

The Influence of Teachers' Interpersonal Communication Competence on The Learning Satisfaction of Generation Z Students

Original Article

Ahmad Rais Habib*

Universitas Negeri Makassar, Indonesia
Email: ahmad.raishabib@unm.ac.id*

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Abstract

This quantitative study examines the influence of teachers' interpersonal communication competence on the learning satisfaction of Generation Z students in Indonesia in the digital era. Employing an explanatory research design, this study used Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) to analyze data collected from 50 students selected through purposive sampling. The findings indicate that teachers' interpersonal communication competence has a positive, strong, and statistically significant effect on students' learning satisfaction ($\beta = 0.745$, $t = 6.440$, $p < 0.001$). The model explains 55.5% of the variance in learning satisfaction, indicating a substantial explanatory power. In addition, the effect size value ($f^2 = 1.247$) demonstrates that interpersonal communication competence has a large practical contribution to students' satisfaction with the learning process. The most prominent dimensions of teacher communication behavior are supportiveness and equality, reflected in teachers' ability to act as approachable facilitators, provide timely and constructive feedback, and avoid rigid one-way communication patterns. These findings suggest that interpersonal communication remains essential in digital learning contexts, particularly for Generation Z students who expect responsive, inclusive, and interactive learning environments. Therefore, schools should strengthen teachers' interpersonal and digital communication skills through continuous professional development programs to improve the quality, stability, and effectiveness of teaching and learning.

Keywords: Interpersonal Communication, Learning Satisfaction, Generation Z, Educational Management.

1. Introduction

The success and sustainability of an organization in facing global challenges are largely determined by the quality of its human resources (HR). Within schools, the synergistic interaction between teachers and students is the driving force behind education. Teachers serve as learning architects and providers of educational services, while students are active participants utilizing these services (Biesta, 2021). The success of knowledge transfer, value instillation, and character development in students is inseparable from the effectiveness of two-way communication between both parties (Garrison, 2022). Positive interpersonal relationships between teachers and students, along with a conducive school climate, have been shown to be key to increasing learning motivation and creating an optimal academic ecosystem (Rahmawati et al., 2024).

However, the modern educational landscape is currently faced with the challenge of an increasingly visible generation gap between educators and students (Pimentel et al., 2026). The majority of students currently attending secondary schools are pure representatives of Generation Z, namely the group of people born between 1997 and 2012. As digital natives,



Generation Z grew up alongside the rapid development of information technology and a highly dynamic social media landscape (Kohnová et al., 2021).

The reality on the ground often shows a significant gap between the demands of modern learning and the actual communication competencies of educators in schools. Most teachers today are categorized as digital immigrants who still bring conventional communication patterns into the classroom (Ariyanto et al., 2023). The applied instructional approach tends to be one-way (top-down), dominated by standard, rigid instructions, and often paternalistic-authoritarian in nature. This rigid, one-way, and authoritarian communication style has been shown to have negative impacts, causing mental stress and anxiety, as well as limiting students' space for expression (Zahara & Abdurohim, 2025). Furthermore, the failure of educators to integrate character values relevant to contemporary challenges makes Generation Z students vulnerable to alienation in the educational environment (Siregar et al., 2025). As a result, students feel their aspirations are not heard, their existence is not valued, and they lose emotional closeness (emotional engagement) with their teachers conditions that ultimately trigger learning resistance and a massive decline in academic motivation (Sari et al., 2026).

The interpersonal communication gap between educators and students directly impacts the decline in student learning satisfaction. Learning satisfaction is a subjective indicator reflecting the extent to which students' expectations, emotional needs, and academic experiences are met during the educational process; this, in turn, significantly influences their emotional regulation and well-being (Tian et al., 2021). When the classroom communication climate is rigid and one-way, learning satisfaction declines, thereby escalating the risk of educator burnout due to the accumulation of negative emotions. Concurrently, it triggers a decrease in active student engagement, leading to an overall decline in academic performance (Pérez-Salas et al., 2025). This situation emphasizes the importance of transforming the learning climate into a more dialogic and empathetic environment. Through an inclusive communication approach, students' psychological stability can be maintained while mitigating the risk of mental exhaustion in educators.

Theoretically, effective interpersonal communication must fulfill five main dimensions: openness, empathy, supportiveness, positiveness, and equality. Utilizing a quantitative approach, this study aims to empirically test the extent to which these dimensions of teachers' interpersonal communication competencies influence learning satisfaction among a sample of 50 Generation Z students. Although previous studies have widely examined teachers' general pedagogical competencies, research specifically dissecting teachers' interpersonal communication in response to the unique characteristics of Generation Z within a focused sample size remains limited. The results of this study are expected to provide practical contributions for school management in formulating teacher human resource training policies based on emotional intelligence and contemporary communication, thereby bridging the generation gap to achieve optimal student learning satisfaction.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Teacher Interpersonal Communication Competency

Interpersonal communication in an instructional context is defined as the process of exchanging messages, meanings, and feelings between teachers and students either face-to-face or through digital media with the aim of influencing behavior and learning outcomes (Zheng, 2021). Unlike public communication, interpersonal communication emphasizes reciprocity and psychological closeness, or immediacy (Ramadhani et al., 2025). This closeness creates a safe and supportive learning environment for students. As a result,

students' intrinsic motivation increases, and the knowledge transfer process can proceed more optimally.

