

Research Article

Interpersonal Communication of the Principal at Mts Al-Washliyah KM6 Tanjung Mulia

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the interpersonal communication of the principal with teachers at MTS Al Washliyah KM 6 Tanjung Mulia. This research employed a qualitative approach with a descriptive research design. Data were collected through observation, interviews, and documentation. The research informants consisted of the principal, vice principal, treasurer, educational staff, and teachers at MTS Al Washliyah KM 6 Tanjung Mulia. Data analysis involved data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing, while data validity was examined through source and technique triangulation. The findings indicate that the principal's interpersonal communication was effectively implemented through five indicators of interpersonal communication: openness, empathy, supportiveness, positiveness, and equality. The principal provided opportunities for teachers to express their opinions and concerns, demonstrated understanding of teachers' conditions, provided support and motivation, established positive communication, and treated teachers fairly regardless of position or length of service. Such interpersonal communication contributed to the development of harmonious working relationships, increased teacher motivation and participation, and the creation of a conducive school environment. Therefore, effective interpersonal communication serves as an important component of school leadership in strengthening cooperation and supporting the achievement of educational goals.

Keywords: Interpersonal Communication; Principal; Teachers; Learning; Students

1. INTRODUCTION

Education is one of the primary instruments for developing high-quality human resources. The success of educational implementation is determined not only by the curriculum, infrastructure, and teacher competence but also by the leadership of the school principal as the leader of the educational institution (Supriyadi, T., & Hakim, A., 2020, p. 56). The school principal plays a strategic role in managing all school resources, establishing harmonious working relationships, and creating a conducive organizational climate through effective interpersonal communication (Leithwood, Harris, & Hopkins, 2020, p. 5). Interpersonal communication serves as an essential foundation for developing trust, openness, and cooperation between the school principal, teachers, and educational staff, thereby supporting the achievement of educational objectives optimally (Ramli, R., 2019, p. 45).

Interpersonal communication refers to the process of conveying messages directly between two or more individuals, allowing immediate feedback to occur (Fitria, H., 2020, p. 55). Within educational institutions, interpersonal communication conducted by the school principal serves as a medium for communicating policies, providing motivation, resolving conflicts, and developing positive emotional relationships with all members of the school community (Wulandari, N., & Prasetyo, R., 2018, p. 33). Communication characterized by openness, empathy, supportiveness, and mutual respect contributes to the creation of a harmonious working environment in which teachers feel valued as important members of the school organization (Sirait & Neliwati, 2022, p. 20). Effective interpersonal communication by the school principal can enhance teachers' work motivation through openness in communication, the provision of support, and harmonious interpersonal relationships. Therefore, interpersonal communication represents an important aspect of creating a conducive working environment within madrasahs (Marpaung, Rambe, & Ridho, 2023, p. 12997).

As an educational leader, the school principal is expected to possess not only managerial competence but also the ability to communicate effectively with all members of the school community. Through effective interpersonal communication, the school principal can build teachers' trust, improve work coordination, minimize misunderstandings, and strengthen the organizational culture of the school. Conversely, ineffective communication may potentially lead to conflicts, poor coordination, and even a decline in the quality of educational services. Therefore, interpersonal communication constitutes one of the essential competencies that every school principal should possess (Nasriah, Yusni, & Sari, 2022, p. 539).

Within the context of madrasahs, communication values are also closely related to Islamic principles, such as shura (deliberation), tawasi (mutual advice), and respect for others. As the leader of an Islamic educational institution, the school principal is expected to establish communication that is not only technically effective but also grounded in noble moral

values. This approach is believed to contribute to a healthier working environment emotionally and spiritually while strengthening teachers' enthusiasm in carrying out their educational and teaching responsibilities (Fadhilah & Latifah, 2023, p. 55). Madrasah Tsanawiyah, as an Islamic educational institution, has distinctive characteristics compared with general schools. In addition to developing students' academic abilities, madrasahs are also responsible for cultivating students' character, morality, and Islamic values. This condition requires the school principal to develop interpersonal communication that is not merely administrative but also educational, religious, and humanistic in nature. Effective communication can foster harmonious working relationships between the school principal and teachers, thereby enabling educational programs to be implemented optimally (Yenny Diahastaty, 2024, p. 228).

MTs Al Washliyah KM 6 Tanjung Mulia is one of the Islamic educational institutions that plays an important role in developing knowledgeable students with noble character. As an educational institution that continues to develop, the success of educational implementation at this madrasah cannot be separated from the role of the school principal in establishing communication with teachers, educational staff, and students. Every policy formulated by the school principal requires effective interpersonal communication so that it can be properly understood, accepted, and implemented by all members of the madrasah community.

In practice, interpersonal communication between the school principal and members of the school community does not always operate as expected. Differences in individual characteristics, educational backgrounds, work experiences, and perceptions of particular policies can influence the effectiveness of communication. Furthermore, the development of information technology has transformed communication patterns within educational institutions. Communication no longer takes place solely through face-to-face interactions but also through digital media, such as WhatsApp and other communication platforms. This situation requires school principals to adapt their communication strategies to ensure that communication remains effective in various circumstances (Pramudito, Darmiyanti, & Saprialman, 2022, p. 12624).

Various studies have demonstrated that interpersonal communication by school principals makes a significant contribution to establishing harmonious working relationships within schools. A study on the effectiveness of interpersonal communication conducted by the principal at MTs Negeri 1 Ogan Komering Ilir found that openness, empathy, supportiveness, positive attitudes, and equality constitute the primary indicators of successful interpersonal communication in establishing effective relationships between school principals and teachers (Fitriyanti, 2022, p. 67). Although numerous studies have examined interpersonal communication by school principals, most have focused on its influence on work motivation, teacher performance, or school organizational effectiveness using quantitative approaches. Meanwhile, studies that specifically describe how interpersonal communication by school principals takes place in everyday life within madrasah environments, particularly at MTs Al Washliyah KM 6 Tanjung Mulia, remain limited. Therefore, a qualitative study is needed to explore interpersonal communication phenomena more comprehensively based on the actual experiences of research informants.

