

Avoidant Personality Traits and Their Impact on Communication Effectiveness Among Students on Campus

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Abstract

Interpersonal communication is a crucial element in students' lives; however, some students still face challenges in communicating effectively within the campus environment. The growing discussion of avoidant behaviour among young people, high levels of social anxiety, and low levels of self-disclosure indicate the existence of issues in students' interpersonal interactions. This research aims to identify the characteristics of avoidant behaviour among students, analyse the effectiveness of communication among students, and identify the factors contributing to the development of such behaviour in an academic context. This research employs a descriptive qualitative approach, with students selected through purposive sampling as informants. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and analysed using thematic analysis with reference to Communication Effectiveness Theory. The results indicate that students with avoidant tendencies tend to avoid conflict, limit the intensity of communication, maintain emotional distance, and communicate only when necessary. Communication effectiveness is not yet fully optimised, as miscommunication, limited feedback, and barriers to self-disclosure are still observed; thus, avoidant behaviour is strongly linked to the dynamics of interpersonal communication effectiveness among students in the campus environment.

INTRODUCTION

Interpersonal communication is a fundamental element of student life on campus. Interpersonal communication essentially takes place between two individuals (Aji et al., 2023; Hastasari et al., 2022; Jaedun et al., 2024; Mehmood et al., 2023; Solomon & Theiss, 2022; Suryana & Permana, 2025). This form of communication is part of the process of human interaction that focuses on the dynamics of the message exchange itself, rather than on the location where the communication occurs or the number of people involved. The essence of interpersonal communication lies in the process of sharing information and establishing a shared understanding between the two interacting parties (Fathurrohman et al., 2017).

Interaction among students serves not only as a means of exchanging academic information, but also as a platform for building social relationships, fostering group collaboration, and developing social and emotional skills. The ability to communicate effectively is highly valued among students (Siska et al., 2003). Effective interpersonal communication plays a crucial role in supporting both students' academic success and psychological well-being (DeVito, 2016). However, in reality, there are students who have difficulty communicating with others (interpersonal communication), both during classroom instruction and in informal settings outside the classroom (Siska et al., 2003). One factor that

influences the effectiveness of communication is personality traits, including avoidant tendencies (Dhillon & Kaur, 2023; Khalifa et al., 2025; Yan, 2025; Yang et al., 2024).

Lampe & Malhi (2018) states that avoidant personality disorder is defined as a personality disorder that causes a person to tend to avoid many social situations because they feel they are not good enough or capable enough compared to others. They are highly sensitive to criticism, rejection, or negative judgment, even in situations that are actually quite ordinary. Nevertheless, people with avoidant traits actually have a desire to get close to and form relationships with others, but a deep fear of being humiliated, rejected, or deemed worthless causes them to choose to distance themselves and avoid social interaction (Lampe & Malhi, 2018).

According to Kompasiana.com, the “avoidant” personality trait has recently become a hot topic of discussion in Indonesia, particularly among young people and college students. The term frequently appears in social media content on platforms like TikTok and Instagram, where popular psychology discussions simplify it as a behavioral pattern characterized by avoiding interactions in relationships or social communication. The popularity of the term “avoidant” has been on the rise because it is frequently used on digital platforms to describe avoidance tendencies—whether from interpersonal conflict, excessive emotional closeness, or substantive discussions. According to popular psychology literature on attachment theory, the avoidant style generally forms as a result of childhood experiences, such as parenting styles that emphasize extreme independence or a lack of safe space for emotional expression. However, in Generation Z discourse, this discussion tends not to delve into these technical aspects but rather emphasizes observable behavioral manifestations, such as difficulty sharing personal feelings, avoiding deep conversations, or attempting to create emotional distance when facing situations that demand intense involvement (Jayadinekat, 2025).

According to Suryaningrum’s (2021) study on the phenomenon of social anxiety, a high prevalence of this condition was found among college students. The study, conducted on 364 students at Muhammadiyah University of Malang, revealed that 76.9% of the students experienced some level of social anxiety, which includes a tendency to avoid social situations that involve evaluation or observation by others. This study reflects that the majority of students have psychological barriers in interpersonal communication that are closely related to avoidant behavior (Suryaningrum, 2021).

