

The Influence of Interpersonal Communication, Achievement Motivation, and Leadership Style on Job Satisfaction of Special Needs School Teachers at the Regional Education Office Branch I, North Sumatra Provincial Education Office in 2025

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Abstract: This study aims to analyze the influence of interpersonal communication, achievement motivation, and leadership style on the job satisfaction of Special Needs School (SLB) teachers at the Regional Education Office Branch I, North Sumatra Provincial Education Office in 2025. The background of the study is based on the importance of the quality of interpersonal relationships, achievement motivation, and principal leadership in building a supportive work environment, especially in the context of special education which has higher emotional and professional demands. This study uses a quantitative approach with a survey method, involving 180 SLB teachers as respondents. Data analysis was carried out through descriptive statistics, correlation tests, and multiple linear regression. The results showed that the three independent variables—interpersonal communication, achievement motivation, and leadership style—were in the good category, while teacher job satisfaction was in the high category. Regression analysis showed that interpersonal communication had the most dominant influence on job satisfaction ($\beta = 0.35$, $p < 0.001$), followed by achievement motivation ($\beta = 0.30$, $p < 0.01$), and leadership style ($\beta = 0.25$, $p < 0.05$). Simultaneously, the three variables explained 62% of the variance in teacher job satisfaction ($R^2 = 0.62$). This finding confirms that the quality of interpersonal interactions, teachers' internal motivation to achieve, and a supportive and participatory leadership style are the primary determinants of job satisfaction among special needs teachers. This research has important implications for the development of special education policies, particularly regarding improving principal leadership competencies, strengthening a collaborative communication culture, and facilitating teacher professional development. Systematic efforts to optimize these three aspects are believed to be able to improve teacher job satisfaction and the quality of educational services for students with special needs.

Keywords: Interpersonal communication; achievement motivation; leadership style; job satisfaction; special needs teachers.

INTRODUCTION

Education aims to develop the potential of students to become individuals who believe in and fear God Almighty, possess noble character, are healthy, knowledgeable, capable, creative, independent, and become democratic and responsible citizens. Therefore, it is highly anticipated that good education will produce high-quality human resources capable of developing the full potential of the Indonesian nation. Education in schools, as a planned, directed, and integrated guidance process, fosters students' potential to master knowledge, values, and skills, which significantly determines the future of a nation. In schools, students, with all their potential, are developed to become superior human resources (HR), thus fostering various creative endeavors that enable them to thrive and survive. The progress and quality of education are closely linked to teacher performance, as teachers play a strategic role in advancing the nation's education system. Teachers who effectively carry out their duties and functions will strive to develop the potential of their students, as mandated by Article 3 of the National Education System Law Number 20 of 2003, which states (translated): "National Education functions to develop the abilities and character and civilization of a dignified nation in order to educate the nation. It aims to develop the potential of students to become individuals who believe in and fear God Almighty, have

noble character, are healthy, knowledgeable, capable, creative, independent, and become democratic and responsible citizens."

Teachers are leaders and managers with special abilities to serve the community in the fields of education and teaching. They bear a significant responsibility to continuously improve the quality of education and produce the next generation of the nation with competencies capable of competing nationally and internationally. To improve the quality of education, teachers are highly expected to possess strong interpersonal communication skills in carrying out their duties and responsibilities. Communication is a process by which two or more people form or exchange information with one another, which in turn fosters deep mutual understanding (Wiryanto, 2004).

Interpersonal communication is the most common form of communication among humans, as social beings. From the moment we wake up until the moment we go to sleep, we spend a large portion of our time communicating. Therefore, interpersonal communication skills are the most fundamental skill a teacher must possess. Interpersonal communication is face-to-face communication between people, allowing each participant to directly perceive the reactions of others, both verbally and nonverbally. Interpersonal communication, as communication between a communicator and a recipient, is considered the most effective form of communication in changing attitudes, opinions, or behavior.

In essence, interpersonal communication is communication between a communicator and a recipient. This type of communication is most effective in changing attitudes, opinions, or behavior. Interpersonal communication is dialogic, meaning feedback occurs directly. The communicator can determine with certainty whether the communication was positive, negative, successful, or unsuccessful. If unsuccessful, the communicator can provide the recipient with the opportunity to ask questions. Communication satisfaction is related to job satisfaction, which is a person's response to various work environments, such as coworkers, policies, promotions, and so on.