A qualitative research approach is considered appropriate because it provides a comprehensive understanding of the interpersonal communication process of the school principal through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. Through this approach, researchers can explore how school principals demonstrate openness, empathy, supportiveness, positive attitudes, and equality when communicating with teachers and educational staff. Consequently, a comprehensive understanding of interpersonal communication practices within the madrasah can be obtained. Based on the foregoing discussion, interpersonal communication conducted by school principals constitutes an important aspect of educational management that deserves in-depth examination. Therefore, this study is entitled "Interpersonal Communication of the School Principal at MTs Al Washliyah KM 6 Tanjung Mulia." The study aims to provide a comprehensive description of the forms, processes, and dynamics of interpersonal communication practiced by the school principal in establishing effective relationships with members of the madrasah community. The findings are expected to serve as an evaluation tool and provide constructive input for the school principal in improving the quality of interpersonal communication within the madrasah environment.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach with a descriptive research design aimed at obtaining an in-depth understanding of the principal's interpersonal communication at MTs Al Washliyah KM 6 Tanjung Mulia. This approach was selected because the study focused on describing the phenomenon based on actual conditions in the field rather than measuring numerical data or testing hypotheses. Sugiyono (2023, p. 9) explains that qualitative research is conducted in natural settings with the researcher serving as the main instrument, data collected through triangulation, and data analyzed inductively with an emphasis on meaning rather than generalization. Similarly, Moleong (2021, p. 6) states that qualitative research seeks to understand phenomena experienced by research subjects holistically through descriptions in words and language within a natural context. Data were collected through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation involving the school principal, teachers, and educational staff who were directly involved in activities at the madrasah. These three techniques were applied systematically to obtain in-depth and accurate data concerning interpersonal communication practices within the madrasah environment.

The focus of this study was the principal's interpersonal communication based on Joseph A. DeVito's theory, which consists of five main dimensions: ***openness, empathy, supportiveness, positiveness, and equality***. These five dimensions served as the basis for developing observation and interview guidelines as well as analyzing the research data. The collected data were analyzed inductively through data organization, data reduction, data presentation, identification of relevant patterns and themes, and conclusion drawing based on empirical findings. Data credibility was ensured through source and technique triangulation by comparing information obtained from observations, interviews, and documentation. Through this methodology, the study is expected to provide a comprehensive description of the forms, processes, and

dynamics of the principal's interpersonal communication in establishing effective relationships with teachers and educational staff at MTs Al Washliyah KM 6 Tanjung Mulia.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 The Principal's Openness in Interpersonal Communication with Teachers

The research findings indicate that the principal of MTs Al Washliyah KM 6 Tanjung Mulia primarily employs face-to-face communication, personal dialogue, regular meetings, and a familial approach when conveying information to teachers. These findings are consistent with the study conducted by Marpaung, Rambe, and Ridho (2023: 12999), which found that direct interpersonal communication can strengthen the emotional relationship between principals and teachers, thereby facilitating the delivery of information and the resolution of various issues within the school environment. The findings further reveal that the principal provides teachers with opportunities to express their opinions, criticisms, and suggestions during regular meetings. This condition demonstrates the implementation of open interpersonal communication within the madrasah. This finding supports the study by Marpaung et al. (2023: 13001), which explains that openness is an important indicator of effective interpersonal communication because it can foster trust, increase motivation, and strengthen collaboration among school personnel.

Based on the findings of this study conducted at MTs Al Washliyah KM 6 Tanjung Mulia, *openness* constitutes one of the essential dimensions of interpersonal communication demonstrated by the principal, Mr. Zulkifli, S.Pd.I., in his interactions with teachers and educational staff. In this study, openness is understood not merely as the principal's willingness to convey information to teachers but also as his readiness to listen, accept different opinions, provide opportunities for teachers to express suggestions and constructive criticism, and establish two-way communication in carrying out school responsibilities. The observational findings indicate that the principal communicates with teachers in various situations, including formal activities such as meetings and evaluation sessions, as well as informal daily interactions within the school environment. This communication pattern demonstrates that the relationship between the principal and teachers is not solely based on organizational hierarchy but also on interpersonal relationships that facilitate the exchange of information in an open manner. Such communication is essential because interpersonal communication constitutes an integral part of educational leadership that influences working relationships and teachers' professional performance. This finding supports Ilham's study, which reported that formal and informal interpersonal communication between principals and teachers becomes more effective when openness, empathy, supportiveness, positiveness, and equality are consistently practiced within the workplace (Ilham, 2024: 21342–21350).

The principal's openness is reflected in the opportunities provided for teachers to express opinions and offer input regarding various school-related issues. Interviews with the vice principal, treasurer, administrative staff, and several teachers revealed that the principal consistently encourages teachers to communicate their ideas, concerns, and suggestions. Teachers are not merely recipients of instructions but are also encouraged to provide feedback regarding policies and programs before implementation. This situation reflects a two-way communication pattern in which the principal functions not only as a source of information but also as an active listener. Consequently, teachers are able to communicate their classroom experiences, instructional challenges, and professional insights, enabling the principal to obtain comprehensive information before making decisions.

Openness is also evident in the school's deliberation and decision-making processes. The findings indicate that whenever issues affecting the school community arise, the principal discusses them collectively through meetings and communication forums involving teachers. Teachers are encouraged to express their opinions based on their professional experiences and understanding of the issues under discussion. Such practices demonstrate that the principal recognizes teachers as valuable members of the school organization. From the perspective of educational leadership, involving teachers in communication and decision-making is crucial because they serve as the primary implementers of the teaching and learning process. Teachers possess firsthand knowledge of students' conditions, instructional practices, challenges encountered during program implementation, and emerging educational needs. Therefore, the principal's openness toward teachers' input provides valuable information that supports more informed and contextually appropriate policy decisions. These findings are consistent with the study conducted by Wijaya, Yanti, and Mansur (2024: 45–55), which reported that interpersonal communication between principals and teachers occurs through direct interaction, meetings, and daily communication, with openness serving as a key determinant of effective interpersonal relationships.

In addition to encouraging teachers to express their opinions, the principal demonstrates openness through transparent dissemination of information concerning school programs, assignments, meetings, professional development activities, and institutional agendas. Observational and documentary evidence indicates that communication is conducted both directly and through formal communication forums. Transparent information sharing enables teachers to understand their responsibilities more clearly and minimizes misunderstandings. Within educational organizations, ineffective information dissemination may lead to inconsistencies in understanding among staff members. Conversely, transparent communication ensures that all members receive the information necessary to implement school programs effectively. This finding corroborates the research of Nurussya'adah, Abdurrahman, and Tuala (2023: 78–86), who found that principals communicate with teachers through face-to-face interactions during daily activities and meetings, complemented by written communication for disseminating institutional information and directives.

The principal's openness is further reflected in his willingness to receive criticism and suggestions from teachers. Within organizational settings, constructive feedback functions as an important mechanism for evaluating and improving institutional programs. The findings demonstrate that teachers are provided with opportunities to communicate recommendations whenever they identify aspects requiring improvement. Such an attitude indicates that communication

is not characterized by a one-way leadership pattern in which teachers merely accept decisions made by the principal. Instead, the principal encourages dialogue to facilitate collaborative problem-solving. This practice is particularly significant because not every policy formulated by school leaders can be implemented successfully without considering practical realities in the classroom. Teachers provide valuable information regarding instructional conditions and implementation challenges, thereby supplying essential feedback for institutional evaluation and continuous improvement.

