

# Teacher's Interpersonal Communication and Uses of Power over Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder: A Case Study in President Special Need Center

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**Abstract:-** People constantly communicate with one another in order to establish and interpret meanings in their life even though not all people can communicate well because they have a disability in communicating with other people. One example is children who suffer from Autism Spectrum Disorder, who have not developed meaningful gestures or language. One of the treatments for these is by giving them the education they need in a special need school. This research was conducted by using qualitative method with a case study approach to explore the process of interpersonal communication between teachers and students with Autism Spectrum Disorder and also focused on uses of power over students with Autism Spectrum Disorder. Data were collected through in-depth interviews and observations. There were four informants who were teachers in President Special Need Center, Jababeka. To analyze the data, the researcher used Uncertainty Reductions Theory in order to get the results. The findings showed that to decrease the level of uncertainty, the teachers examined the students' personal interests and behaviors; this came in a few phases. The teachers used their power wisely by giving the compliments in the form of 'high five' and 'stars' to the students with Autism Spectrum Disorder.

**Keywords:-** *Interpersonal Communication, Uncertainty Reduction Theory, Uncertainty Level, Autism Spectrum Disorder, and President Special Need Center.*

## I. INTRODUCTION

As human beings, people cannot live by themselves. People need to communicate with one another. Communicating with other people is an important part of our daily life. Communication is needed in order to establish a relationship between and among individuals. Based on Wood (2011), communication used by people to interact with a systematic process which through symbols to create and interpret meaning. Meanwhile, West and Turner (2010) stated that communication is a social process which individuals employ symbols in order to establish and interpret meaning to their environment. People constantly communicate with one another in order to establish and interpret meanings in their life. It could happen between a teacher and students, a doctor and patients, or parents with their children. Communication helps people to interpret meanings in their life. However, not all people can

communicate well because they have a disability in communicating with other people.

Autism Spectrum Disorder is one of the examples of a type of disabilities that cause trouble in communicating with other people. As said by National Institute of Mental Health (2015), Autism Spectrum Disorder is portrayed by: 1) Persistent deficiencies in social communication and social interaction over numerous situations, 2) Restricted, repetitive patterns of behavior, interests, or activities, 3) Symptoms must be present in the early formative period (commonly perceived in the initial two years of life), and 4) Symptoms cause clinically critical weakness in social, occupational, or other important areas of current functioning. Children who suffer from Autism Spectrum Disorder have not created significant gestures or language.

This makes them to simply shout or grab or otherwise act out until they are taught better ways to communicate their needs and emotions. While these children growing up, they will be conscious about their difficulty in understanding other people and in being understood. Their consciousness may make them become anxious or depressed.

One of the treatments for the children with Autism Spectrum Disorder is by giving them the education they need in a special need school. Nowadays, schools with special treatment for special needs children are easy to find. Since, the students with Autism Spectrum Disorder have disabilities in communicating and interacting with other people, the researcher wanted to explore the process of interpersonal communication between teachers and students with Autism Spectrum Disorders in President Special Need Center. Not only exploring interpersonal communication, the researcher also wanted to explore the uses of power over the students with Autism Spectrum Disorder.

This research focused the study in President Special Need Center especially in the communication process between teachers and students with Autism Spectrum Disorder. The researcher gathered data and analyzed the process of interpersonal communication between teachers and students with Autism Spectrum Disorder during the learning process in the classroom.

**II. LITERATURE REVIEW**

The first research was conducted by Nyang’acha Esther Moke in 2008, entitled “The Role of Interpersonal Communication In Limuru Division Kiambu District”. This research focused only on the causes and results of interpersonal communication breakdown and formal and informal structures in school between teachers and students. Unlike Moke’s research, this study used Qualitative method conducted in President Special Need Center, focusing on the process of interpersonal communication in order to decrease the uncertainty level between teachers and students with Autism Spectrum Disorders. This study also focused on uses of power over the students with Autism Spectrum Disorder.

