



THE ROLE OF INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION IN IMPROVING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF STUDENT-LECTURER RELATIONSHIPS: A LITERATURE REVIEW

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Article Info

Article history:

Received : 12 March 2026

Acceptance : 28 March 2026

Published : 28 March 2026

How to cite:

Syahira, F. A., Alghifari, A. M., Arifurrahman, I. D., Lubis, N. S. (2026). THE ROLE OF INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION IN IMPROVING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF STUDENT-LECTURER RELATIONSHIPS: A LITERATURE REVIEW. *OPINI: Journal of Communication and Social Science*, 3(1), 93-104



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ABSTRACT

This article reviews the role of interpersonal communication in improving the effectiveness of student-lecturer relationships in higher education. Using a narrative literature review approach, the study synthesizes five selected journal articles published between 2021 and 2025 that discuss lecturer-student communication, academic supervision, learning motivation, and student engagement. The findings indicate that interpersonal communication functions as a crucial relational mechanism in shaping academic trust, participation, emotional comfort, and learning effectiveness. Five major dimensions consistently emerged from the reviewed studies, namely openness, empathy, supportiveness, positive attitude, and equality. These dimensions contribute to the creation of a conducive academic environment in which students feel respected, motivated, and encouraged to participate actively. The review also shows that communication becomes increasingly important in vulnerable contexts such as thesis supervision and distance learning. Overall, interpersonal communication is not merely a supporting element of teaching, but a central factor in strengthening the quality of student-lecturer relationships.

Keywords: *interpersonal communication, student lecturer relationship, higher education, academic interaction, learning motivation.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Interpersonal communication is a fundamental element of human interaction because it enables individuals to exchange meanings, emotions, and information through verbal and nonverbal messages in a reciprocal process (Dalimunthe, 2022; Ivan, 2023). In educational settings, this form of communication is particularly

important because learning does not only involve the transfer of knowledge, but also the development of trust, responsiveness, and mutual understanding between the participants in the academic process (Dalimunthe et al., 2025; Suhendar et al., 2023). Previous studies have shown that effective interpersonal communication is closely associated with feedback quality, active listening, openness, and emotional sensitivity, all of which contribute to more meaningful interactions and better social relationships (O'Toole, 2024; Solomon & Theiss, 2022; Walker, 2023). In this sense, interpersonal communication should not be viewed merely as a supporting element of teaching, but as a central mechanism through which academic relationships are formed and maintained.

In higher education, the relationship between students and lecturers is one of the most decisive forms of interpersonal interaction (Dalimunthe et al., 2023; Wong & Chapman, 2023). Universities are not only spaces for formal instruction, but also environments in which students and lecturers continuously interact through classroom discussions, academic consultations, supervision, and informal exchanges (Ahmad et al., 2023; Leijon et al., 2024). The quality of these interactions has a direct impact on students' academic experiences, motivation, and sense of belonging (Pedler et al., 2022; Suhendar et al., 2024). When communication is clear, respectful, and empathetic, it helps create a supportive academic climate in which students feel encouraged to participate and express their ideas. On the contrary, ineffective communication may generate misunderstanding, psychological distance, and reduced engagement in learning activities (Dahmani et al., 2024; Dushechkina et al., 2024). Therefore, examining interpersonal communication in student-lecturer relationships is highly relevant to understanding how academic effectiveness can be improved.

A number of previous studies have addressed this issue from different perspectives. Research has shown that lecturers' interpersonal communication is positively related to students' learning motivation and classroom enthusiasm (Hamdan & Attika, 2024). Other studies have demonstrated that the quality of communication between students and supervisors significantly affects students' emotional well-being and their experience during the thesis-writing process (Li et al., 2025; Xie & Liu, 2025). In addition, teacher or lecturer interpersonal behavior has been found to influence academic achievement, student participation, and perceptions of educational quality

(Haile et al., 2024; Zhang, 2022). These studies consistently suggest that communication dimensions such as openness, empathy, supportiveness, positivity, and mutual respect are essential in building productive academic interactions (Mickel, 2024; Phan, 2026). However, the existing literature tends to discuss these dimensions separately and often focuses on specific educational situations rather than offering a broader synthesis of how interpersonal communication as a whole shapes the effectiveness of student–lecturer relationships.

Based on this condition, there remains a clear gap in the literature. Although many studies confirm the importance of interpersonal communication in academic settings, there is still limited review-based work that systematically synthesizes findings from recent studies to explain how interpersonal communication contributes to the effectiveness of student–lecturer relationships across different academic contexts. Most existing works emphasize empirical findings in isolated cases, such as classroom interaction, thesis supervision, or student satisfaction, without integrating them into a more comprehensive conceptual understanding. As a result, the broader academic significance of interpersonal communication in strengthening student–lecturer relationships has not yet been sufficiently articulated in review-based scholarship.

