# Interpersonal Communication of Students and Lecturers in Thesis Guidance

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**ABSTRACT:**

**Background:** The thesis guidance process requires effective interpersonal communication between students and supervisors so that the final project can be completed properly. However, in practice, obstacles are often found that interfere with the smooth flow of communication.

**Aims:** This study aims to determine the dynamics of interpersonal communication between Communication Science students and supervisors in the process of making a thesis at UIN Suska Riau, as well as identify obstacles and solutions that occur during guidance.

**Methods:** This study uses a qualitative method with a phenomenological approach. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with 7 students and 4 supervisors, then analyzed using Colaizzi's phenomenological analysis technique.

**Results:** Results show that interpersonal communication takes many forms, especially through digital media such as WhatsApp and Zoom. Obstacles found include delayed responses, lack of openness, and miscommunication. Aspects of openness, empathy, support, positive attitudes, and equality influence the success of mentorship.

**Conclusion:** Effective interpersonal communication contributes significantly to the smooth preparation of thesis. Therefore, both lecturers and students need to build relationships that are open, supportive, and respectful of each other.

**Keywords:** Interpersonal Communication, Supervisor, Thesis Guidance, Students, Phenomenology

## INTRODUCTION

Students as subjects of higher education have the obligation to complete the final project in the form of a thesis to achieve a bachelor's degree. In the process of preparing a thesis, intensive interaction between students and supervisors is crucial. Interpersonal communication between the two is an important foundation so that the guidance process runs effectively and the thesis is completed on time(Amrullah et al., 2024; Budiwinarto et al., 2024; Marleni, 2021; A. I. Saputra & Haq, 2020; Age et al., 2024). Without smooth communication, students can feel depressed, lack confidence, and have difficulty conveying ideas or receiving input from supervisors. Therefore, an in-depth understanding of the quality and process of interpersonal communication is the main urgency in this study.

However, ideal conditions in the communication practice of thesis guidance are often not achieved. There is a gap between the expectation of open and supportive communication and the reality on the ground. Obstacles such as lecturers who are difficult to contact, differences in perception, and lack of empathy are the disruptive factors that students often experience (Fadhilah, 2022; R. M. Putri et al., 2021; R. Saputra, 2019). Students sometimes wait for a long time without certainty, feel afraid to meet the lecturer, or even just put the thesis on the lecturer's desk without meaningful interaction. This disharmony signifies the importance of evaluating the communication process that occurs during mentorship.

The opportunity to conduct this research is very open because there have not been many studies that specifically raise the phenomenon of interpersonal communication between students and supervisors within UIN Suska Riau. In addition, the emergence of new communication patterns due to the use of digital media in guidance during the pandemic adds to the relevant complexity to be researched. Changes in the way we interact via WhatsApp, Zoom, or Telegram need to be studied from the perspective of the effectiveness of interpersonal communication (Budiarti & Aina, 2022; Marwanda et al., 2025; Zakaria et al., 2022).

From various previous studies reviewed in the literature, it can be seen that most of them examined communication barriers in general or communication patterns theoretically. This research offers novelty by raising a phenomenological approach that highlights students' subjective experiences in building interpersonal communication with supervisors. Using Joseph DeVito's communication theory (Istikhomah et al., 2025; Mukti & Simanjuntak, 2025; Nurwitami et al., 2024), the study also focuses on five aspects of effective communication: openness, empathy, supportive attitudes, positive attitudes, and equality.

This research is novel in its use of a phenomenological approach to capture the lived experiences of students and supervisors in the thesis guidance process, especially in the digital communication era. Unlike previous studies, which often focused on general communication patterns or examined communication barriers from a theoretical perspective, this study emphasises the subjective meaning and emotional dynamics involved in real guidance interactions. Additionally, applying Joseph DeVito's five elements of interpersonal communication provides a comprehensive framework for understanding the quality of the relationship during academic supervision.

The selection of the interpersonal communication variable (X) is based on its fundamental role in the formation of cooperative relationships between students and supervisors. Meanwhile, the variable for making the final project (thesis) (Y) was chosen because it was a real indicator of the success of the guidance process. This research aims to answer how the quality of interpersonal communication affects the success or obstacles in the preparation of student thesis.

The purpose of this study is to find out how the interpersonal communication of students and supervisors takes place during the thesis preparation process, the obstacles that occur, and the solutions found. Theoretically, this study enriches the literature on interpersonal communication in the context of higher education. Practically, the results are expected to be input for students, lecturers, and institutions to improve guidance systems and patterns, as well as a reference for other researchers interested in similar themes.

## METHOD
### Research Design

This study uses a qualitative approach with phenomenological methods (Nasir et al., 2023; Tumangkeng & Maramis, 2022). This approach was chosen to explore in depth the experiences and meanings felt by Communication Studies students in building interpersonal communication with supervisors during the process of making the final project (thesis).