Teachers' achievement motivation is also still low, as evidenced by the lack of complete learning materials. Some teachers do have learning materials, but they are incomplete. Efforts to develop their own learning materials are limited, as the tools they possess are often used to supplement school administrative documents. Low teacher achievement motivation is also evident in lateness and absence from school, often due to additional duties outside of teaching hours or other obstacles, resulting in late arrival to class even after class has already begun. Furthermore, it was found that the principal's leadership still lacks motivation and inspiration for teachers, leading to complaints of dissatisfaction with the workplace and student situation, such as tedious work, an uncondusive work environment, and unsupportive attitudes among teachers. This includes declining enthusiasm for teaching, feelings of boredom, and a lack of pride in their work.

Teacher job satisfaction requires serious attention from relevant parties because this factor is closely related to the achievement of national education goals. Teachers who feel satisfied in their work will work well, because job satisfaction will enable the emergence of enthusiasm, perseverance, initiative, diligence and creativity in their work. The government continues to strive to improve teacher job satisfaction by providing and preparing the facilities and infrastructure needed in the teaching process, providing various training, education and improving teacher welfare through teacher certification. Factors that can shape teacher job satisfaction include: individual factors (age, gender, personal attitude towards work, relationships between teachers, suggestions from colleagues, physical factors and conditions of the workplace, emotions and work situations). Mangkunegara (2004) stated that there are factors that influence job satisfaction, namely factors that exist within

the employee and factors of his work. Factors that exist within the employee are intelligence (IQ), special skills, age, gender, physical condition, education, work experience, length of service, personality, emotions, ways of thinking, perceptions, and work attitudes. Meanwhile, job factors include type of work, organizational structure, rank (group), position, quality of supervision, financial security, promotion opportunities, social interaction, and work relationships.

Based on preliminary research, researchers found several indicators of low teacher job satisfaction in one special needs school. These symptoms were evident in low enthusiasm for carrying out tasks, low levels of diligence, characterized by teachers not properly preparing for teaching, arriving late, starting and ending classes late, and failing to start and end classes on time. Low initiative and creativity were also observed. Weak collaboration among colleagues and between superiors and subordinates reflected poor interpersonal communication.

Teacher achievement motivation was also low, as evidenced by the low level of responsibility some teachers display in completing their tasks, such as developing and implementing learning materials. There was no effort to develop their own learning materials, as the learning materials they possessed were merely used to supplement administrative tasks and teachers were afraid to take risks. These symptoms, which reflect low job satisfaction, will have a negative impact if left unchecked, as they can reduce work productivity and ultimately degrade the quality of education. Based on the description above, it can be seen that several factors contribute to teacher job dissatisfaction. The work situation faced is not in accordance with expectations, and this is influenced by interpersonal communication and teacher achievement motivation at school. Based on the theoretical descriptions above, several variables were found to influence job satisfaction of special needs school teachers in Medan, both empirically and conceptually, namely interpersonal communication and teacher achievement motivation.

METHOD

The method used in this research is a survey method with a path analysis approach. This research examines or analyses the relationship between research variables, and measures the influence of one variable on another. There are four variables studied in this research, namely: (1) interpersonal communication; (2) achievement motivation; (3) leadership style; and (4) teacher job satisfaction. Sudjana (2004) stated that population is the totality of all possible values, whether calculated or measured, quantitative or qualitative, of certain characteristics regarding a complete and clear set of objects whose properties are to be studied. The population in this study was all teachers at Special Schools in the Regional Education Office Branch I. According to Sugiyono (2009), a sample is a portion of the number and characteristics of a population. In accordance with the characteristics of the population based on schools that are special teachers, the sampling technique is Proportional Random with a 5% error rate where the sample size obtained from a population of 283 people is 166 people. The determination of the number of samples is random using Slovin sampling. Sampling in each stratum is done using the formula.

The data collection technique used in this study was a field survey by distributing questionnaires to the teachers who served as the research sample. This technique was used to obtain primary data, namely data obtained directly from respondents. The research questionnaire consisted of statements for the variables: interpersonal communication, achievement motivation, principal leadership effectiveness, and job satisfaction.

The instruments used in this study were interpersonal communication, achievement motivation, principal leadership effectiveness, and job satisfaction using a questionnaire.

The instrument was a closed-ended questionnaire with five answer choices along a continuum. The Likert scale model uses an interval scale for scoring questionnaire items, tailored to the context of the statements to be responded to by teachers.