Furthermore, openness contributes significantly to developing mutual trust between the principal and teachers. When teachers recognize that their opinions are welcomed and genuinely considered, they develop a stronger sense of appreciation and belonging within the organization. This positive perception encourages teachers to communicate existing problems openly and honestly. Conversely, limited communication opportunities may discourage teachers from expressing their concerns, resulting in passive organizational behavior. The findings reveal that the principal consistently maintains communication channels that allow teachers to discuss work-related matters comfortably. Therefore, openness extends beyond information sharing and contributes to creating a psychologically safe environment that encourages effective interpersonal communication.

The study also demonstrates that openness positively influences teachers' motivation and organizational engagement. Teachers who are given opportunities to participate in discussions and decision-making processes tend to develop a stronger sense of ownership toward the school. Consequently, they perceive themselves not merely as policy implementers but also as contributors to institutional development. This finding aligns with the study by Azizah, Aini, Pratiwi, and Sudirman (2024: 1–7), which concluded that effective interpersonal communication between principals and teachers at SDN 16 Ampenan was characterized by openness that fostered harmonious collaboration. Similar conditions were observed at MTs Al Washliyah KM 6 Tanjung Mulia, where open communication enabled teachers and the principal to discuss various institutional needs and educational challenges collaboratively. From the perspective of Joseph A. DeVito's interpersonal communication theory, openness represents one of the fundamental characteristics of effective interpersonal communication. Openness requires individuals to disclose relevant information appropriately while remaining receptive to information provided by others. Within the context of principal-teacher relationships, openness does not imply disclosing all personal matters or confidential institutional information. Rather, it refers to the willingness to communicate information relevant to organizational responsibilities and to provide opportunities for teachers to express their professional perspectives. The findings indicate that this principle has been effectively implemented through meetings, discussions, daily communication, and evaluation activities. Accordingly, the principal's openness can be categorized as organizationally oriented openness that supports both institutional effectiveness and healthy interpersonal relationships.

The findings further suggest that openness plays a strategic role in resolving organizational problems within the school. Open discussions enable the principal and teachers to identify alternative solutions based on comprehensive and accurate information rather than assumptions or incomplete data. Through such communication, the principal gains a deeper understanding of issues from teachers' perspectives, while teachers become more aware of the rationale underlying institutional policies. Consequently, openness facilitates mutual understanding and strengthens collaboration between school leaders and teachers. Overall, the findings indicate that the principal of MTs Al Washliyah KM 6 Tanjung Mulia has successfully demonstrated a high level of openness in interpersonal communication. This openness is reflected in the principal's willingness to receive opinions, criticism, and suggestions; provide opportunities for teachers to express concerns; involve teachers in deliberative decision-making; transparently disseminate information regarding school programs; and maintain two-way communication through both formal and informal interactions. These findings are consistent with recent studies demonstrating that interpersonal communication between principals and teachers becomes more effective when characterized by openness and reciprocal information exchange. Likewise, Widiastuti, Dwikurnaningsih, and Sugiarto (2025: 1–10) concluded that interpersonal communication in educational settings functions effectively when supported by openness, empathy, supportiveness, positive attitudes, and equality. Therefore, openness constitutes one of the principal's primary strengths in fostering trust, enhancing teacher participation, and creating harmonious professional relationships within MTs Al Washliyah KM 6 Tanjung Mulia.

3.2 The Principal's Empathy in Interpersonal Communication with Teachers

Based on the findings of this study conducted at MTs Al Washliyah KM 6 Tanjung Mulia, empathy emerged as one of the most prominent dimensions of the interpersonal communication demonstrated by the principal, Mr. Zulkifli, S.Pd.I., in his interactions with teachers. In interpersonal communication, empathy refers to an individual's ability to understand another person's feelings, circumstances, needs, and concerns from that person's perspective. Within the context of educational leadership, empathy is particularly important because school principals interact not only with teachers in relation to their professional duties but also with individuals who possess diverse personalities, experiences, circumstances, and professional needs. The findings indicate that the principal consistently sought to understand teachers' situations before providing guidance or making decisions. This was reflected in his willingness to listen to teachers' concerns, allow them sufficient opportunity to explain the challenges they encountered, and provide responses that were appropriate to the issues presented. These findings are consistent with the study conducted by Suha, Sukmawati, and Radiana (2021: 1–8), which reported that effective interpersonal communication between principals and teachers is established through close relationships, an understanding of individual characteristics, and empathetic listening as an essential strategy for overcoming communication barriers.

Interviews with the vice principal, the school treasurer, administrative staff, and several teachers revealed that the principal demonstrated a thorough understanding of the challenges teachers encountered in carrying out their professional responsibilities. Teachers were viewed not merely as employees expected to fulfill institutional obligations but also as individuals who may experience various professional and personal difficulties while performing their duties. These challenges included instructional difficulties, student-related issues, administrative responsibilities, and other

circumstances that could affect teachers' concentration and performance. The principal consistently provided opportunities for teachers to communicate these concerns, allowing problems to be understood more comprehensively before any judgment or decision was made. Such practices demonstrate that the principal refrained from making premature evaluations and instead sought first to understand the context underlying each issue.

The principal's empathy was also reflected in his ability to serve as an attentive listener whenever teachers communicated their concerns. Effective interpersonal communication requires not only the ability to convey messages clearly but also the capacity to receive, interpret, and understand messages communicated by others. The findings indicate that whenever teachers expressed complaints or difficulties, the principal encouraged them to explain the situation fully before offering responses or recommendations. Consequently, teachers felt respected because their concerns received serious attention from the school leader. Moreover, the principal's listening behavior minimized the likelihood of misunderstandings by ensuring that information was fully understood before conclusions were drawn. This finding supports the study of Suha, Sukmawati, and Radiana (2021: 1–8), which concluded that principals enhance interpersonal communication by demonstrating empathy toward teachers' responsibilities, practicing active listening, clarifying unclear information, and selecting appropriate opportunities for communication.

Empathy was further demonstrated through the principal's responses to the difficulties experienced by teachers. Rather than merely instructing teachers on what should be done, the principal carefully considered the circumstances contributing to each problem. For example, when teachers encountered difficulties in carrying out specific responsibilities, the principal provided guidance and practical solutions while taking into account their abilities and current situations. Such an approach made interpersonal communication more humane because teachers did not feel judged solely on the basis of success or failure in completing their tasks. Instead, they were given opportunities to improve their performance through constructive guidance and professional support. These findings indicate that empathy represents an effective leadership approach because it enables school leaders to understand problems objectively before determining appropriate actions.