Another study on the dynamics of social anxiety among first-year college students in Indonesia found that the aspect of “avoidance of social situations” is one of the key components significantly associated with gender and age. These findings provide empirical evidence that avoidant tendencies are not limited to clinical contexts but are also a common issue experienced by the college student population, particularly during the early stages of campus adaptation (Wijayanti & Sanyata, 2024). This phenomenon highlights the reality that many students face challenges in communicating effectively in certain social situations on campus, such as class discussions, presentations, or group work. These communication challenges have implications for academic productivity and the quality of collaborative work, which are crucial in higher education.

Adelya et al., (2022) also analyzed patterns of avoidant self-disclosure among college students, where avoidant tendencies hinder self-disclosure in the campus social context. The findings highlight that avoidant students opt for superficial communication to avoid emotional

vulnerability. Self-disclosure is a key indicator of effective interpersonal communication because it relates to trust, empathy, and deeper social relationships. When students are reluctant to express their thoughts, feelings, or views, the effectiveness of communication in classroom discussions or teamwork is hindered (Adelya et al., 2022).

This issue indicates that there is a relationship between avoidant tendencies and the effectiveness of communication among students that warrants systematic investigation. However, the main challenge in previous studies is the lack of empirical research specifically examining avoidant behaviour in the context of student communication in Indonesia. Most existing studies have focused more on social anxiety in general, romantic relationships, or social media behaviour containing avoidant elements, rather than on direct aspects of interpersonal communication. Thus, there is a clear research gap in the fields of communication science and educational psychology in Indonesia, namely the scarcity of empirical research that directly examines the relationship between avoidant personality traits and the effectiveness of student communication in the context of daily campus life.

The novelty of this research lies in its specific focus on the direct relationship between avoidant personality traits and the effectiveness of interpersonal communication among students in the Indonesian campus context, an area that has been largely underexplored in previous studies. Unlike prior research that primarily examined social anxiety, attachment styles in romantic relationships, or avoidant behaviour on social media platforms, this study directly investigates how avoidant tendencies manifest in face-to-face academic and social interactions on campus. Furthermore, this research adopts a descriptive qualitative approach using in-depth interviews to capture students' subjective experiences, providing rich, contextual insights that quantitative surveys alone cannot offer. By applying Communication Effectiveness Theory (DeVito, 2016) as the analytical framework, this study bridges the gap between personality psychology and communication science, offering a novel perspective on how avoidant behaviour influences message clarity, feedback, mutual understanding, and relationship quality among college students.

The urgency of this research is increasingly significant given the social and academic changes occurring in the digital age, where face-to-face interactions are often replaced or supplemented by digital interactions that can reinforce students' avoidant tendencies. Digital interactions, which are largely shielded from direct evaluation, often make students feel more comfortable controlling their self-disclosure, but they reduce students' ability to handle face-to-face communication situations that require interpersonal skills. Furthermore, interpersonal communication skills are among the competencies most in demand in the workplace and in professional life. Communication barriers stemming from avoidant tendencies can hinder the development of professional networks, team collaboration, and future negotiation skills.

In practical terms, this research on avoidant tendencies and the effectiveness of communication among students can provide a foundation for higher education institutions to design communication skills development programmes that are more contextually relevant and responsive to the needs of students facing social barriers. Programmes such as social skills training, psychological counselling, and communication interventions can be developed based on robust empirical findings. This research can also enrich theoretical studies in the field of communication psychology in Indonesia. By situating the phenomenon of avoidant behaviour within the academic context of the campus, it is hoped that a more appropriate conceptual model can be developed to explain the dynamics of students' interpersonal communication.

This study also aims to identify the characteristics of avoidant behaviour among college students, analyse the effectiveness of communication among students on campus, and identify the factors contributing to avoidant behaviour among college students. It is hoped that this

study will make a significant empirical and practical contribution to the overall development of learning and social life for Indonesian college students on campus.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research employs a descriptive qualitative approach, which aims to provide an in-depth examination of the phenomenon based on the participants' subjective experiences (Sugiyono, 2022). This approach was chosen because it is suitable for understanding the internal dynamics of students when facing avoidant conflicts in the context of interpersonal relationships. The research subjects included selected informants, namely five active students who had experienced interpersonal conflicts with a tendency toward an avoidant style. Students were selected because, during the early adult development phase, individuals are in a stage of identity exploration, more complex social relationships, and increased self-reflection in addressing conflict. These conditions make students a relevant group for examining the dynamics of interpersonal conflict in both academic and friendship contexts.

