

Communication Experiences with Individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder in Social Settings: An Autoethnographic Study

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Keywords:

Autism Spectrum Disorder;
Autoethnography;
Communication; Social
Interaction; Social Presence
Theory.

ABSTRACT

This research explores communication experiences with individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) through an autoethnographic approach in family and school settings. The study aims to understand how communication and social interactions with individuals with ASD are experienced, interpreted, and understood within everyday contexts. Using an interpretive paradigm and a qualitative autoethnographic method, data were collected through memory work, self-observation, reflexive journaling, field notes, and supporting information from family and school environments. Data were analyzed inductively using the Miles and Huberman model, which consists of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings indicate that communication with individuals with ASD cannot be understood solely through verbal messages but also requires attention to nonverbal expressions, behaviors, contextual factors, response patterns, and reciprocal interactions. Experiences with Julio in the family environment demonstrate that communication understanding develops through repeated interactions and continuous adaptation. Observations in the school environment further reveal that simple verbal and nonverbal responses may represent social attention and reciprocal engagement. Viewed through Social Presence Theory, the findings highlight the importance of direct presence, immediate responses, and contextual interpretation in understanding communication with individuals with ASD. This study emphasizes the need to promote greater awareness, empathy, and inclusive communication practices.

INTRODUCTION

For people with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), communication is one of the main challenges in daily life. Mansur (2016) explains autism as a developmental disorder that causes difficulties in establishing social relationships and developing communication skills similar to those of the general population, while Larasati et al. (2021) emphasize that ASD is a neurodevelopmental disorder characterized by communication barriers, social interaction difficulties, and repetitive behavior patterns. Dewi and Morawati (2024) add that these communication challenges not only affect individuals with ASD but also influence their families, social environments, and educational settings. The World Health Organization (2025) estimates that one in 127 people worldwide is autistic, while the Global Burden of Disease Study 2023 recorded approximately 52.3 million people with ASD globally, with Indonesia estimated to have around 1.69 million autistic individuals and approximately 40,000 new cases annually.

The broad spectrum of ASD results in diverse characteristics among individuals, meaning that experiences and abilities cannot be generalized, as affirmed by the WHO (2025). This diversity often contributes to stigma and discriminatory treatment, ranging from limited access to healthcare and educational services to social exclusion that affects the psychological well-being of individuals and their families, as explained by Al Fikroni et al. (2025). The experience of Andrew Collins, an autistic individual who shared his story through Autism Speaks, illustrates how behaviors perceived as “strange” by society can complicate educational and occupational experiences, despite his assertion that he is neither a corrupt nor unintelligent person. The testimony of Georgina, the mother of an autistic child, also demonstrates that the most painful aspect is not autism itself but the lack of kindness and understanding from people in the surrounding environment.

These phenomena encouraged me, as an individual who grew up alongside a younger sibling with ASD, to understand more deeply the dynamics of communication with him, both within the family context and in broader social environments. When my younger sibling was diagnosed with ASD at the age of two, our family began a long process of learning about the condition. During childhood, behaviors considered inappropriate were often interpreted as typical childhood misbehavior (Boonstra, 2021; Freidus, 2020; Hong et al., 2015; Janzen & Schwartz, 2018). However, as he grew older and developed physically, society began to place different social expectations on him, as though he had already understood social norms and manners in the same way as neurotypical individuals. This condition aligns with various digital narratives shared by families of individuals with ASD who express a similar dilemma: a physical appearance that seems “typical” often causes atypical behaviors to be misinterpreted as delinquency or rebellion.

I experienced this situation firsthand when accompanying my younger sibling at a shopping center. His strong interest in gadgets led him to spontaneously approach other visitors and look at the phones they were using without considering social boundaries. Shorna et al. (2025) explain that children with neurodevelopmental disorders may be more susceptible to problematic smartphone use due to their behavioral characteristics. Negative responses from others in such situations can generate feelings of frustration, sadness, and offense, an emotional burden that Mokoena and Kern (2022) note is commonly experienced by individuals who live alongside people with ASD. Purnamasari et al. (2025) also note that public awareness of autism in major cities such as Jakarta remains relatively low, resulting in inaccurate labeling, such as “crazy children” or “bad boys.” This stigma does not only target individuals with ASD but also extends to their families, as I experienced when someone judged my parents as incapable of raising their children properly—an experience consistent with the findings of Dali and Hawamseh (2026) regarding stigma arising from societal misunderstandings of the causes and characteristics of autism.

Within the home environment, communication with my younger sibling is also not free from misunderstandings because his verbal responses do not always align with his nonverbal expressions. He almost always answers “want” when offered something, even though his facial expressions and behaviors often indicate the opposite (Bargh, 2017; Colvin, 2015; Leary, 2019; Scarantino, 2017). This pattern may be related to his tendency to interpret offers as instructions that should be followed, as well as his reliance on structured routines—characteristics also identified by Nabila and Nadhirah (2024) among individuals with ASD.