The second research was conducted by Theodora BalingeLupenta in 2014. The research was entitled The Role of Interpersonal Communication Skill in Motivating Children with Behavioral Disorder: A Case Study of President Special Need Center. Unlike Lupents’s research, this study used Qualitative method conducted in President Special Need Center, focusing on the process of interpersonal communication in order to decrease the uncertainty level between teachers and students with Autism Spectrum Disorders. This study also focused on uses of power over the students with Autism Spectrum Disorder.

**Interpersonal Communication**, which is communication between people with an example as a continuum that goes from quite impersonal (interaction between you and a cafeteria waitress) to highly interpersonal (interaction between you and your closest companions). The more we do interaction with an individual as distinct, the more interpersonal the communication is.

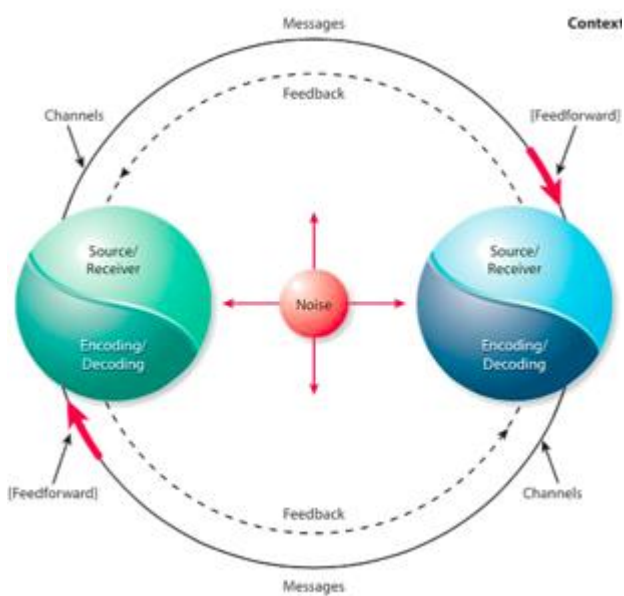
➤ *Interpersonal Relationship*

In daily life, individuals experience a variety of interpersonal relationships with family, friends, or people at the workplace. People who fill a large number of each other's emotional and physical needs will build a strong interpersonal relationship. While each relationship is unique, there are some common ideas that influence the health and continuation of all relationships. Several theories have been made up to clarify how relationships are build and maintained, specifically based on various things people are searching for from a relationship (Education Portal, n.d). Developing the interpersonal relationships is the cornerstone in building of what individuals want to accomplish in life. How people interact with others, the non-verbal communication, such as body language, the tone of voice and the expressions that can be seen on the face are just as important as what people say.

Interpersonal relationships include more than just the verbal communication between individuals. They also communicate as much with their gestures and body language as they do with their voice and language. Interpersonal relationships are two-way communication. The importance of interpersonal relationships cannot be refused. Whether when interacting with a friend, a stranger who have the same likes or dislikes with you, your workmates, your wife or your family – learn to listen, learn to think about about what the other peopleneeds to say and you will end up at the core of several interpersonal relationships that characterize you and give meaning to your life. Making connections with others starts with your ability to hear them out, your ability to approvethair existence and your ability to let them perceive that what they say is important to you.

In this study the researcher wanted to explore the interpersonal communication between teachers and students with Autism Spectrum Disorder to form close personal relationship and also focused on the uses of power in relationship.