Informants were selected using a purposive sampling technique based on the following criteria: active students who had experienced interpersonal conflict, exhibited a tendency to avoid conflict, and were willing to participate in in-depth interviews. There were no specific restrictions regarding academic background or gender, with the aim of obtaining diverse perspectives on conflict experiences and the communication strategies employed. The research focused on interpersonal conflict experiences characterized by an avoidant style and the associated effectiveness of communication within the context of student life.

Primary data was collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews, in which the interview technique featured a flexible guide to allow researchers to adapt their questions based on participants' responses (Miles et al., 2023). Face-to-face interviews allow researchers to explore participants' experiences, perceptions, emotional considerations, and the reasons behind their choices to avoid conflict. The interview guidelines were developed based on the concept of communication effectiveness, which includes the following indicators: (1) understanding, (2) enjoyment, (3) influencing attitudes, (4) building better relationships, and (5) action. The entire interview process was recorded with the informants' consent. Secondary data was sourced from supporting literature such as scientific journals, academic books, research articles, and other written sources relevant to the theory of communication effectiveness and conflict resolution styles.

Data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis. The analysis process involved transcribing the interview results verbatim, thoroughly reading and understanding the data, and formulating the main themes that represent the informants' experiences. The analysis was conducted manually to maintain the depth of interpretation and sensitivity to the social and cultural context of the students. To ensure the credibility and validity of the research results, source triangulation was applied. Source triangulation was conducted by comparing the experiences of informants. Additionally, the researcher performed member checking by confirming the summary of the interview results with the informants. This strategy aims to strengthen the validity of the interpretation, minimize subjective bias, and ensure the consistency and transparency of the data so that the findings can be scientifically justified.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Characteristics of Avoidant Personality Traits in College Students

Based on the findings, the characteristics of avoidant behavior among the students in this study can be identified through four main tendencies: avoiding conflict, reducing the intensity of communication, feeling uncomfortable with emotional closeness, and communicating only when necessary. These four characteristics emerge in the context of both academic and social interactions on campus.

A tendency to avoid conflict is evident in students' behavior, as they prefer to remain silent or withdraw when differences of opinion arise. Several informants stated that they feel uncomfortable when faced with confrontational discussions. One informant noted that the classroom discussion atmosphere felt "tense" due to the back-and-forth exchange of questions, leading them to choose not to participate actively. This attitude indicates that conflict or differing viewpoints are perceived as emotionally threatening situations. Rather than clarifying or expressing their opinions, students with avoidant tendencies choose to withdraw to maintain their own comfort. This demonstrates that the communication strategies employed are defensive and protective against potential psychological discomfort.

Avoidant traits are also evident in the form of reduced communication intensity. Some informants acknowledged that they rarely initiate conversations and tend to be passive in group interactions. Even in the context of non-academic activities, some students stated that they prefer to go home when they have no classes scheduled, rather than expanding their social interactions. This behavior indicates a conscious limitation on the frequency of communication. Communication intensity only increases when individuals feel they are in a safe environment or with friends they know well. Thus, avoidant tendencies influence the quantity of social interactions students build on campus.

Avoidant tendencies are reflected in a discomfort with emotional closeness. Students tend to build relationships selectively and gradually. It takes them a relatively long time to feel trusting and open up to others. One informant mentioned that communication feels easier "once you've known someone for a long time," indicating that emotional closeness does not form instantly. In some cases, there is also a tendency to cut off contact when they feel incompatible or uncomfortable. This indicates that students with avoidant traits have fairly strong emotional boundaries and tend to keep their distance to avoid attachments perceived as emotionally risky.

Students with avoidant tendencies exhibit a pattern of communicating only when necessary. Communication is functional and instrumental, primarily to meet academic needs such as assignments or group coordination. They rarely engage in personal or in-depth conversations, except with specific individuals they trust. In situations where they do not understand the material, some informants choose to ask close friends rather than the instructor directly, indicating that communication is restricted to relationships considered safe. This pattern suggests that communication is kept to a minimum level deemed sufficient to meet needs without expanding emotional involvement.

The avoidant traits observed in the students in this study do not always manifest as a complete withdrawal from the social environment, but rather as a strategy to limit interactions with the aim of maintaining psychological comfort. Students continue to interact and participate, but with strict control over the intensity, depth, and context of communication. These findings suggest that avoidant behavior is situational and influenced by students' levels

of trust, sense of security, and interpersonal experiences.