This article addresses that gap by providing a literature review on the role of interpersonal communication in improving the effectiveness of student–lecturer relationships in higher education. By synthesizing findings from relevant recent studies, this article highlights the main communication dimensions that shape academic relationships and explains how these dimensions contribute to learning motivation, emotional comfort, academic engagement, and the creation of a conducive academic environment. Thus, the contribution of this article lies not only in reaffirming the importance of interpersonal communication, but also in presenting a more integrated understanding of its strategic role in strengthening student–lecturer relationships within contemporary higher education.

2. RESEARCH METHODE

This study employed a narrative literature review to examine the role of interpersonal communication in improving the effectiveness of student–lecturer relationships in higher education (Healey & Healey, 2024). A narrative review was

considered appropriate because the purpose of this article was not to statistically aggregate findings, but to critically synthesize and interpret scholarly studies discussing communication patterns, relational dynamics, and academic interaction between students and lecturers across different higher education contexts.

The literature search was conducted through Google Scholar and Scopus using combinations of keywords such as “interpersonal communication,” “student–lecturer relationship,” “lecturer–student communication,” “academic relationship,” “thesis supervision communication,” “learning motivation,” and “higher education.” The search was limited to publications published between 2021 and 2025 in order to capture recent discussions relevant to the topic. At the identification stage, 12 records were obtained. After removing duplicate and clearly irrelevant records, 9 articles remained for title and abstract screening. Following this process, 6 articles were selected for full-text assessment. After evaluating their relevance and methodological clarity, 5 articles were included in the final synthesis.

The inclusion criteria were as follows: (1) peer-reviewed journal articles published between 2021 and 2025; (2) studies written in English or Indonesian; (3) studies focusing on interpersonal communication in higher education settings; (4) studies discussing lecturer–student interaction, classroom communication, academic supervision, student motivation, student participation, or related academic relationship outcomes; and (5) studies presenting clear objectives, methods, and findings. The exclusion criteria included: (1) publications not directly related to communication between students and lecturers; (2) studies focusing primarily on primary or secondary school contexts; (3) editorials, opinion pieces, and non-scholarly materials; and (4) sources with insufficient methodological explanation or only marginal relevance to the review focus.

In this review, the five selected journal articles served as the main units of analysis, namely studies by Hamdan & Attika (2024), Li et al (2025), Zhang, (2022), Jaedun et al (2024), and Wang, (2023). These studies were chosen because they directly address lecturer-student communication, student perceptions of lecturer communication, supervisory communication, learning motivation, academic engagement, and interpersonal interaction in higher education. Meanwhile, several

books and supporting conceptual references were used only to strengthen the theoretical explanation in the Introduction and Discussion sections and were not treated as part of the reviewed empirical corpus. This distinction was necessary to maintain consistency between the methodological procedure and the use of references in the article.

After the final set of articles was determined, each study was organized in a review matrix containing the author(s), year of publication, study objective, educational context, method, and principal findings. The data were then analyzed using thematic synthesis. In the first stage, each article was read repeatedly to identify recurring concepts related to interpersonal communication in student–lecturer relationships. In the second stage, similar findings were coded and grouped into broader categories. In the third stage, these categories were synthesized into five major themes: openness, empathy, supportiveness, positive attitude, and equality. These themes were then interpreted in relation to their contribution to academic comfort, learning motivation, student participation, and the effectiveness of student–lecturer relationships.

To ensure transparency and trustworthiness, the synthesis process was conducted by comparing patterns, consistencies, and differences across the selected studies. Rather than merely describing each article separately, this review aimed to explain how previous studies collectively show that effective interpersonal communication contributes to the creation of a conducive academic climate and strengthens the professional and relational quality of student–lecturer interactions in higher education. This procedure allowed the article to produce an interpretive and academically grounded understanding of the topic.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The review results indicate that interpersonal communication consistently appears as an important explanatory factor in the effectiveness of student–lecturer relationships, although each study emphasizes different outcomes. Hamdan & Attika (2024), showed a direct statistical relationship between lecturers’ interpersonal communication and students’ learning motivation, suggesting that communication

quality functions as an immediate driver of academic enthusiasm. Li et al (2025), broadened this picture by showing that the relationship between students and supervisors does not only influence academic work, but also affects well-being and career-social development. Zhang (2022), through a review perspective, further confirmed that positive interpersonal behavior is associated with better academic achievement. Taken together, these studies show that interpersonal communication is not merely an auxiliary aspect of teaching, but an integral condition of academic effectiveness.