**Uncertainty Reduction Theory**, Berger and Calabrese (as cited in West & Turner, 2010) stated that when strangers first meet, they are most likely concerned about increasing consistency in an effort to bode well out of their communication experience. They theorize that communication is the tool by which individuals reduce their uncertainty aroundeach other. Thus, reduced uncertainty makes conditions ready for the improvement of interpersonal relationships. The current rendition of the theory stated that there are two kinds of uncertainty in the first encounters: psychological and behavioral. Therefore, cognitive uncertaintyrefers to the degree of uncertainty associated with those beliefs and attitudes. On the other hand, behavioral uncertainty,pertains to “the extent to which behavior is predictable in a given situation.” Berger (as cited in West & Turner, 2010) speaks about the nature of behavioral uncertainty in this passage:



*Interpersonal Communication*  
Source: Devito, 2013

*“To interact in a relatively smooth, coordinated, and understandable manner, one must be able both to predict how one’s interaction partner is likely to behave, and, based upon these predictions, to select from one’s own repertoire those responses that will optimize outcomes in the encounter”.*

According to Berger and Calabrese (as cited in West & Turner, 2010), vast majority start the interaction in an entry phase, defined as the beginning stage of an interaction between strangers. Individuals then enter the second stage, called the personal phase, or the stage where the interactants begin to communicate more spontaneously and to reveal more personal information. The personal phase can occur from the very first interaction, but it is more likely to happen after few interactions. The third stage, the exit phase, refers to the stage during which individuals decide about whether they want to continue interacting with this person again or not. Although not all people enter an interaction phase in the similar way or stay in a phase for a similar amount of time, Berger and Calabrese (as cited in West & Turner, 2010) stated that a universal framework exists that clarifies how interpersonal communication shapes and reflects the development of interpersonal relationships. In this study, all the informants had experienced those phases during the interactions process with the students with Autism Spectrum Disorder.

Uncertainty Reduction Theory sets a effective action of interpersonal relationships in their first stages. This theory has been depicted as a pattern of original theorizing in the communication field (Miller, as cited in West & Turner, 2010) because it employs concepts (such as information seeking, self-disclosure) that are specifically relevant to studying communication behavior. Uncertainty Reduction Theory attempts to put communication as the foundation of human behavior, and to this end various of beliefs about human behavior and communication determine the theory.

Berger and Calabrese (as cited in West & Turner, 2010) started with an assortment of **axioms**, or truisms drawn from past research and common sense. These axioms, or what some researchers called by propositions, require no additional evidence than the assertion itself. Axioms are the core of the theory and have to be accepted as valid because they are the constituent for everything else in the theory. Each axiom shows a connection between uncertainty (the central theoretical concept) and one other concept. There are seven axioms:

**Axiom 1:** Because of the high level of uncertainty that encounters at the beginning of the entry phase, as the number of verbal communications between strangers increases, the level of uncertainty for each individual in the relationship decreases. As uncertainty is further decreased, the amount of verbal communication increases. This affirms an inverse or negative relationship between uncertainty and verbal communication.

**Axiom 2:** As nonverbal affiliative expressiveness increases, uncertainty levels in the first interactions decrease. Also, decreases in uncertainty level will increase the nonverbal affiliative expressiveness which indicates another negative relationship.

**Axiom 3:** High levels of uncertainty will increase the information seeking behavior. As uncertainty levels decline, information-seeking behavior decreases. This axiom sets into a positive relationship between the two concepts.

**Axiom 4:** This axiom affects a negative relationship between uncertainty and levels of intimacy which means that high levels of uncertainty in a relationship will decrease the intimacy level of communication content and low levels of uncertainty produce high levels of intimacy.

**Axiom 5:** High levels of uncertainty outgrowth high paces of cooperation. Low levels of uncertainty outgrowth low levels of cooperation. A positive relationship is developed here.

**Axiom 6:** Similarities between people decrease uncertainty, while dissimilarities increase uncertainty. Negative relationship can be seen in this axiom.

**Axiom 7:** If the uncertainty level increased, the liking will be decreased; if uncertainty decreased, the liking will be increased. Another negative relationship can be seen in this axiom.

The seven axioms stated above, only two axioms which were applied in this study; **axiom 2** and **axiom 3** which explained about the reducing the uncertainty level by using nonverbal communication and using seeking information with the students with Autism Spectrum Disorder.

