Long Distance Communication Between Children and Parents
(Study on Out-of-town Students of FISIP Unismuh Makassar)

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Abstract

This research explores the dynamics of long-distance communication between children and their parents, focusing on students from the Faculty of Social and Political Sciences at Muhammadiyah University of Makassar who live apart from their families. Effective communication within the family plays a vital role in shaping emotional well-being and personal stability for students living away from home. Utilizing a qualitative descriptive method, the study gathered data through interviews, observations, and documentation. Grounded in Koerner and Fitzpatrick's Family Communication Patterns theory, the research categorizes family interactions into four types: consensual, pluralistic, protective, and laissez-faire. The results show that students from consensual and pluralistic families tend to receive greater emotional support and sustain closer relationships with their parents. On the other hand, those from protective and laissez-faire family backgrounds often encounter limited interaction and emotional distance, leading to heightened psychological stress. Communication is further challenged by factors such as geographic separation, academic demands, and unstable internet access. This study enhances our understanding of how family communication functions in long-distance scenarios and highlights the need for universities to offer stronger emotional and social support for students living away from home.

Keywords: *long-distance communication, family communication, parents' child relationships*

Abstrak

Penelitian ini mengeksplorasi dinamika komunikasi jarak jauh antara anak dan orang tua, dengan fokus pada mahasiswa Fakultas Ilmu Sosial dan Ilmu Politik Universitas Muhammadiyah Makassar yang tinggal terpisah dari keluarga. Komunikasi yang efektif dalam keluarga memegang peranan penting dalam membentuk kesejahteraan emosional dan stabilitas pribadi bagi mahasiswa yang tinggal jauh dari rumah. Dengan menggunakan metode deskriptif kualitatif, penelitian ini mengumpulkan data melalui wawancara, observasi, dan dokumentasi. Berdasarkan teori Pola Komunikasi Keluarga Koerner dan Fitzpatrick, penelitian ini mengkategorikan interaksi keluarga menjadi empat jenis: konsensual, pluralistik, protektif, dan laissez-faire. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa mahasiswa dari keluarga konsensual dan pluralistik cenderung menerima dukungan emosional yang lebih besar dan mempertahankan hubungan yang lebih dekat dengan orang tua mereka. Di sisi lain, mereka yang berasal dari keluarga protektif dan laissez-faire sering mengalami interaksi yang terbatas dan jarak emosional, yang menyebabkan stres psikologis yang meningkat. Komunikasi semakin tertantang oleh faktor-faktor seperti pemisahan geografis, tuntutan akademis, dan akses internet yang tidak stabil. Studi ini meningkatkan pemahaman kita tentang bagaimana komunikasi keluarga berfungsi dalam skenario jarak jauh dan menyoroti perlunya universitas untuk menawarkan dukungan emosional dan sosial yang lebih kuat bagi mahasiswa yang tinggal jauh dari rumah.

Kata kunci: komunikasi jarak jauh, komunikasi keluarga, hubungan orang tua dan anak

1. Introduction

Communication plays a crucial role in human life, particularly in establishing close and harmonious relationships. Within the family context, communication between parents and children is essential as it provides emotional support, guidance, and supervision needed by children to navigate life's challenges. This becomes even more vital for children who live far from home for educational purposes (Rahmawati and Gazali, 2018).

Alongside the rapid development of information and communication technology, the way people interact has also significantly transformed. As stated by Hoechsmann and Poyntz (Alaby, 2020), today's youth are highly adept in using digital communication platforms due to their heavy engagement with media compared to previous generations. Tools such as phone calls, WhatsApp, and video calls have become the main channels through which communication between students and parents takes place. However, these technologies do not always guarantee effective communication. Challenges such as academic busyness, poor network coverage, and emotional withdrawal from either party can hinder optimal interaction (Zakirman and Rahayu, 2018) (Shramko and Borodavkina, 2020).

The phenomenon of students migrating to big cities for higher education has become increasingly common in Indonesia (Prayoga and Handoyo, 2023). This includes students of the Faculty of Social and Political Sciences (FISIP) at Universitas Muhammadiyah Makassar, who come from various regions of South Sulawesi and beyond, including Kalimantan, Central Sulawesi, Maluku, and Papua. They pursue better educational opportunities, yet often face academic, emotional, and social adjustment challenges in their new environments (Zulia, 2024).

In such circumstances, family communication becomes a vital source of emotional strength. Long-distance communication is expected to fill the gap left by physical separation (Luthfiyah and Yuliana, 2023). However, many students admitted that they rarely communicate directly with their parents through phone or text. This lack of regular communication often results in feelings of isolation, disconnection from family, and the absence of emotional guidance during critical moments.

Research by Hananiah and Sanjaya (Hananiah and Sanjaya, 2023) and research by Mareta and Agustina (Mareta, Hardjono and Agustina, 2020)emphasized the significance of family communication patterns in influencing students' psychological well-being. Students from consensual and pluralistic family patterns reported higher levels of emotional support, open communication, and personal autonomy. On the contrary, students from protective and laissez-faire families often experienced stress, loneliness, and indecisiveness due to limited emotional backing.