The findings also demonstrate that the principal's empathy contributed significantly to creating a comfortable communication climate between the principal and teachers. Teachers who perceived that their circumstances and concerns were genuinely understood were more willing to communicate openly about professional challenges. This condition strengthened interpersonal communication because teachers no longer felt hesitant or reluctant to seek assistance, advice, or clarification when necessary. Within the school environment, such openness is particularly valuable because issues related to teaching and student management can be communicated promptly to the principal. Consequently, empathy serves not only to strengthen interpersonal relationships but also to facilitate more effective problem-solving within the school organization. Furthermore, the findings reveal that the principal's empathy should not be interpreted as providing excessive leniency toward every problem experienced by teachers. Instead, empathy is more accurately understood as the ability to understand teachers' circumstances and provide responses appropriate to those circumstances. The principal continued to perform supervisory and developmental responsibilities while taking teachers' individual situations into consideration. This balance between professional expectations and personal concern represents an essential characteristic of effective educational leadership, ensuring that teachers remain accountable for their responsibilities while receiving guidance delivered through a humane and supportive approach.

These findings are consistent with the study conducted by Alfianto, Riyadi, and Hidayati (2021: 1–7), which investigated the role of principals' interpersonal communication in improving teachers' work motivation. Their study concluded that effective interpersonal communication is characterized by five essential principles: openness, empathy, supportiveness, positiveness, and equality. The study further reported that a positive communication climate, mutual respect, collaboration, and openness between principals and teachers facilitate problem-solving and collective decision-making. Similar conditions were observed at MTs Al Washliyah KM 6 Tanjung Mulia, where interpersonal communication functioned as an important means of understanding teachers' concerns while fostering respectful professional relationships. The principal's empathy was also evident in everyday interpersonal interactions. Interpersonal communication occurred not only during formal meetings but also through informal conversations within the school environment. Greetings, brief conversations, inquiries about teachers' well-being, and discussions concerning work-related challenges represented simple yet meaningful forms of communication that reflected genuine concern. Such daily interactions strengthened interpersonal closeness between the principal and teachers, making teachers feel more comfortable approaching the principal whenever they required guidance or assistance. Therefore, empathy does not necessarily require extraordinary actions; rather, it can be demonstrated consistently through everyday attention, responsiveness, and interpersonal care.

The findings also correspond with the research conducted by Nasriah, Yusni, and Sari (2022: 537–544), which demonstrated that interpersonal communication between principals and teachers becomes more effective when supported by togetherness, openness, empathy, supportiveness, and positive attitudes. Using observations, interviews, and document analysis, the researchers emphasized the importance of interpersonal communication in strengthening professional relationships within educational institutions. These findings reinforce the results of the present study, indicating that empathy is inseparable from both formal and informal communication within the daily life of the school community. Moreover, empathy plays a significant role in establishing harmonious professional relationships. When principals demonstrate genuine understanding of teachers' circumstances, teachers perceive that they are valued not merely for their professional positions but also as individuals. This perception enhances teachers' trust in the principal, which subsequently forms the foundation for more open and constructive communication. As trust develops, teachers become increasingly willing to discuss professional difficulties and collaborate in finding appropriate solutions. Over time, this condition contributes to stronger working relationships and creates a more conducive educational environment. From the perspective of interpersonal communication theory, empathy also involves the ability to interpret both verbal and nonverbal messages.

School principals must pay attention not only to what teachers communicate verbally but also to how they communicate. Tone of voice, facial expressions, body language, and behavioral changes may provide important indicators of teachers' emotional conditions. Accordingly, the ability to recognize these nonverbal cues enables principals to determine more appropriate communication strategies. The findings indicate that the principal consistently paid attention to teachers' emotional and professional conditions rather than focusing solely on the content of conversations. This demonstrates that interpersonal communication within the school was conducted with careful consideration of the human and relational dimensions of leadership.

According to Joseph A. DeVito's theory of interpersonal communication, empathy constitutes one of the fundamental characteristics of effective interpersonal communication. In the present study, the principal's empathy was reflected in his willingness to listen attentively to teachers, understand their professional circumstances and challenges, provide appropriate responses, and offer guidance whenever needed. Consequently, empathy functioned not merely as a personal characteristic of the principal but also as an essential communication strategy in educational leadership. Through empathetic communication, the principal was able to understand teachers' actual conditions and subsequently provide decisions, supervision, and professional guidance that were responsive to their needs. Overall, the findings indicate that the principal of MTs Al Washliyah KM 6 Tanjung Mulia effectively demonstrated empathy in interpersonal communication with teachers. Empathy was reflected in the principal's willingness to listen to teachers' concerns, understand their circumstances, provide opportunities for them to explain the challenges they encountered, deliver guidance tailored to their situations, and consistently demonstrate concern through both formal and informal communication. Such practices enabled teachers to feel heard, respected, and valued, thereby fostering closer and more harmonious interpersonal relationships between the principal and teachers. These findings reinforce previous studies demonstrating that empathy, openness, supportiveness, positive attitudes, and togetherness constitute essential elements of effective interpersonal communication between school principals and teachers (Nasriah, Yusni, & Sari, 2022: 537–544).

3.3 The Principal's Supportiveness in Interpersonal Communication with Teachers

Based on the findings of this study conducted at MTs Al Washliyah KM 6 Tanjung Mulia, supportiveness emerged as one of the key dimensions of the principal's interpersonal communication with teachers. The principal, Mr. Zulkifli, S.Pd.I., demonstrated supportiveness as an essential leadership characteristic in fostering positive professional relationships within the school. In interpersonal communication, supportiveness refers to an individual's willingness to provide encouragement, assistance, guidance, attention, and reinforcement that enable others to perform their responsibilities more effectively. Leadership is also regarded as an organizational function that enables an individual to influence others to perform their duties effectively in order to achieve organizational goals (Ananda & Awaluddin, 2023: 7). Within the context of educational leadership, supportiveness extends beyond assisting teachers when they encounter difficulties. It also encompasses motivating teachers, providing professional guidance, creating opportunities for competency development, and establishing a supportive working environment in which teachers feel secure in carrying out their professional duties. Evidence obtained through observations, interviews, and document analysis indicates that the principal consistently demonstrated support through both formal and informal communication. Such supportive behavior represents an important component of interpersonal relationships because teachers require not only direction from school leaders but also continuous encouragement in responding to the increasing demands of their profession.

Hasibuan and Nasution, in their study, found that learning motivation has a significant influence on students' academic achievement, indicating that motivation is closely associated with educational performance (Hasibuan & Nasution, 2024: 565–576). In the context of the present study conducted at MTs Al Washliyah KM 6 Tanjung Mulia, these findings provide additional support for the argument that motivation constitutes an essential component of the educational environment. Although Hasibuan and Nasution's research focused on university students and academic achievement, whereas the present study examines teachers and the principal's interpersonal communication, both studies share the perspective that motivation serves as an important factor in supporting the implementation of educational activities. Therefore, the motivation provided by the principal to teachers through interpersonal communication can be viewed as a form of psychological support that enhances teachers' commitment and assists them in carrying out their professional duties and responsibilities.