Berger (as cited in West & Turner, 2010) recommended that three antecedent (prior) conditions exist when searching for uncertainty devaluation. The first condition happens when the other individual can possibly get a reward or punish. A second antecedent condition happens when the other person behaves opposed to expectations. The third and final condition happens when a person anticipates future interactions with the other person.

In this study, only two antecedents were applied. First, the condition occurs when the teachers have a potential to reward and punish the students with Autism Spectrum Disorders during the learning process in the classroom. The second antecedent was the condition when the teachers expected future interactions with the students with Autism Spectrum Disorder.

### III. METHODOLOGY

This study used qualitative research because this study focused on accounts given by the informants. In order to let the researcher to perform in - depth exploration, this study used a case study approach with a semi-structured interview. In-depth interview is the most commonly used data collection approach in qualitative method (Darlington & Scoot, 2002)



*In-depth Interview Stages*

*Source: Darlington and Scoot (2002)*

The researcher also observed the learning session where the researcher used the Observer as The Participant Role where the researcher had limited involvement in the neutral setting being studied, President Special Need Center, Jababeka. This allows the researcher to find out the interactional pattern between teacher and students with Autism Spectrum Disorders.

### IV. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

After analyzing the data supported by theory in the literature review, the findings are as follows.

1. The level of uncertainty when interacting with the students with Autism Spectrum Disorder was high. To decrease the level of uncertainty the teachers examined the students' personal interests and behavior. This came in a few phases. 1) **entry phase** in which the teachers wanted to have an interaction with the students. In this phase, informant 1 and 4 introduce themselves as teacher to their student and then the interaction would happen. As for the informant 2 and 3, they began their interaction by examining the student's behavior; their approach varied depending on the student's behavior. 2) **The personal phase** when the teacher knew personal information such as the student's likes and dislikes and also students' behavior. Informant 1 stated that she tried

to interact personally by teaching the students to take off their shoes or to remove the shoes by themselves. This is meant to shape their behavior. As for informant 2, she stated that she tried to improve the students' ability in Gross Motor Skill to improve their ability to write or bicycle that moved their muscles. Meanwhile, for informant 3 and informant 4 they stated that they examined the students' interests like some of the students enjoyed drawing, singing, or painting. 3) **The exit phase** in which the teachers wanted to continue the interaction process by continuing the learning process in the classroom in order to engage in future interactions. Informant 1 stated that she tried to interact personally by teaching the students to take off their shoes or to remove the shoes by themselves. This is meant to shape their behavior. As for informant 2, she stated that she tried to improve the students' ability in Gross Motor Skill to improve their ability to write or bicycle that moved their muscles. Meanwhile, for informant 3 and informant 4 they stated that they examined the students' interests like some of the students enjoyed drawing, singing, or painting. These aims to tell students that the teachers want to continue the interaction with their students by continuing the process of learning in the classroom.

2. As a person who has power in the classroom, the teachers use their power wisely. To reduce the uncertainty level, the teachers not only examined the students' personal interests and behavior, but also used their power to reduce the uncertainty level by giving the students a reward to motivate the students during the learning process. The teachers gave the students compliments such as "high five" or gave a "star" to the students. All the informants had full power in the classroom, but they were against harm doing toward the students with Autism Spectrum Disorder and they began their lessons with a bolder and higher voice only to get their attention or to warn the students to prevent them from something bad. In order to make the situations in the class effective for the students, the informants used their power to manage the classroom. All of the informants were firm toward the students in order to get the situation in class under control, hence most effective. The informants also got help from the teachers' assistants in managing the situation in the classroom.

### V. CONCLUSION

In order to reduce the uncertainty level between teacher and students with Autism Spectrum Disorder in President Special Need Center is by examining the students' personal interests and behavior. And as the person who has power over in the classroom, the teacher reduces the uncertainty level with their power by giving the students compliments such as "high five" or giving a "star" to the students. This role motivates the students during the learning process.

This research is open to the future research to explore deeper into interpersonal communication between teachers and students with Autism Spectrum Disorder in public school and take on other possible angles related to the topic.

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