### Participant

Participants in this study consist of 7 students of Communication Sciences, Faculty of Da'wah and Communication UIN Suska Riau who are preparing their thesis, as well as 4 supervisors who guide the final project in the same study program.

### Population and the Methods of Sampling, Instrumentation

The population in this study is all students of Communication Studies UIN Suska Riau who are in the process of thesis guidance. The sampling technique uses purposive sampling, with the criteria of active students who are in the process of preparing their thesis and are willing to be interviewed. The instrument used was a semi-structured interview guide compiled based on the theory of interpersonal communication by Joseph DeVito. Because this is a qualitative research, it does not use numerical scoring, but the validity of the content is tested through expert judgment, and the validity of the data is maintained through triangulation of sources and techniques.

### Instrument

The main instrument in this study is the open-ended interview guide, which includes questions about the experiences of students and lecturers in establishing communication, the obstacles faced, and how to overcome these obstacles. The data is also supplemented with documentation and field notes.
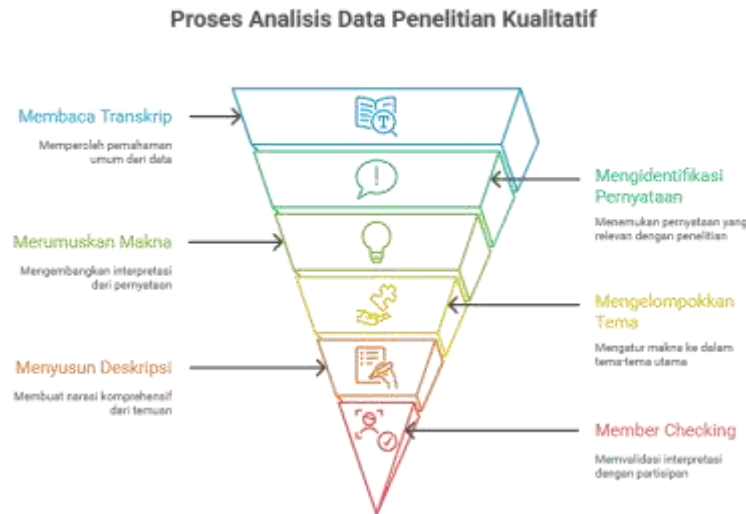
### Procedures and Time Frame

The research procedure includes: application for research permits, selection of informants, conducting online interviews using WhatsApp and Telegram, documentation and transcription of interview results, and data analysis. The research was carried out in the period from April to August 2022.

### Analysis Plan

In this study, data were analyzed using the Colaizzi phenomenological approach which aims to uncover the deepest meaning of participants' subjective experiences regarding interpersonal communication between students and supervisors during the thesis guidance process (Stephen & Hutapea, 2022; Supriyono et al., 2020). The analysis was carried out through seven systematic stages, starting from reading the entire interview transcript thoroughly to gain a general understanding, then identifying statements that are relevant to the phenomenon being studied. After that, the researcher formulates the meaning of each significant statement and groups it into key themes that

reflect the collective experiences of the informants. The next step is to compile a comprehensive description of the interpersonal communication phenomenon that occurs. These descriptions are then summarized into the core essence of the participant's experience. As a form of validation, the results of the analysis are returned to the participants (member checking) to ensure that the researcher's interpretation is in accordance with their actual experience. This procedure is used to maintain the credibility and validity of phenomenology-based qualitative research findings.



Proses Analisis Data Penelitian Kualitatif

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Results

The results of the study show that interpersonal communication that occurs between Communication Science students and supervisors in the thesis guidance process takes place in various forms, both directly and through online media. Online communication is predominantly carried out through WhatsApp, Telegram, Zoom, and Google Classroom. Students feel that the media facilitates the guidance process, although it is not uncommon to also cause misunderstandings or delays in response. The communication pattern built depends on the lecturer's communication style and the student's initiative in establishing relationships.

The findings also indicate that not all interpersonal communication relationships go smoothly. Some students experience obstacles in building closeness with their supervisors. Common obstacles include time incompatibility, lecturers who are difficult to contact, and feelings of fear or awkwardness when contacting lecturers. There are even cases where students only put their thesis on the lecturer's desk without any direct interaction or discussion process. This indicates a weak openness and empathy in the communication process.

As for the supervisors, most of them stated that student delays in consultation, unpreparedness to bring revisions, and impolite or unethical communication became obstacles in the guidance process. However, there are also lecturers who try to build a warm and open communication atmosphere, so that students feel comfortable in conveying academic and personal problems.