Interviews with the vice principal, the school treasurer, administrative staff, and several teachers revealed that the principal consistently supported teachers in fulfilling their professional responsibilities. This support was reflected in his willingness to provide guidance whenever teachers encountered challenges, motivate them during difficult situations, and assist them in identifying appropriate solutions to problems related to teaching and school activities. Rather than merely assigning tasks, the principal provided explanations, professional assistance, and continuous guidance whenever teachers required support. This communication pattern demonstrates that the principal positioned himself not only as an instructional leader but also as a mentor who accompanied teachers throughout the implementation of their responsibilities.

One of the most evident forms of support identified in this study was the provision of guidance when teachers experienced difficulties in performing their duties. Teachers inevitably encounter various professional challenges related to classroom instruction, classroom management, student behavior, administrative responsibilities, and other school-related activities. Under such circumstances, the principal's role as a leader capable of providing direction becomes particularly important. The findings indicate that the principal responded to these situations by communicating directly with teachers. He listened carefully to the issues presented, sought to understand the underlying problems, and subsequently offered guidance that was appropriate to each specific circumstance. These findings suggest that interpersonal communication between the principal and teachers functioned not only as a means of conveying instructions but also as an effective mechanism for collaborative problem-solving.

Supportiveness was also demonstrated through the principal's efforts to motivate teachers. The principal consistently encouraged teachers to maintain enthusiasm, commitment, and professionalism in carrying out their responsibilities while continuously improving the quality of their work. Motivation was expressed through advice, professional guidance, appreciation, and simple interpersonal interactions that reflected the principal's genuine concern for teachers' performance. Such encouragement is particularly important because the teaching profession involves complex responsibilities. Teachers are expected not only to deliver instructional content but also to guide students, conduct assessments, manage administrative tasks, participate in school activities, and fulfill additional institutional responsibilities. Consequently, the principal's support serves as an important factor in sustaining teachers' professional commitment and motivation. These findings are consistent with the study conducted by Hidayati and Yuliani (2023), which reported that interpersonal communication between school leaders and teachers plays a significant role in establishing professional relationships that support teachers in performing their duties. Open communication accompanied by attention to teachers' professional needs contributes to a more positive working environment while strengthening relationships between school leaders and teachers (Hidayati & Yuliani, 2023: 117–124). Similar conditions were observed at MTs Al Washliyah KM 6 Tanjung Mulia, where the principal demonstrated support through effective communication, constructive guidance, and continuous concern for teachers' professional well-being.

In addition to providing motivation, the principal demonstrated supportiveness by encouraging teachers to develop their professional competencies. The findings indicate that the principal actively encouraged teachers to participate in professional development activities, including training programs, seminars, Subject Teacher Consultation Forums (*Musyawarah Guru Mata Pelajaran*—MGMP), and other educational development initiatives. Such opportunities reflect the principal's understanding that improvements in school quality are closely associated with the professional competence of teachers. Teachers who are encouraged to pursue continuous professional development are more likely to acquire new knowledge, experiences, and instructional skills that can subsequently enhance classroom learning. Support for teachers' professional development also demonstrates the principal's long-term commitment to improving institutional quality. Rather than focusing solely on the completion of daily administrative tasks, the principal consistently emphasized the continuous improvement of teachers' professional capacities. Competent teachers are better equipped to implement effective instruction, understand students' learning needs, and adapt educational practices to contemporary educational developments. Therefore, the principal's commitment to teachers' professional development contributes not only to individual teacher growth but also to the overall improvement of educational quality within the school.

Supportiveness was further reflected in the implementation of supervision and evaluation activities. The findings indicate that whenever shortcomings were identified in teachers' performance, the principal provided constructive feedback and professional guidance as part of the coaching process. Evaluation was not intended merely to identify weaknesses but rather to facilitate professional improvement. This approach is particularly significant because the manner in which principals communicate evaluative feedback influences teachers' acceptance of constructive criticism. When evaluation is delivered respectfully and through effective interpersonal communication, teachers are more likely to accept recommendations and utilize them as opportunities for professional growth. Conversely, excessively critical evaluation may create psychological pressure and discourage teachers from engaging in open communication.

Within the present study, the principal consistently provided constructive feedback by identifying areas requiring improvement while simultaneously offering practical recommendations for addressing those weaknesses. Consequently, evaluative communication extended beyond identifying deficiencies to include collaborative problem-solving and professional coaching. This communication pattern demonstrates the principal's commitment to instructional leadership and teacher development. Teachers not only became aware of aspects requiring improvement but also gained practical guidance regarding strategies for enhancing their professional performance.

These findings support the study conducted by Mulyani, Harapan, and Rohana (2022), which concluded that principals' interpersonal communication contributes significantly to improving teachers' performance through professional guidance, continuous coaching, and the establishment of positive communication between principals and teachers (Mulyani, Harapan, & Rohana, 2022: 86–94). Leadership support is particularly important because teachers require a professional environment that provides opportunities for continuous mentoring and evaluation. Similarly, at MTs Al Washliyah KM 6 Tanjung Mulia, the principal consistently supported teachers by providing guidance whenever professional challenges arose. Supportiveness was also reflected in the recognition and appreciation extended to teachers. The findings indicate that the principal acknowledged teachers who demonstrated responsibility, discipline, and meaningful contributions to school activities. Appreciation was expressed through verbal recognition, words of gratitude, professional trust, and other forms of acknowledgment. Although these expressions of appreciation were relatively simple, they held considerable significance for teachers because they indicated that their efforts were recognized by the school leadership. Teachers who perceive that their contributions are appreciated are more likely to maintain and improve their professional performance. From the perspective of interpersonal communication, supportiveness encompasses not only material assistance but also psychological support. When principals demonstrate confidence in teachers' abilities, provide motivation, and entrust them with professional responsibilities, teachers develop greater self-confidence and become more willing to assume leadership roles within the school. Such trust also strengthens interpersonal relationships because communication is established on the basis of mutual confidence rather than suspicion or excessive control.

The principal's supportiveness also created a sense of psychological safety that encouraged teachers to communicate their professional concerns openly. Teachers became more willing to discuss challenges because they understood that the principal would respond by seeking constructive solutions rather than assigning blame. The findings indicate that the principal consistently provided opportunities for teachers to express various concerns before offering guidance tailored to their specific situations. These findings suggest that supportiveness and openness are closely interconnected. Openness creates opportunities for teachers to communicate freely, whereas supportiveness enables teachers to utilize those

opportunities with confidence and without fear of negative judgment.