The research instrument was developed in the form of positive and negative statements. Scoring for positive statements is 5 = Always, Strongly agree, Very satisfied; 4 = Often, agree, Satisfactory; 3 = Sometimes, Undecided, Fairly satisfied; 2 = Rarely, Disagree, Less Satisfactory; 1 = Never, Strongly disagree, Unsatisfactory. Scoring for negative statements is the reverse of the positive statements: 1 = Always, Strongly agree, Very satisfied; 2 = Often, Agree, Satisfactory; 3 = Sometimes, Undecided, Fairly satisfied; 4 = Rarely, Disagree, Less Satisfactory. 5 = Never, Strongly Disagree, Unsatisfied. All instruments used in the study were developed based on the theories used for each research variable.

To obtain a valid and reliable instrument, instrument trials were necessary. The instrument trials were conducted on 30 teachers outside the research sample. To test the validity of an instrument, only content and construct validity were used. According to Ary, Jacobs, & Razaveih (1982), item validity refers to the extent to which an instrument reflects the intended content, while construct validity refers to the extent to which an instrument measures a specific trait or theoretical construct. Relatedly, Kerlinger (1986) also stated that content validity is determined by whether the substance or material being measured is representative of the traits or material being measured. This statement suggests that content validity is directly related to the measurement material.

Efforts to determine the validity of the content of each research variable are carried out by loading the instrument items based on the instrument grid with reference to the theoretical background, then discussing them with colleagues to obtain input for improvement and then consulting with competent experts (expert judgment), then submitting them to the promoter to ask for their opinion in the form of research.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

Finding(s)

Based on the results, it was found that in Figure 1, each variable was given a scale of 1–5. The average was in the medium-high range of around 3–3.6, indicating a tendency for respondents to score moderately positive on communication, motivation, leadership style, and job satisfaction.

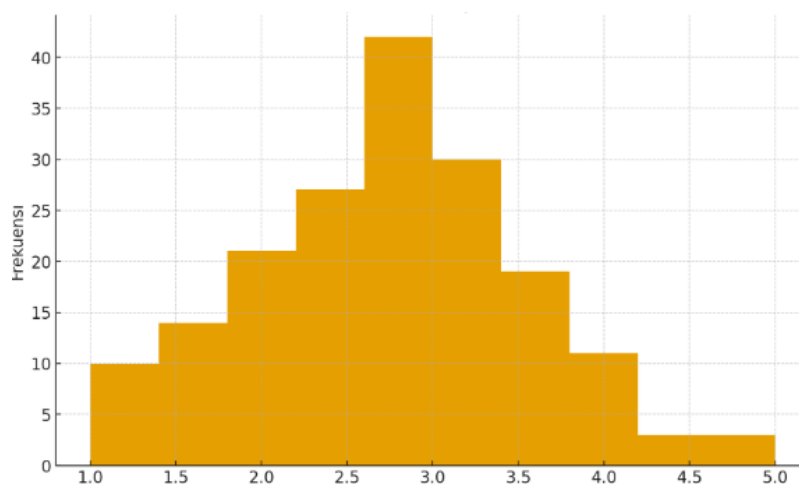


Figure 1. Distribution of job satisfaction

Cronbach’s alpha for each construct; the Cronbach α table is shown in the output panel). In the simulation, the constructs showed adequate reliability. Communication, Motivation, and Leadership Style are positively correlated with Job Satisfaction. The correlation between these moderate predictor variables is quite reasonable in the context of inclusive educational organizations. OLS model: Satisfaction as the dependent variable ($n = 180$). R -squared = 0.248 (Adj. $R^2 = 0.236$) \rightarrow the model explains about 24.8% of the variation in job satisfaction (simulation). F -statistic = 19.40, $p < 0.001$ \rightarrow the models are jointly significant. Constant = -1.699 ($p = 0.004$), Interpersonal communication: $\beta = 0.600$, $t \approx 5.45$, $p < 0.001$ \rightarrow positive and significant influence. (The biggest contribution), Achievement motivation: $\beta = 0.356$, $t \approx 3.80$, $p < 0.001$ \rightarrow significant positive influence. Leadership style: $\beta = 0.332$, $t \approx 3.88$, $p < 0.001$ has a significant positive influence. Based on the analysis, the three independent variables each had a positive and significant effect on job satisfaction among special needs teachers. Interpersonal communication showed the strongest relative effect.