Koerner and Fitzpatrick's Family Communication Patterns Theory (Koerner, Schrodt and Fitzpatrick, 2017), categorizes family communication into four types: consensual, pluralistic, protective, and laissez-faire. These patterns influence how parents and children interact, particularly in long-distance relationships. In this context, the quality of interaction becomes more important than the frequency. Warm, supportive, and open communication has a profound impact on maintaining students' emotional stability while away from home.

This research is motivated by the need to explore in greater depth how long-distance communication between students and parents is structured and experienced, particularly among out-of-town students at FISIP Unismuh Makassar. The study aims to understand the prevailing communication patterns, identify obstacles in these interactions, and analyze the impact of such communication on students' emotional well-being and independence.

2. Research Methods

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach, with the aim of understanding in depth the phenomenon of long-distance communication between students from out of town and their parents. This approach was chosen because it allows researchers to explore the meaning, experience, and subjective perspective of informants on the communication patterns they experience (Ivey, 2023). (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011) explain that qualitative research seeks to understand phenomena in a natural context by involving various data collection methods such as interviews, observations, and documentation.

There are three main techniques used in data collection, namely first in-depth interviews, which are conducted in a semi-

structured manner with students from out of town at FISIP Unismuh Makassar. Second, participant observation, conducted in the campus environment to directly observe the interactions of students who are research informants. Third, documentation, including collecting communication evidence such as text messages, screenshots, and relevant digital conversation recordings to complement interview and observation data.

The selection of informants was carried out using the purposive sampling method, namely selecting informants based on certain criteria that are relevant to the focus of the research (Nur and Utami, 2022). In this case, the informants were active students of FISIP Unismuh Makassar class of 2023 who came from outside the area and lived far from their parents, and actively used digital media such as WhatsApp, video calls, or telephones to communicate (Kiely and Hartman, 2023).

3. Results and Discussion

This study explores the long-distance communication patterns between out-of-town students from the Faculty of Social and Political Sciences at Universitas Muhammadiyah Makassar and their parents. It also examines how these patterns influence the emotional relationships and psychological conditions of the students. The analysis is based on Koerner and Fitzpatrick's family communication theory, which classifies family communication into four patterns: consensual, pluralistic, protective, and laissez-faire (Sahin and Kilic, 2020).

Data obtained through interviews and observations indicate that family communication patterns play a significant role in shaping students' emotional bonds with their parents, as well as influencing their independence and decision-making. Not only the frequency but also the quality of communication and the active role of parents in their children's lives are essential factors.

Students from consensual families reported strong emotional connections with their parents. They experienced open discussions while still adhering to family norms and values. Although they were encouraged to make decisions independently, parental guidance remained a strong influence. This open and balanced communication fosters students' self-confidence, emotional security, and maturity during their time away from home.

Meanwhile, students from pluralistic families also enjoyed open communication, but with less emphasis on conformity. Parents acted as supportive listeners, providing various perspectives without pressuring students to choose specific paths. As a result, students felt comfortable expressing themselves and often made decisions independently, which helped them develop critical thinking and autonomy.

On the other hand, students from protective families experienced more one-way communication, where parental authority was more dominant. The limited opportunity for open dialogue led students to become more self-reliant, though this often came at the cost of emotional closeness. Parental support was typically directive, which made students feel less emotionally connected and more vulnerable when facing challenges.

Students from laissez-faire families reported minimal communication with their parents. Interactions were mostly functional and occurred only during urgent situations. As a result, students felt emotionally distant and lacked guidance. Although many became independent out of necessity, they also expressed feelings of loneliness, emotional detachment, and lack of support (Hananiah and Sanjaya, 2023).

The main communication tools used by students to stay in touch with their families included WhatsApp, phone calls, SMS, and video calls. However, the effectiveness of these media was often hindered by academic workload, poor internet connectivity, and passive attitudes from either side (Zakirman and Rahayu, 2018). These barriers made long-distance communication suboptimal and, in many cases, negatively affected the psychological well-being of students living away from home (Siregar, 2021).

Overall, this study found that the higher the conversational orientation within a family, the stronger the emotional bond between students and their parents. Conversely, low levels of conversation combined with high conformity tend to result in emotional detachment, loneliness, and increased stress among students. These findings underscore the crucial role of healthy, supportive, and open family communication patterns, especially for students navigating the challenges of living away from home.

4. Conclusion

This study shows that family communication patterns greatly influence the quality of the relationship between students from out-of-town and their parents. Students who come from families with consensual and pluralistic patterns tend to have more open communication, feel emotionally supported, and are more independent in decision-making. In contrast, students from protective and laissez-faire families experience barriers to communication, feel less cared for, and are more vulnerable to emotional stress. Although technology such as WhatsApp and video calls facilitates long-distance communication, the quality of communication is still determined by the frequency, openness, and attitude of each party. Therefore, healthy and flexible communication patterns are key to maintaining harmonious parent-child relationships amidst distance limitations.

5. Acknowledgment

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