Theoretically, the effectiveness of interpersonal communication rests on five main dimensions of behavioral quality developed by DeVito: openness, empathy, supportiveness, positiveness, and equality (DeVito, 2022). In an instructional context, applying these dimensions is crucial; it requires teachers to be honest, transparent, empathetic, and able to view students as partners in the learning process, thereby eliminating authoritarian power relations. In the modern era, actualizing these five dimensions through the mastery of both adaptive verbal and nonverbal communication has proven highly relevant in stimulating classroom participation and has a significant positive relationship with increased student learning activity (Sareong & Supartini, 2020).

2.2. Student Learning Characteristics of Generation Z

Generation Z is a demographic group born between 1997 and 2012, who grew up amidst the peak of the digital revolution, the global internet, and the social media ecosystem. A life deeply connected to technology has shaped cognitive structures and sociological preferences that are fundamentally different from those of their predecessors. In the context of education, Generation Z is categorized as digital natives who possess unique learning characteristics: a preference for fast-paced information processing, a shorter attention span for conventional textual materials, and a heavy reliance on visual stimulation and digital interactivity.

Beyond technical aspects, Generation Z has a social orientation that highly values inclusivity, transparency, and egalitarian relationships. They tend to reject rigid bureaucratic boundaries and respond more positively to authority figures (such as teachers) who position themselves as facilitators or mentors, rather than as sole rulers in the classroom. In the learning space, they demand instant feedback and active emotional engagement. The failure of educational institutions to understand this shift in psychographic characteristics often leads to Generation Z students experiencing alienation, a loss of intrinsic motivation, and viewing the school process as tedious and irrelevant to the realities of their lives.

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2.3. Student Learning Satisfaction

Learning satisfaction is a subjective evaluation indicator that reflects students' level of comfort, psychological intimacy, and fulfillment of expectations regarding the educational

services they receive at school. This satisfaction stems not only from academic achievement but also from the accumulation of emotional experiences experienced by students throughout the instructional interaction process (Baber, 2021). The determinants of learning satisfaction are multidimensional, with student acceptance of the system and ease of use of digital infrastructure being the main foundations of modern learning (Han & Sa, 2022). In addition to infrastructure aspects, the flexibility of curriculum methods that integrate effective synchronous and asynchronous interactions has also been shown to significantly mediate this increase in learning satisfaction (Aldiabat et al., 2024).

From the perspective of educational human resource management, student learning satisfaction acts as a form of loyalty and motivation that drives their engagement in class. This conceptualization of satisfaction is multidimensional, with empirical evidence that optimizing school infrastructure and improving the quality of educational services simultaneously serve as key determinants of student satisfaction (Nauraida et al., 2024). The impact of fulfilling this satisfaction will stimulate adaptive student behaviors, such as active participation in discussions, reduced levels of procrastination, and greater resilience to academic pressure (academic resilience). This process is reinforced in the classroom because teachers' effective interpersonal communication skills and a positive work climate have been shown to be the most sensitive daily predictors in intervening in the dynamics of satisfaction and emotional engagement (Hermawan et al., 2023).

2.4. Hypothesis

The relationship between teachers' interpersonal communication competencies and student learning satisfaction is based on the assumption that the teaching and learning process is essentially a communication process (Ismail & Febriyanti, 2022). When teachers optimally apply interpersonal communication dimensions (such as showing empathy, providing emotional support, and treating students equally), the psychological distance between teachers and students will shrink (Ismail & Febriyanti, 2022). This condition fosters a sense of psychological safety in Generation Z students, who inherently crave recognition and egalitarian relationships (Wajdi et al., 2024).

A communicative and supportive classroom atmosphere makes students feel valued and fully involved in the learning ecosystem (Ismail & Febriyanti, 2022; Wajdi et al., 2024). This feeling of appreciation stimulates their inner satisfaction while studying at school. Conversely, closed, intimidating, and rigid communication patterns from teachers will undermine the learning experience and drastically reduce student satisfaction. Based on the visualization of the logical relationships between these variables, the hypothesis proposed in this study is:

H1: Teachers' interpersonal communication competencies have a positive and significant influence on the learning satisfaction of Generation Z students.

3. Methods

This study uses a quantitative approach with an explanatory research design. The population in this study were all active students belonging to Generation Z at MTs Guppi Dante Koa, Baraka District, Enrekang Regency. The sampling technique used non-probability sampling with a purposive sampling approach, which set the following criteria: (1) active Generation Z students, and (2) have interacted with the teacher concerned for at least one semester.

Given limited field access, the sample size collected and meeting eligibility requirements was 50 respondents. Referring to PLS-SEM literature, the Partial Least Squares method offers

high flexibility and maintains good statistical power even when applied to small sample sizes of 30–100 respondents (Hair et al., 2022).