Table 1. Review Matrix of Selected Studies

Authors	Context of Study	Method	Main Findings	Relevance to This Review
Hamdan & Attika (2024)	Lecturer-student communication and learning motivation in higher education	Non-experimental quantitative correlational study using questionnaires	Lecturers' interpersonal communication was significantly correlated with students' learning motivation	Shows the direct relationship between communication quality and student motivation
Li et al. (2025)	PhD student-supervisor relationship in higher education	Qualitative study using focus groups and individual interviews	Supervisor-student relationship affected academic achievement, well-being, and career/social development	Demonstrates that relational quality shapes both academic and psychosocial outcomes
Zhang (2022)	Teacher-learner interpersonal	Review article	Positive teacher-learner	Strengthens the theoretical argument that

	behavior and academic achievement		interpersonal relationships were constructively associated with academic achievement	interpersonal behavior is linked to learning success
Jaedun et al. (2024)	Development of interpersonal skills in vocational education toward Industry 5.0	Perception-based empirical study of students and teachers	Interpersonal skills were regarded as essential competencies that need to be intentionally developed in education	Extends the discussion from classroom interaction to curriculum-level skill development
Wang (2023)	Distance learning and student mental health in higher education	Comparative empirical study involving 186 university students	First-year students experienced greater difficulty adapting, communicating, and building trusting relationships in distance learning settings	Provides contextual evidence that weakened interaction can reduce relational quality and student well-being

A more critical synthesis shows that the reviewed studies do not all speak about interpersonal communication in the same way. Hamdan & Attika (2024), focused on the motivational consequence of communication, whereas Li et al (2025), emphasized

relational quality in supervision as a determinant of both academic and emotional outcomes. Zhang (2022) framed interpersonal behavior more broadly as a theoretical predictor of achievement, while Jaedun et al (2024), shifted the emphasis from dyadic lecturer–student interaction to the wider development of interpersonal skills as educational competencies. Wang, meanwhile, did not directly examine lecturer–student interpersonal communication as the primary variable, but its findings remain relevant because they show that when students struggle to adapt and build trusting relationships in distance-learning settings, their well-being is negatively affected. This means that the literature does not present a single uniform pattern; rather, it suggests that interpersonal communication operates across motivational, relational, developmental, and psychological dimensions.

When interpreted through interpersonal communication theory, the five dimensions used in this article openness, empathy, supportiveness, positivity, and equality help explain why these outcomes recur across studies. Openness is reflected in communication that allows reciprocal feedback and active participation, which is particularly relevant to findings on motivation and classroom engagement. Empathy and supportiveness are especially visible in supervisory and mentoring relationships, where students need to feel understood rather than judged. Positivity contributes to a safer academic atmosphere in which students are more willing to ask questions, make mistakes, and remain involved in learning. Equality, however, should not be understood as the elimination of lecturers' authority. In the higher education setting, equality is better understood as dialogic respect within an unequal institutional role structure. In other words, lecturers remain academically authoritative, but students are still recognized as legitimate partners in scholarly interaction. This interpretation makes the theory more analytically useful than simply listing the five dimensions in a descriptive way.

Another important finding from the synthesis is that communication quality becomes even more decisive when academic interaction enters situations of vulnerability, such as thesis supervision or distance learning. Li et al. demonstrated that student–supervisor relationships influence not only completion-related matters but also broader student well-being and developmental outcomes. Wang likewise showed that students in online-learning contexts, particularly first-year students,

encountered difficulty in adaptation and trust-building. These two studies suggest that interpersonal communication should not be reduced to message transmission alone. Rather, it functions as a relational resource that helps students navigate uncertainty, academic pressure, and psychological transition. This point is important because it shows that ineffective communication is not simply a technical failure; it may also deepen stress, distance, and disengagement.

Overall, the reviewed literature supports the conclusion that interpersonal communication improves the effectiveness of student–lecturer relationships, but the contribution is multidimensional rather than singular. Its effects are visible in learning motivation, academic achievement, student participation, emotional comfort, and the development of trust in academic interactions. At the same time, this review also indicates that not all cited studies are equally central to the topic. Four studies directly address lecturer–student or teacher–student relational communication, whereas Wang provides more indirect contextual support regarding the consequences of weakened interaction in higher education. This distinction is important to maintain analytical precision. Therefore, the main contribution of this review is not merely to restate that interpersonal communication matters, but to show that it functions as a relational infrastructure of higher education: it shapes how students engage, how lecturers guide, and how academic relationships become either supportive or strained.

4. CONCLUSION

This review demonstrates that effective interpersonal communication between students and lecturers is consistently shaped by three main relational patterns: openness, empathy, and dialogic interaction. Across the studies reviewed, these patterns are associated with stronger academic trust, greater student participation, improved understanding of course material, and a more supportive learning environment. The main scientific contribution of this article lies in synthesizing interpersonal communication not merely as a social skill in higher education, but as a relational mechanism that directly influences academic engagement and the quality of lecturer student interaction.

Theoretically, the findings reinforce the view that interpersonal communication in educational settings should be understood as a reciprocal and meaning-making process rather than a one-way transfer of information. Practically, the review suggests that lecturers should adopt more responsive, approachable, and student-centered communication practices, while universities should strengthen institutional support through communication training, mentoring systems, and policies that reduce rigid hierarchical barriers in academic interactions. Nevertheless, this review is limited by its dependence on existing published studies, which may vary in context, methodological design, and analytical depth. Future research should therefore examine interpersonal communication in more diverse higher education settings and explore how digital learning environments reshape lecturer–student relationships.

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