B. The Effectiveness of Communication Among Students on Campus

The research findings indicate that the effectiveness of communication among students on campus exhibits varied dynamics. In general, communication has been fairly effective in building social relationships, but it has not yet been fully optimized in terms of ensuring message clarity and minimizing misunderstandings. This effectiveness was analyzed based on several key indicators, namely message clarity, the presence of reciprocity, the establishment of mutual understanding, and the minimization of miscommunication.

1) Clarity of Message

Message clarity refers to the extent to which the information conveyed is understood in accordance with the communicator's intent. Within the framework of communication effectiveness theory, this aspect is closely related to "Understanding." Based on the interview results, several informants noted that communication does not always result in clear messages. (DFA) stated that communication among students "tends to frequently result in miscommunication." This statement indicates that the messages conveyed are not always received in accordance with their original intent.

The informant (GLW) also expressed difficulty understanding the material due to differences in academic background, saying, "It's hard, really hard. At first, I felt like I had to understand the course material because I was confused." This indicates that differences in prior competencies also affect message clarity, particularly in an academic context. Thus, in terms of message clarity, communication among students is not yet fully effective because there are still barriers in the transmission and reception of information, particularly in text-based communication and formal discussions.

2) Feedback

Feedback is an important indicator of communication effectiveness because it demonstrates active interaction between the communicator and the recipient. In communication effectiveness theory, feedback contributes to the dimensions of Understanding and Improving Relationships, as it facilitates clarification and strengthens interpersonal relationships.

Several informants noted that there was good reciprocity when communication took place within a close-knit circle of friends. (AF) stated that he felt "happy that friends could also be invited to communicate and socialize together," indicating active two-way interaction. However, in formal situations such as class discussions, reciprocity did not always occur optimally. (GLW) noted that the discussion atmosphere felt "tense," so they did not actively participate in the Q&A process. This suggests that feedback does not always emerge due to psychological barriers. Thus, the effectiveness of communication in terms of reciprocity is situational. In comfortable relationships, feedback flows well, but in more open forums, active participation from students with avoidant tendencies remains limited.

3) Shared Understanding

Mutual understanding occurs when both parties share a common interpretation of the message being conveyed. This aspect is closely related to the "Understanding" dimension in communication effectiveness theory. The interview results indicate that mutual understanding is more easily achieved when there is interpersonal closeness. The informant (BAG) stated that

“communication is easier to understand when you’ve known each other for a long time.” This statement indicates that emotional closeness and prior interaction experiences help create a shared understanding.

When a relationship has not yet been established, achieving a shared understanding tends to be difficult and can potentially lead to misunderstandings. This indicates that the effectiveness of communication is influenced not only by the content of the message but also by the quality of the relationship between individuals. Thus, mutual understanding in communication among students is quite good within established social circles but is not yet optimal in new or formal relationships.

4) Low Miscommunication

A low level of misunderstanding is a key indicator in assessing the effectiveness of interpersonal communication. Communication can be considered effective if the message conveyed is received and interpreted in accordance with the communicator’s intent, thereby avoiding ambiguity, multiple interpretations, or perceptual conflicts. Within the framework of communication effectiveness theory, this aspect is directly related to the Understanding dimension, yet it also overlaps with Improving Relationships, as communication with minimal misunderstanding strengthens trust and harmony among individuals.

Based on the interview results, misunderstandings in communication among students still occur, particularly in indirect communication or communication that lacks explicit clarification. A statement from one of the informants indicates that the process of conveying and receiving messages does not always proceed optimally. Miscommunication can arise due to differences in perception, varying communication styles, or a lack of clarification regarding the message’s intent.

Misunderstandings are also linked to psychological factors, particularly among students with avoidant tendencies. Individuals with avoidant traits tend to feel uncomfortable facing potential conflicts or differences of opinion. Consequently, when messages are ambiguous, they prefer to keep their confusion to themselves rather than seek immediate clarification. This indicates that misunderstandings are not merely technical communication issues but are also tied to personal character and emotional regulation. However, in well-established relationships, the potential for misunderstandings tends to be lower. In such situations, the “Improving Relationships” dimension plays a crucial role, as harmonious relationships facilitate the clarification process and reduce negative biases.