From the results of the interview, it was found that the quality of interpersonal communication was influenced by the five main aspects stated by Joseph DeVito, namely openness, empathy, supportive attitude, positive attitude, and equality. Students who have open communication with their lecturers tend to complete their thesis faster because they get clear directions and feel appreciated. On the other hand, students who do not establish good two-way communication tend to experience protracted obstacles in the guidance process.

Several solution strategies are carried out by students to overcome these obstacles, such as taking the initiative to visit lecturers on campus, scheduling regular guidance, and avoiding one-way communication. Students are also more active in using various communication channels to ensure that their messages are conveyed, such as sending follow-up messages or changing communication platforms according to the lecturer's convenience. This initiative shows that the effectiveness of interpersonal communication can be improved if both parties work together to build supportive relationships.

Overall, this study emphasizes the importance of building effective interpersonal communication between students and supervisors so that the thesis guidance process runs optimally. Relationships based on mutual respect and openness not only speed up the thesis completion process, but also form a positive academic experience for students.

**Table 1. Aspects of Interpersonal Communication Experienced by Students**

| No. | Aspects of DeVito | Student Findings | Impact in Thesis Guidance |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | Openness | Students find it difficult to convey ideas because they are afraid or embarrassed | Slow revisions, miscommunication is frequent |
| 2. | Empathy | Lecturers do not understand the personal situation of students | Students feel unsupported |
| 3. | Backing | Lecturers lack direction or motivation | The thesis did not develop significantly |
| 4. | Positive Attitude | Lecturers give praise and constructive criticism | Students are more enthusiastic and confident |
| 5. | Equality | Students feel appreciated when given equal space for discussion | Smoother and more active interaction |

**Discussion**

The findings of this study provide important implications for the implementation of academic guidance in higher education. Effective interpersonal communication between students and supervisors has been proven to affect the smooth and successful thesis preparation process (Chairunnisa et al., 2024; Ela Kusmawati, 2019; Mustofa et al., 2024). Therefore, higher education institutions need to encourage the development of lecturer and student communication skills, including empathetic communication and relationship management training. In addition, the use of digital media in guidance must also be accompanied by proper communication ethics so as not to cause misinterpretation or miscommunication (Arifin & Fuad, 2020; M. Putri & Anshari, 2025).

This research contributes to expanding the study of interpersonal communication in the academic realm, especially in the context of final project guidance in the Communication Science study program. Using the phenomenological approach and theory of Joseph DeVito (Boness et al., 2021; Mustofa et al., 2023; Ribaut et al., 2024), the study succeeded in uncovering the subjective meaning of the student experience and identified five key aspects of effective communication: openness, empathy, support, positive attitudes, and equality. This research also adds a new perspective on the role of digital media as an interpersonal communication channel in non-face-to-face situations.

This study has limitations on the relatively small number of participants, which only involves 7 students and 4 supervisors from one study program at one university. This limits the generalization of research results to the context of other institutions. In addition, the phenomenological approach only records participants' subjective perceptions and experiences, so it cannot be used to quantitatively or comparatively measure the effectiveness of communication between individuals.

Researchers are further advised to expand the scope of the study by involving more informants from various study programs and universities to obtain a more comprehensive picture. In addition, a mixed methods approach can be used so that qualitative data can be complemented with quantitative data that measures the effectiveness of communication statistically. For institutions, it is recommended to develop guidelines for thesis guidance based on ethical and effective interpersonal communication, both in direct meetings and through online media.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the research, it can be concluded that interpersonal communication between Communication Science students and supervisors at UIN Suska Riau has a very important role in the smooth thesis guidance process. Open, empathetic, mutually supportive, positive, and equality-based interactions have been proven to help students understand lecturers' directions, build motivation, and complete final projects more purposefully. Conversely, communication barriers such as time mismatches, lack of response, and miscommunication contribute to the inhibition of the guidance process.

Overall, this study confirms that the quality of communication relationships greatly determines the success of thesis guidance. Therefore, both students and lecturers are required to build an effective communication pattern by prioritizing ethics, patience, and openness. The results of this study also provide input for universities to strengthen the academic guidance system through interpersonal communication training and the appropriate use of digital media.

From a scientific perspective, this study enriches Joseph DeVito's interpersonal communication theory by applying its five core components to the context of thesis supervision in higher education. The findings affirm the theory's relevance in academic settings and emphasise the importance of relational aspects, such as mutual understanding and emotional support, in formal learning interactions. This provides a deeper understanding of interpersonal communication as both a skill and a relational process that shapes academic success.

## AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

DM is responsible for preparing proposals, collecting data, conducting interviews, transcription, and analyzing research results. DM also writes the entire thesis, starting from the introduction to the conclusion. ED as a supervisor, provides conceptual direction, correction of academic substance, and methodological guidance during the process of drafting and finalizing the thesis manuscript. ED also helps in the refinement of the structure and validation of the analysis.

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