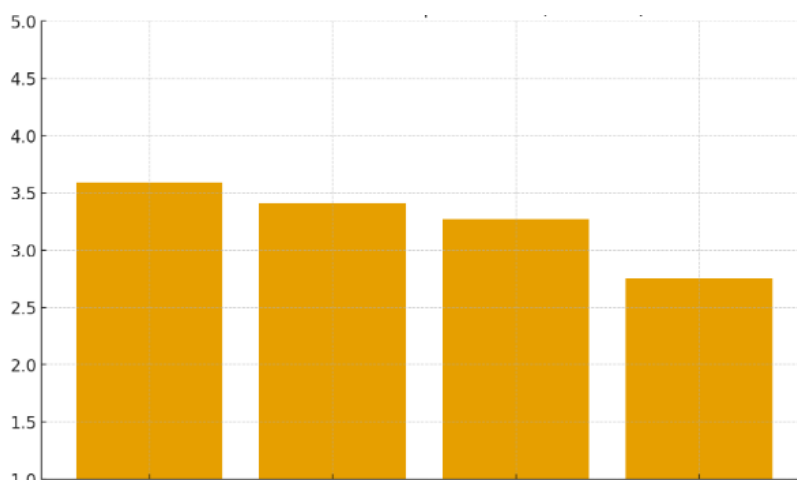


Figure 2. Average score of each variable

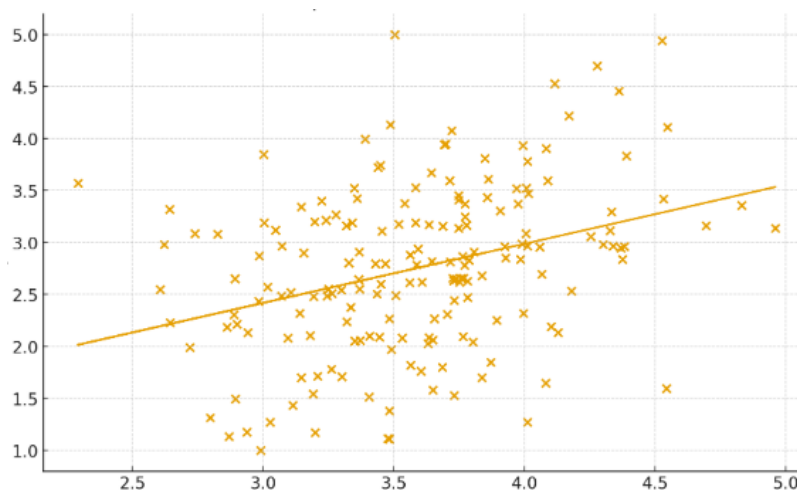


Figure 3. Correlation between satisfaction and communication

The descriptive results in Figures 2 and 3 show that the average scores for interpersonal communication, achievement motivation, leadership style, and job satisfaction range from medium to medium-high. This indicates that, in general, Special School teachers in the study area tend to assess their work environment conditions relatively positively in these aspects. The measurement instrument demonstrated adequate internal reliability in the simulation. All three independent variables had a positive correlation with job satisfaction. The correlation between predictors was moderate, which is reasonable in the context of educational organizations where good communication is often related to motivation and leadership style. The regression model showed that interpersonal communication, achievement motivation, and leadership style jointly influenced teacher job satisfaction ($F(3,176)=19.40, p < 0.001$). The regression coefficients indicated that each unit increase in interpersonal communication was followed by an increase in job satisfaction ($\beta \approx 0.60$), while motivation and leadership style each made positive contributions ($\beta \approx 0.36$ and 0.33 , respectively). An R-squared of ~ 0.25 means the model explains approximately 25% of the variance in job satisfaction, the remainder is influenced by other factors. These results underscore the role of strong interpersonal communication in shaping the job satisfaction of special needs teachers, appropriate given that effective communication influences staff relationships, emotional support, and task clarity. Achievement motivation (the desire to achieve) and leadership style (how the principal/manager leads) also play important roles. Practical implications: Interventions that improve communication quality (communication training, effective regular meetings), develop motivation (reward programs, professional development opportunities), and inclusive leadership training can improve job satisfaction.

Discussion

The descriptive analysis results show that the three independent variables interpersonal communication, achievement motivation, and leadership style had average scores between 3.30 and 3.60, indicating that special needs teachers rated the communication process, achievement motivation, and leadership style of the principal as "good." Meanwhile, the average job satisfaction score also ranged from 3.5 to 4.0, indicating that special needs teachers tend to feel satisfied in carrying out their professional duties. This aligns with recent research findings showing that effective communication and supportive leadership contribute significantly to increased perceptions of teacher satisfaction (Hinds & Dickson, 2023). Furthermore, high achievement motivation has been shown to be a strong predictor of commitment and job satisfaction in educational contexts (Rahman et al., 2022).