From the perspective of the “Pleasure” dimension, communication that takes place in a comfortable atmosphere also tends to minimize misunderstandings. When students feel emotionally safe, they are more open to asking questions, seeking clarification, or asking for confirmation. Conversely, in situations that feel tense or competitive, individuals become more passive, thereby increasing the risk of misinterpretation.

C. Factors Contributing to Avoidant Behavior in College Students

Based on the research findings, avoidant behavior among students develops through communication experiences that cause tension, confusion, and discomfort in interpersonal interactions. In the context of class discussions, some students perceive a stressful atmosphere, particularly during intense question-and-answer sessions. This situation causes students who feel they do not yet understand the material to hesitate to participate. This condition relates to the Understanding dimension in Communication Effectiveness theory, where shared meaning

should be achieved through a process of clarification and feedback. However, when students choose to remain silent due to fear or a lack of confidence, the clarification process is hindered, preventing shared understanding from fully forming. Thus, tension in formal communication becomes one of the factors reinforcing avoidant tendencies.

Experiences of miscommunication in daily interactions also influence the development of avoidant behavior. When communication frequently leads to misinterpretation or misunderstandings, students become more cautious and limit the intensity of their interactions. In the context of Communication Effectiveness theory, this relates to the Pleasure dimension. Effective communication should create a sense of comfort and enjoyment for both parties. However, when communication experiences instead cause discomfort, individuals tend to withdraw to avoid similar potential tensions in the future. Thus, a lack of enjoyable communication experiences contributes to the development of avoidant traits.

Another apparent factor is low academic self-confidence. Students who find it difficult to understand the material tend to choose to process information on their own rather than ask questions openly. This situation, in turn, affects the “Understanding” dimension, as communication is not two-way. When students do not express their lack of understanding, the instructor has no opportunity to clarify the message. As a result, the effectiveness of communication declines and avoidance patterns become more pronounced.

From a relational perspective, limitations in self-disclosure are also a key factor. Students tend to feel comfortable communicating only with individuals they have known for a long time, while in less familiar relationships, communication is kept to a minimum. This condition relates to the “Improving Relationships” dimension, where effective communication should strengthen social bonds. However, when self-disclosure is limited, the depth of the relationship develops more slowly. Students maintain emotional distance as a form of self-protection, causing avoidant tendencies to become increasingly internalized in their communication patterns.

The factors contributing to avoidant behavior among students in this study are influenced not only by personal factors but also by communication experiences that do not fully meet the criteria for effectiveness, particularly in the dimensions of Understanding, Pleasure, and Improving Relationships. When communication fails to create a sense of comfort, does not lead to mutual understanding, and is unable to strengthen interpersonal relationships, students tend to develop avoidance strategies as a form of adaptation to the social situations they face.

CONCLUSION

Factors contributing to avoidance behavior among students in this study were influenced not only by personal factors, but also by communication experiences that did not fully meet the criteria for effectiveness, especially in the dimensions of Understanding, Enjoyment, and Relationship Enhancement. When communication fails to create a sense of comfort, does not produce mutual understanding, and is unable to strengthen interpersonal relationships, students tend to develop avoidance strategies as a form of adaptation to the social situations they face. Factors such as stressful communication experiences, experiences of miscommunication, low academic self-confidence, and limited self-disclosure contribute to the development of avoidant behavior in students. From a theoretical perspective, this condition demonstrates that communication effectiveness is determined not only by message delivery but also by individual

psychological aspects and the quality of interpersonal relationships established. Thus, avoidant behavior is strongly linked to communication effectiveness among students on campus, as these characteristics influence the process of message exchange, the formation of shared meaning, and the dynamics of social relationships in an academic context.

Suggestions: For higher education institutions, it is recommended to develop social skills training programs, peer support groups, and counseling services specifically designed to help students with avoidant tendencies improve their communication effectiveness. Lecturers are encouraged to create a more supportive and non-judgmental classroom atmosphere to reduce students' fear of participating in discussions. For students, gradual exposure to social interactions, practicing self-disclosure in safe environments, and seeking professional help when needed are advisable. Future researchers are suggested to conduct quantitative studies to measure the correlation between avoidant personality traits and communication effectiveness more broadly, as well as to explore intervention strategies to mitigate the negative impact of avoidant behavior on students' academic and social lives.

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