According to Joseph A. DeVito's theory of interpersonal communication, supportiveness is one of the essential characteristics of effective interpersonal communication. Communication becomes more effective when individuals demonstrate supportive attitudes and avoid creating judgmental communication environments. In the present study, the principal's supportiveness was reflected in his willingness to provide guidance, motivation, professional coaching, and practical assistance whenever teachers encountered difficulties. He consistently established a communication climate in which teachers felt comfortable discussing challenges and collaboratively identifying appropriate solutions. These findings demonstrate that the principal's interpersonal communication extended beyond the transmission of instructions to include continuous mentoring and professional support. Supportiveness also contributed to strengthening collaboration among teachers. When the principal consistently demonstrated support toward teachers, collaborative relationships among colleagues became easier to establish. The principal encouraged teachers to assist one another and coordinate their efforts in implementing school programs. Consequently, the principal's supportive communication influenced not only individual relationships between the principal and teachers but also contributed to the development of a collaborative organizational culture. Such a culture is essential in educational institutions because successful implementation of school programs depends upon collective effort rather than individual performance. Overall, evidence obtained from observations, interviews, and document analysis indicates that supportiveness has become an integral component of interpersonal communication at MTs Al Washliyah KM 6 Tanjung Mulia. The principal consistently demonstrated support by providing professional guidance, motivation, coaching, opportunities for competency development, constructive evaluation, and recognition of teachers' contributions. These supportive practices enabled teachers to feel valued, assisted, and professionally supported rather than facing workplace challenges independently. Consequently, stronger and more harmonious professional relationships were established between the principal and teachers.

In conclusion, the principal of MTs Al Washliyah KM 6 Tanjung Mulia effectively demonstrated supportiveness through interpersonal communication characterized by professional guidance, motivation, mentoring, and collaborative problem-solving. The principal functioned not only as an administrator who delegated responsibilities but also as a mentor who continuously supported teachers in fulfilling their professional duties. This supportive communication strengthened teachers' trust in the principal, enhanced their comfort in interpersonal interactions, and contributed to the creation of a positive and conducive working environment. These findings suggest that supportiveness represents one of the principal's leadership strengths in promoting collaboration and improving the overall quality of educational implementation within the school.

3.4 The Principal's Positiveness in Interpersonal Communication with Teachers

Based on the findings of this study conducted at MTs Al Washliyah KM 6 Tanjung Mulia, **positiveness** emerged as one of the essential dimensions of the principal's interpersonal communication with teachers and educational staff. The principal, Mr. Zulkifli, S.Pd.I., consistently demonstrated a positive communication attitude in establishing professional relationships within the school. In interpersonal communication, positiveness refers to an individual's ability to demonstrate respect, optimism, appreciation, and positive regard toward others throughout the communication process. Within the context of educational leadership, a principal's positiveness is reflected not only in the use of respectful language but also in the ability to motivate teachers, acknowledge their contributions, provide recognition, and deliver constructive feedback. Evidence obtained through observations, interviews, and document analysis indicates that the principal consistently sought to create a comfortable communication climate in which teachers felt respected, supported, and valued while carrying out their professional responsibilities. Such a positive attitude contributed significantly to establishing harmonious working relationships between the principal and teachers.

Interviews with the vice principal, the school treasurer, administrative staff, and several teachers revealed that the principal consistently communicated in ways that avoided creating psychological pressure for teachers. When providing guidance, he used clear and respectful language while adapting his communication style to the specific circumstances being addressed. Whenever shortcomings were identified in teachers' performance, the principal did not merely point out mistakes but also provided explanations and constructive guidance regarding areas requiring improvement. This communication approach demonstrates the principal's commitment to maintaining positive interpersonal relationships even when conducting performance evaluations or addressing professional concerns.

The principal's positiveness was also reflected in his practice of recognizing and appreciating teachers' contributions. The findings indicate that teachers who performed their responsibilities effectively received acknowledgment from the principal, either through verbal appreciation or by being entrusted with additional responsibilities and leadership opportunities. Such recognition is particularly meaningful because it demonstrates that the school leader values teachers' contributions to institutional development. Teachers who perceive that their efforts are appreciated are more likely to sustain and improve the quality of their professional performance. Within educational organizations, recognition does not necessarily have to be material in nature. Expressions of gratitude, praise, attention, and acknowledgment of teachers' efforts also constitute meaningful forms of appreciation that generate positive psychological effects. Another manifestation of the principal's positive attitude was his continuous effort to motivate teachers. The principal consistently encouraged teachers to remain enthusiastic and committed to their professional responsibilities despite encountering various challenges. Motivation was provided during staff meetings, individual conversations, and informal daily interactions. These practices demonstrate the principal's awareness that teachers' psychological well-being plays a crucial role in supporting effective educational performance. Teachers who receive encouragement and motivation from their leaders are more likely to perceive that their work is valued and that they play an important role in achieving the school's educational objectives.

These findings indicate that positiveness in interpersonal communication is closely associated with the principal's ability to reinforce teachers' professional efforts. Positive reinforcement enables teachers to recognize that every contribution they make has value for the organization. When teachers encounter professional difficulties, the principal encourages them to persevere rather than become discouraged. Conversely, when teachers successfully accomplish their responsibilities, the principal acknowledges their achievements through appreciation and recognition. Such communication practices contribute to the development of a more optimistic organizational climate because interactions between the principal and teachers involve not only directives, evaluations, and corrections but also encouragement, recognition, and professional support. The findings of this study are consistent with those reported by Fauziah and Mulyana (2022), who concluded that interpersonal communication within educational institutions plays a significant role in establishing harmonious relationships and fostering a positive working environment. Communication characterized by mutual respect and positive responses contributes to stronger interpersonal relationships among organizational members (Fauziah & Mulyana, 2022: 112–119). Similar conditions were observed at MTs Al Washliyah KM 6 Tanjung Mulia, where the principal consistently promoted a communication climate grounded in appreciation, respect, and genuine concern for teachers.