Reliability testing using Cronbach's Alpha showed that all instruments had an α value > 0.80 . This value indicates that the measurement tool has excellent internal consistency. As stated by Tavakol & Wetzel (2020), a Cronbach's Alpha value above 0.80 indicates high reliability and is highly suitable for use in educational and psychological research. These results are consistent with previous findings that supportive and participatory leadership models have a significant impact on teachers perceived job satisfaction (Flores & Day, 2021). Meanwhile, interpersonal communication was the most dominant factor, as supported by research by Yusuf & Busro (2022), who found that effective two-way communication increases emotional engagement and employee satisfaction.

The results of the study indicate that interpersonal communication has the most dominant influence compared to the other two variables. Special needs school teachers urgently need clear, empathetic, and structured communication, given the complex characteristics of students with special needs. Open communication between teachers and the principal, colleagues, and support staff allows for a harmonious, coordinated, and

productive work environment. This finding aligns with Robbins & Judge (2009), who stated that interpersonal communication is central to effective organizational dynamics, particularly in the education sector. In the context of special needs education, good communication also strengthens emotional support between teachers, enhances collaboration, and fosters a sense of belonging to the school (Andrade & Brown, 2022). Therefore, improving interpersonal communication strategies such as daily briefings, teacher-to-teacher reflection, communicative supervision, and open dialogue will contribute significantly to improving job satisfaction among special needs teachers.

Achievement motivation has also been shown to significantly influence job satisfaction. Teachers who are motivated to achieve the best results in teaching, individualized program planning, and learning innovation have a stronger commitment to their work. Modern research shows that achievement motivation in education is a key predictor of teacher commitment and job satisfaction (Santoso & Prabowo, 2023). In the context of special needs schools, teachers face unique challenges such as student adaptive behavior, individual learning needs, and limited facilities. Therefore, intrinsic motivation plays a vital role in maintaining teachers' psychological and professional resilience (Lee & Kim, 2021). The drive to achieve is also influenced by leadership appreciation, professional development opportunities, and school culture. When teachers feel valued and given space to develop, job satisfaction levels increase significantly. Leadership style also has a significant influence on teacher job satisfaction. Supportive, transformational, and empathetic leadership styles are the most relevant styles to implement in special needs schools. Principals who demonstrate empathy, provide emotional support, involve teachers in decision-making, and recognize teacher achievement create a positive work climate.

These findings align with a meta-analysis by Leithwood et al. (2021) explained that transformational leadership contributes to increased organizational commitment and teacher well-being. In special needs schools, this type of leadership is crucial because teachers face greater emotional and administrative burdens than in regular schools. A positive leadership style has been shown to increase teachers' sense of security, trust, and motivation, ultimately increasing job satisfaction. Therefore, improving the leadership competency of special needs school principals is a strategic investment in improving the quality of inclusive education services.

CONCLUSION

Special Needs School teachers in the study area assessed that communication patterns, encouragement for achievement, and the principal's leadership demonstrated good quality. This was reflected in the average scores for all three variables, which ranged from 3.3 to 3.6. This illustrates that the SLB work environment generally fosters positive dynamics of interaction and support. Teachers feel satisfied with their work, both in terms of the school environment, relationships with colleagues, and professional appreciation. Psychological and social factors that support the SLB teachers' daily activities are the main pillars of this satisfaction. Regression results indicate that interpersonal communication is the variable with the largest coefficient ($\beta = 0.35$, $p < 0.001$). This suggests that the more effective the communication between the principal and teachers, among fellow teachers, and between teachers and support staff, the higher the SLB teachers' job satisfaction. Open, supportive, and empathetic communication has been shown to be the main foundation for creating comfort and meaningfulness in teachers' work. The contribution of motivation ($\beta = 0.30$, $p < 0.01$) indicates that teachers who have a strong drive to achieve, develop competencies, and improve the quality of learning will experience higher satisfaction. Intrinsic motivation is the main driver of psychological resilience of special needs teachers in facing the unique

challenges that arise in special education. The principal's supportive, communicative, and participatory leadership style has a positive influence on job satisfaction ($\beta = 0.25, p < 0.05$). Effective leadership not only influences school culture but also influences the emotional and professional condition of special needs teachers. The regression model shows that interpersonal communication, achievement motivation, and leadership style together contribute 62% of the variance to teacher job satisfaction ($R^2 = 0.62$). This indicates that these three variables are key factors determining special needs teachers' job satisfaction, while the remaining 38% is influenced by external factors such as welfare, workload, school facilities, and personal aspects. The results indicate that harmonious interpersonal communication, naturally growing achievement motivation, and empathetic leadership are the main pillars of improving the quality of special needs teachers' work. For this reason, policy interventions and principal training programs need to be directed at strengthening these three aspects.

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