Data collection was conducted using a Likert-scale questionnaire survey of 1–5, namely 1 = Strongly Disagree and 5 = Strongly Agree (Sugiyono, 2018). Data analysis was conducted using the Partial Least Squares-Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) approach using the assistance of SmartPLS software through evaluation of the outer model (validity and reliability) and the inner model (hypothesis testing through the bootstrapping process).

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Testing the Measurement Model

Outer model testing is carried out to ensure that the research instrument meets the validity and reliability criteria before hypothesis testing is carried out.

Table 1. Construct Validity & Reliability

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha	rho_A	Composite Reliability	AVE	Heterotrait–Monotrait	
					Interpersonal Communication (X)	Student Learning Satisfaction (Y)
Interpersonal Communication (X)	0.86	0.87	0.89	0.61		
Student Learning Satisfaction (Y)	0.88	0.89	0.89	0.61	0.61	

Source: *Data Processed, 2026*

The Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability values for both constructs are above 0.70, indicating a strong level of internal reliability. Convergent validity is also met with an AVE value of > 0.50 (0.61 for variable X and 0.64 for variable Y). Discriminant validity is declared safe because the HTMT value is 0.78 (< 0.90), proving that the two constructs are empirically different. In addition, all observation indicators have outer loading values ranging from 0.710 to 0.880 (meeting the threshold of ≥ 0.70).

4.2. Testing the Structural Model and Hypothesis

Table 2. Results of Inner Model and Hypothesis Testing

Connection	R ²	R ² Adjusted	f ²	Path Coefficient (β)	t-statistic	p-value	Decision
Teacher Communication (X) → Learning Satisfaction (Y)	0.55	0.54	1.24	0.74	6.44	0.000	Significant

Source: *Data Processed, 2026*

The evaluation results show an R² value of 0.555. This indicates that 55.5% of the variation in Generation Z Student Learning Satisfaction can be explained by Teachers' Interpersonal Communication Competence, while the remaining 44.5% is influenced by external variables. The effect size (f²) value of 1.247 is categorized as large.

In hypothesis testing through bootstrapping, the path coefficient value $\beta = 0.745$ is positive with a t-statistic value = 6.440 and p-value = 0.000 (<0.05). Thus, the research hypothesis is accepted: Teachers' interpersonal communication competence has a positive and significant effect on the learning satisfaction of Generation Z student.

4.3. Respondent Demographic Profile

Table 3. Characteristics of Student Respondents

Characteristics	Category	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Man	22	44%
	Woman	28	56%
Age	15–16 Years	24	48%
	17–18 Years	26	52%
Grade Level	X (Ten)	18	36%
	XI (Eleven)	22	44%
	XII (Twelve)	10	20%

Source: *Data Processed, 2026*

Demographic data from these 50 respondents shows that the sample distribution is dominated by female students (56%) with a mature age range of high school (17–18 years at 52%).

4.4. Discussion

Table 4. Analysis of Sectoral Indicator Values

Variables	Highest Indicator	Item Code	Question Items	Average	Category
Interpersonal Communication (X)	Supportiveness & Equality	X.10	The teacher provides direct feedback in a friendly and supportive manner.	3.52	Tall
		X.11	The teacher respects my opinion without differentiating status.	3.48	Tall
Learning Satisfaction (Y)	Engagement	Y.10	I feel appreciated so I am motivated to attend classes.	3.65	Tall
		Y.11	I feel the class atmosphere is comfortable because of the two-way communication.	3.60	Tall

Source: *Data Processed, 2026*

The results of this 50-sample study reinforce the argument that teachers' interpersonal communication skills play a crucial role in creating learning satisfaction. The strong path coefficient ($\beta = 0.745$) demonstrates that the more adaptive and interpersonal a teacher's teaching style, the more significant the learning satisfaction of Gen Z students.

a detailed analysis of the indicators (Table 4), the aspects of Supportiveness and Equality were the most dominant dimensions perceived by students. Generation Z grew up in an egalitarian digital environment, where they are accustomed to freely expressing their opinions. When they enter the classroom, they expect equal treatment. Teachers who actively listen, demonstrate empathy, use relevant language, and offer genuine appreciation will make students feel recognized.

Conversely, a rigid, one-way (top-down) communication style or the use of intimidating, high-pitched intonation actually reduces the learning satisfaction of new-age students. Data from these 50 respondents clearly demonstrates that student learning satisfaction is no longer solely determined by the content of the instructional material, but rather by how the interpersonal communication atmosphere is constructed in the classroom.

5. Conclusion

This study has successfully proven empirically that teachers' interpersonal communication competence is an important predictor that has a positive and significant influence in increasing the learning satisfaction of Generation Z students. The more open, supportive, and equal the interpersonal communication patterns shown by teachers, the higher the satisfaction and psychological comfort felt by students during the learning process.

School management is advised to organize contemporary communication training programs for teachers to bridge the generation gap. Teachers are encouraged to optimize the use of two-way communication media, provide humanistic feedback, and create an inclusive classroom ecosystem to reduce student learning burnout.

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