The principal's positive attitude was also evident in the manner in which corrective feedback was delivered. Providing constructive criticism is an inseparable aspect of educational leadership because principals are responsible for ensuring that institutional regulations and professional responsibilities are fulfilled. However, the effectiveness of corrective feedback depends largely on the manner in which it is communicated. The findings indicate that the principal deliberately avoided reprimanding teachers publicly. When concerns involved personal matters or specific professional shortcomings, corrective feedback was delivered privately, allowing teachers to improve their performance without experiencing embarrassment or loss of dignity. This approach illustrates the principal's ability to integrate supervisory responsibilities with positive interpersonal communication. Within this context, positiveness should not be interpreted as ignoring teachers' mistakes. Rather, it is reflected in the principal's ability to provide correction while preserving positive interpersonal relationships. Although professional guidance was consistently provided whenever shortcomings occurred, it was communicated using constructive and encouraging language. Consequently, teachers perceived corrective feedback as an opportunity for professional growth rather than as a form of punishment. Such an approach facilitates more open communication because teachers do not perceive that every mistake will result in negative treatment from school leadership. The principal's positiveness was further reflected in his appreciation of teachers' opinions. During meetings and discussions, differing viewpoints were not immediately rejected. Instead, teachers were encouraged to explain the rationale underlying their opinions before decisions were made. Although the final decision remained the principal's responsibility, the process of listening attentively to teachers' perspectives demonstrated respect for their professional expertise. Such practices contributed to a more democratic communication climate in which teachers understood that their opinions were valued and carefully considered.

The findings also indicate that positive interpersonal communication strengthened the relationship between the principal and teachers. These relationships extended beyond formal work-related interactions to include informal communication during everyday school activities. Casual conversations, greetings, expressions of concern regarding teachers' well-being, and informal interactions before and after school activities contributed to greater interpersonal closeness. Such relationships are particularly important because excessively rigid professional relationships may discourage teachers from communicating their concerns openly. Conversely, positive and approachable communication encourages teachers to interact more comfortably with the principal whenever professional guidance is required. These findings are consistent with the research conducted by Rahmawati and Nurhayati (2024), which emphasized that the quality of interpersonal communication within educational organizations is closely related to the ability to establish mutually respectful relationships, create a comfortable communication climate, and provide positive responses that strengthen relationships between leaders and organizational members (Rahmawati & Nurhayati, 2024: 203–211). Similar conditions were identified at MTs Al Washliyah KM 6 Tanjung Mulia, where the principal consistently maintained respectful, open, and approachable communication without creating unnecessary hierarchical distance between himself and the teaching staff.

The principal's positiveness also contributed to strengthening collaboration among members of the school community. By consistently modeling respectful and constructive communication, the principal encouraged teachers to adopt similar communication patterns in their interactions with colleagues and administrative staff. As a role model, the principal demonstrated how differences of opinion should be addressed, how constructive criticism should be communicated, and how appreciation should be expressed. Consequently, the principal's positive communication practices gradually became an integral component of the school's organizational communication culture. According to Joseph A. DeVito's theory of interpersonal communication, positiveness is one of the fundamental characteristics of effective interpersonal communication. Positiveness reflects respect for oneself and others while contributing to the creation of a supportive communication climate. In the present study, the principal's positiveness was demonstrated through continuous motivation, appreciation of teachers' contributions, respect for differing opinions, the use of courteous language, and the delivery of constructive criticism. These findings indicate that the principal consistently sought to ensure that communication was directed not only toward accomplishing organizational objectives but also toward strengthening interpersonal relationships.

Positiveness was also associated with the principal's ability to foster optimism among teachers. The implementation of school programs inevitably involves various challenges and obstacles. During such situations, the principal consistently encouraged teachers to remain focused on identifying solutions rather than emphasizing difficulties. By maintaining an optimistic attitude, the principal helped teachers perceive challenges as problems that could be addressed collaboratively. Consequently, positive communication contributed not only to teachers' emotional well-being but also to the development of

a collaborative problem-solving culture within the school. Overall, the findings indicate that the principal of MTs Al Washliyah KM 6 Tanjung Mulia effectively demonstrated positiveness in interpersonal communication with teachers. This positive attitude was reflected in the use of respectful communication, continuous motivation, recognition of teachers' contributions, appreciation of diverse opinions, and the delivery of constructive criticism and feedback. Such communication practices enabled teachers to feel respected, valued, and professionally supported, thereby fostering more comfortable and harmonious working relationships. In conclusion, positiveness constitutes one of the principal's key strengths in interpersonal communication at MTs Al Washliyah KM 6 Tanjung Mulia. The principal fulfilled not only the responsibilities of directing and evaluating teachers but also the broader leadership role of motivating, recognizing, and empowering them through positive communication. This positive communication climate contributed to a conducive working environment, enhanced teachers' confidence and comfort in interpersonal interactions, and strengthened professional relationships between the principal and teachers. Consequently, the leadership process within the school became more humane, communicative, participatory, and supportive of continuous educational improvement.

3.5 The Principal's Equality in Interpersonal Communication with Teachers

Based on the findings of this study conducted at MTs Al Washliyah KM 6 Tanjung Mulia, equality emerged as one of the essential dimensions of the principal's interpersonal communication with teachers and educational staff. The principal, Mr. Zulkifli, S.Pd.I., consistently demonstrated equality by fostering communication characterized by mutual respect and recognition of teachers as valuable members of the school community. In interpersonal communication, equality refers to the recognition that every individual involved in the communication process possesses equal human dignity and deserves to be respected, regardless of differences in organizational position, authority, or responsibility. Within the school context, although the principal occupies the highest leadership position and holds formal authority over educational management, this structural distinction does not require communication to be rigid or hierarchical. The findings indicate that the principal consistently established communication practices that enabled teachers to feel respected, listened to, and actively involved in matters related to the school. Therefore, equality in this study refers primarily to equality in respect, opportunities for participation, and interpersonal treatment rather than equality in organizational authority or professional responsibilities.

Interviews with the vice principal, the school treasurer, administrative staff, and several teachers revealed that the principal consistently regarded teachers as indispensable members of the school organization. During everyday interactions, the principal not only provided professional instructions but also encouraged teachers to express their opinions and offer suggestions regarding various educational matters. Teachers were able to communicate openly with the principal about instructional responsibilities as well as issues arising within the school environment. These findings demonstrate that the principal consistently promoted two-way communication, allowing interpersonal relationships to extend beyond traditional superior-subordinate interactions. Equality was also reflected in the opportunities provided for teachers to express their views during meetings and deliberative discussions. Within educational organizations, principals frequently require information and professional input from teachers because teachers interact directly with students throughout the teaching and learning process. Accordingly, principals who encourage teachers to participate in organizational discussions acknowledge that teachers possess valuable knowledge and practical experience essential for institutional decision-making. The findings indicate that the principal consistently listened to teachers' perspectives and carefully considered their recommendations during collective discussions. Although the final authority for decision-making remained with the principal, the communication process ensured meaningful teacher participation before decisions were finalized.

