress, and learn how to keep going. Students are more likely to take academic chances and learn from their failures when teachers use positive language, give constructive criticism, and talk to them with real caring. One lecturer said,

"*I often remind my students that making errors is part of learning; this enables them to be calmer and motivated to try again*" *(Lecturer 3).*

In addition to academic results, empathic communication was thought to help students develop moral and social qualities like respect, cooperation, and tolerance in the classroom. It turns the classroom into a community where students can be themselves and help each other. A lecturer said

"*When communication is based on empathy, the classroom becomes more than a place to learn—it becomes a community where everyone learns together*" *(Lecturer 1).* The results show that when communication and empathy are used together on purpose, they not only make students more motivated but also help create a caring, collaborative, and humanistic learning environment.

The findings of this study indicate that lecturers at the Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Universitas Islam Makassar, have commenced the implementation of blended learning with an increasing sense of confidence and adaptability. Their teaching shows that they know how to use technology in the classroom to make learning more fun for pupils. The professors often stressed how important it is to keep a balance between in-person and online learning, making sure that each type of learning supports the other. This shows that teaching is moving toward being more student-centered, where digital tools are used not only to convey knowledge but also to encourage students to communicate, give feedback, and work together.

Lecturers said that blended learning makes it easier to teach because it can meet the demands of different students and learning styles. They can use different digital platforms to get people involved, encourage learning at their own speed, and keep people interested even after class is over. Furthermore, the incorporation of multimedia resources and interactive learning platforms was seen as extremely successful in sustaining students' enthusiasm and focus (Amaliah et al., 2023).

Even while these were good changes, there were also some problems that needed to be fixed. One of the biggest problems is that technology is not always reliable, such as when the internet goes down or when there are not enough digital devices for both students and teachers. These kinds of problems often make it hard to smoothly add online learning parts. Also, even though instructors are becoming more digitally literate, there is still a strong demand for formal professional development. Some teachers still utilize traditional ways of teaching and need further training to make the best use of learning management systems, interactive media, and digital assessment tools.

Institutional support is also very important for making sure that blended learning lasts. Lecturers said that for blended learning programs to be successful in the long run, they need good administrative support, proper use of resources, and technological help. There is also a need for policies that encourage lecturers to work together to make blended learning materials, share best practices, and look at how well their students are doing in class.

Another important result is that the teachers are introspective and creative in how they educate. They are not just using technology; they are also reconsidering how they teach to make learning more meaningful. For instance, several teachers changed their course syllabi to include more problem-based and project-based activities that help students think critically, be creative, and talk to each other. This approach is in line with the current trend in higher education, which puts a lot of emphasis on 21st-century skills and being ready to study for the rest of your life.

The lecturers' experiences also show that how technology is used in the classroom has a big effect on how engaged students are. Using digital tools well can improve interaction and feedback (Bertrand et al., 2018). On the other

hand, relying too much on lecture videos or static materials can make people less likely to participate. So, the effectiveness of blended learning depends more on how creative the teachers are than on how advanced the technology is.

The discussion emphasizes that the implementation of blended learning among lecturers at the Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Universitas Islam Makassar, is advancing towards maturity. The teachers are really dedicated to coming up with new ways to teach, even if they face a lot of problems. To build on this progress, it is important to have ongoing support from institutions, focused digital training, and better infrastructure. The faculty can make a blended learning environment that is more sustainable and successful by encouraging cooperation, reflective practice, and professional development. This will help both lecturers grow and students learn.

Various studies supported this study stated that Effective interpersonal communication established by lecturers with students serves as a foundational step in fostering a positive academic environment and stimulating all facets of student learning motivation to attain commendable academic achievement (Hamdan & Attika, 2024). This shows that motivation is one of the most crucial things to think about when trying to understand how people act with information (Oh & Syn, 2015). The effects of training were influenced by the internal urge to respond impartially, whereas trainee empathy served as a moderating factor in the model (Lindsey et al., 2015). The fact that sympathetic language had the most impact on employee trust out of the three forms of language shows how important it is for leaders to communicate emotional support during tough times (Men et al., 2022).

This study is unique in that it uses an integrative approach to investigate interpersonal communication, empathy, and learning motivation within the context of Indonesian higher education. More specifically, the study focuses on the lived experiences of lecturers in both face-to-face and online learning environments. The purpose of this research is to understand the emotional and relational dynamics that support effective teaching. In contrast to prior studies, which frequently studied these constructs independently or quantitatively, this research takes a qualitative descriptive approach. The research illustrates how empathy acts not only as an emotional attribute but also as an educational method that increases interpersonal communication and enhances student motivation because it helps students feel more connected to one another (Lindsey et al., 2015). Furthermore, by positioning the research within the post-pandemic transition to hybrid learning, it provides contextual insights into how lecturers retain empathy and communication across digital and physical platforms (Hamdan & Attika, 2024). This is a topic that is currently considered to be underexplored in the Indonesian academic system. By highlighting the synergistic role that empathy-driven communication plays in maintaining motivation and emotional well-being among university students, this study makes

a significant contribution to the field of educational psychology and pedagogy, hence contributing fresh ideas to the field.

It is important to recognize that this study has a number of limitations. To begin, the research was conducted with only five professors from a single university, Universitas Islam Makassar. This restricts the capacity to generalize the findings to other educational contexts or fields of study. Second, the research depended on qualitative data that was gathered through interviews and observations. Although these methods yielded a wealth of information, they are susceptible to being influenced by subjective interpretation and the self-reporting bias of the participants. The third limitation of the study was that it only included the perspectives of the lecturers, without taking into account the perspectives of the students. This would have allowed for a more well-rounded understanding of how communication and empathy influence the drive to learn.

Furthermore, the duration of classroom observations was restricted due to time restrictions, which resulted in a diminished potential to capture changes in communicative and empathic behaviors across a variety of teaching scenarios. For the purpose of obtaining a more comprehensive and objective picture of the relationship between interpersonal communication, empathy, and learning motivation in higher education, future research should include a sample that is larger and more diverse, employ mixed-method approaches, and integrate the perspectives of both lecturers and students.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

This research determines that interpersonal communication and empathy are key aspects affecting students' learning motivation in higher education. Effective communication builds comprehension, trust, and engagement. Empathy lets teachers connect with students' feelings and learning problems. Together, they make the classroom a more welcoming place that boosts motivation, confidence, and teamwork. Empathetic communication not only enhances academic performance but also fosters moral and social values, like respect, tolerance, and cooperation. Consequently, communication and empathy must be acknowledged as vital teaching instruments that foster both intellectual and emotional development in university students.

Further studies could broaden the participant pool to incorporate students' viewpoints, investigate quantitative metrics of motivation, or juxtapose data across several colleges to improve generalizability.

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