The principal further demonstrated equality by maintaining communication that was not restricted by formal organizational hierarchy. Teachers were able to approach the principal whenever they required professional guidance or wished to discuss school-related concerns. Such accessibility contributed to a communication climate that was approachable rather than excessively formal. Within educational organizations, overly rigid communication structures may discourage teachers from communicating important concerns. Conversely, communication characterized by openness and accessibility enables school leaders to obtain timely information regarding institutional conditions. Consequently, equality contributes significantly to the effectiveness of interpersonal communication. The findings also demonstrate that the principal consistently respected differences of opinion expressed by teachers. Divergent perspectives are a natural characteristic of educational organizations because teachers possess diverse professional experiences, educational backgrounds, and ways of thinking. Equality does not require organizational members to share identical viewpoints; rather, it requires that every individual be given the opportunity to express opinions without fear of being disregarded or undervalued. In this study, the principal consistently listened to teachers' viewpoints before making decisions. Whenever differing opinions emerged, discussions remained focused on the best interests of the school, thereby preventing professional disagreements from developing into personal conflicts.

Equality was likewise reflected in the principal's interpersonal relationships with teachers during everyday school activities. Observational findings indicate that communication occurred not only during formal meetings but also through informal interactions within the school environment. The principal frequently engaged teachers in conversations concerning school activities, students' development, and various work-related issues. These informal interactions strengthened interpersonal relationships between the principal and teachers, creating a more comfortable working environment in which teachers perceived the principal as approachable rather than distant or inaccessible. These findings are consistent with the study conducted by Sari and Murni (2020), which concluded that interpersonal relationships between principals and teachers become more effective when communication is characterized by mutual respect, openness, and opportunities for teacher participation in organizational communication. Positive relationships between school leaders and teachers contribute to a more harmonious working environment while facilitating coordination in implementing

educational programs (Sari & Murni, 2020: 65–72). Similar conditions were identified at MTs Al Washliyah KM 6 Tanjung Mulia, where the principal consistently encouraged teachers to communicate openly, express their ideas, and participate actively in discussions concerning school-related issues.

Equality in interpersonal communication was also evident in the principal's appreciation of teachers' competencies and professional experiences. Teachers possess diverse qualifications, instructional experiences, and professional expertise in areas such as classroom instruction, educational administration, organizational management, and extracurricular activities. The findings indicate that the principal recognized these individual strengths by assigning responsibilities according to each teacher's competence and professional capacity. Such delegation of responsibility demonstrates that teachers were viewed not merely as recipients of instructions but as valuable human resources capable of making meaningful contributions to the school's development. Within this context, equality was further reflected in the opportunities provided for teachers to participate actively in school activities. Teachers were entrusted with responsibilities that matched both their competencies and the institution's organizational needs. Such trust enhanced teachers' professional confidence because they perceived that the principal believed in their capabilities. Moreover, these opportunities enabled teachers to acquire valuable organizational experience, thereby contributing to both their professional and leadership development. Consequently, equality in interpersonal communication extends beyond interpersonal relationships to support broader human resource development within the school.

The findings further indicate that equality is closely associated with mutual trust between the principal and teachers. When teachers perceive that they are respected and provided with opportunities to express their opinions, they develop stronger trust in the principal. Likewise, principals require teachers' trust to ensure the effective implementation of institutional policies. Such trust cannot be established solely through formal organizational regulations but must be cultivated through consistent interpersonal communication in everyday professional interactions. Therefore, equality represents one of the fundamental principles for developing professional relationships characterized by trust, mutual respect, and collaboration. These findings are consistent with the research conducted by Pratiwi, Sulastris, and Nuraini (2023), which demonstrated that interpersonal communication within schools plays a significant role in establishing harmonious professional relationships between school leaders and teachers. Communication that encourages teachers to express their ideas and receive constructive responses from school leaders strengthens collaboration and supports organizational effectiveness within educational institutions (Pratiwi, Sulastris, & Nuraini, 2023: 134–142). These conclusions closely correspond with the findings of the present study, particularly regarding the principal's consistent efforts to encourage teacher participation and maintain open communication.

According to Joseph A. DeVito's theory of interpersonal communication, equality is one of the fundamental characteristics of effective interpersonal communication. Equality does not imply that organizational members possess identical structural positions or authority. Instead, it emphasizes the recognition that every individual possesses inherent value and deserves equal respect throughout the communication process. In the present study, although the principal maintained formal authority as the institutional leader, he consistently encouraged teachers to express their opinions, listened attentively to their suggestions, and responded thoughtfully to their concerns. These practices demonstrate that interpersonal communication remained balanced despite differences in organizational hierarchy. Equality was also reflected in the principal's commitment to providing all teachers with equal opportunities to communicate. Teachers were able to discuss professional concerns and seek guidance whenever necessary without experiencing unequal treatment. Such practices prevented the perception that only selected teachers had privileged access to the principal. Fair and inclusive communication strengthens mutual respect among organizational members. This condition is particularly important because the successful implementation of educational programs depends upon the contributions of all members of the school community rather than the efforts of only the principal or a limited number of teachers. Overall, the findings indicate that the principal of MTs Al Washliyah KM 6 Tanjung Mulia effectively demonstrated equality in interpersonal communication with teachers. Equality was reflected in the opportunities provided for teachers to express their opinions, openness toward differing perspectives, appreciation of teachers' professional competencies, delegation of trust and responsibility, and informal communication that fostered closer interpersonal relationships. Although differences in organizational authority remained, communication was consistently characterized by mutual respect, allowing teachers to participate actively and perceive themselves as valued members of the school community.

In conclusion, equality constitutes one of the principal's key strengths in fostering effective interpersonal communication at MTs Al Washliyah KM 6 Tanjung Mulia. Equality did not diminish the existing leadership structure but instead promoted more humane, respectful, and participatory communication between the principal and teachers. While the principal maintained his authority as the institutional leader, teachers were consistently provided with opportunities to express opinions, offer recommendations, and participate actively in various school activities. These communication practices strengthened mutual trust, enhanced teachers' sense of belonging to the school, and contributed to the development of harmonious and supportive professional relationships within the educational community.

4. CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of this study regarding the interpersonal communication between the principal of MTs Al Washliyah KM 6 Tanjung Mulia and teachers, it can be concluded that the principal's interpersonal communication has been implemented effectively through the five key dimensions proposed by Joseph A. DeVito, namely openness, empathy, supportiveness, positiveness, and equality. The principal consistently provided teachers with opportunities to express their opinions, concerns, and constructive feedback; demonstrated a genuine understanding of teachers' professional circumstances; offered motivation, guidance, and continuous support; acknowledged and appreciated teachers' contributions; and fostered communication characterized by mutual respect and collaboration. Among these five

dimensions, empathy emerged as the most prominent characteristic, as the principal consistently sought to understand teachers' circumstances and professional challenges before providing guidance or making decisions. Such open, supportive, and human-centered communication contributed significantly to the development of harmonious professional relationships, enhanced teachers' confidence and comfort in interpersonal interactions, strengthened collaboration among school members, and promoted a positive and conducive school environment for the effective implementation of educational activities.

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