Several studies have examined communication and social interaction among individuals with ASD across various contexts. Mansur (2016) describes autism as a developmental disorder that causes difficulties in establishing social relationships and developing communication skills, while Larasati et al. (2021) emphasize that ASD is characterized by communication barriers, social interaction difficulties, and repetitive behavior patterns. Dewi and Morawati (2024) further explain that these communication challenges affect not only individuals with ASD but also their families, social environments, and educational systems. In educational settings, Christyastari and Rusmawan (2023) found that students with ASD can engage in social interactions through verbal and nonverbal communication, emotional expression, and prosocial behaviors, highlighting the importance of supportive school environments. Fajrin and Rustini (2022) identified that direct, patient, and adaptive communication strategies from teachers are essential, while Sari et al. (2021) demonstrated that peer acceptance and teacher mediation significantly influence the quality of social interactions. Yuswatiningsih (2021) further showed that many children with ASD demonstrate adequate social interaction skills, including requesting assistance and responding to peers, while Noya and Ambarwati (2020) found that interaction quality varies depending on environmental support and individual characteristics. Research on sibling experiences has also developed, with Mokoena and Kern (2022) identifying emotional burdens commonly experienced by individuals who live alongside people with ASD, and Dewi and Widiyasavitri (2019) examining resilience among mothers of autistic children. In the Indonesian context, Purnamasari et al. (2025) noted that public awareness of autism in major cities remains relatively low, contributing to negative labeling, while Dali and Hawamseh (2026) found that misinformation significantly contributes to stigmatization and social exclusion.

Academically, research on communication and ASD has developed across various areas, ranging from communication characteristics and educational communication to social stigma. Studies examining the experiences of siblings of individuals with ASD have begun to emerge; however, research specifically exploring communication processes involving individuals with ASD across diverse social contexts through direct lived experiences remains limited. Based on this research gap, this study employs an autoethnographic approach to explore communication processes involving individuals with ASD in various social contexts based on the researcher's lived experiences. This study does not aim to evaluate the communication abilities of individuals with ASD but rather seeks to understand the communication processes that occur between individuals with ASD and their social environments. This research is expected to contribute academically to the study of interpersonal and family communication, provide practical benefits through emotional support and adaptive communication strategies, and offer social benefits by promoting public awareness and empathy toward diverse communication patterns among individuals with ASD.

METHOD

Research Paradigm

This research employed an interpretive paradigm to understand communication phenomena and social interactions with individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) based on the researcher's lived experiences and observations in daily life. This paradigm was

applied to explore how meanings of communication were constructed through interactions within social contexts rather than through quantitative measurement.

Types and Approaches to Research

This study uses a qualitative approach with an autoethnography method. A qualitative approach is used to understand phenomena in depth under natural conditions, while autoethnography is used to explore and reflect on researchers' personal experiences in interacting with people with ASD. The research was conducted in two contexts, namely the family environment and the school environment. The research does not aim to measure the communication skills of people with ASD clinically, but to understand communication experiences and social interactions based on the researcher's experience.

Unit of Analysis

The unit of research analysis is the process of communication and social interaction with people with ASD in the context of family and school. In the family setting, research focuses on daily communication between researchers and people with ASD. In the school setting, research focuses on verbal and nonverbal communication, responses between parties, and the social context that occurs during interactions. The research subjects are the researcher himself as a family member and an individual who interacts directly with people with ASD. In the autoethnography method, the researcher's experience, memory, observation, and reflection are the main sources of data. The object of the research is the process of communication and social interaction between people with ASD and their social environment, especially in the context of family and school. The research focuses on understanding the interaction process, not the clinical assessment of communication skills.

Research Areas and Data Sources

The research was conducted in two environments, namely the home as a domestic environment and the school as an institutional environment. Primary data came from researchers' experiences and memories, direct observations, field notes, and reflective journals. Information from family members and the school is used as supporting data to clarify the experience and context of the interaction. Secondary data were obtained through books, scientific journals, and academic sources related to communication, ASD, social interaction, Sociocultural Traditions, and Social Presence Theory.

Data Collection Techniques

Data collection was carried out through three main techniques, namely memory work, self-observation, and reflexive journaling. Memory work is used to remember and reconstruct the researcher's communication experience with people with ASD in the family environment. Self-observation is carried out through observation of the communication and interaction process in the school environment. Meanwhile, reflexive journaling is used to record the researcher's experiences, responses, feelings, communication situations, and reflections during the research process.

Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis was carried out inductively and interpretively using the Miles and Huberman model which includes data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawn. In the reduction stage, data from experiences, observations, and reflective journals are selected and grouped based on relevant themes. Furthermore, data is presented in the form of a narrative to describe the communication and interaction process contextually. Conclusions are then drawn based on

the patterns found and verified by reviewing research records as well as supporting information from various sources.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Communication Experience in Family Life

Although I have known Julio since he was born, I realized that the length of our relationship did not always allow me to understand his communication responses directly. Over the years of living alongside him, I became more and more familiar with Julio's habits, behaviors, and ways of responding to various situations. However, that understanding doesn't mean that I can always know what he really wants to convey. There are still situations when I need to pay attention to my behavior, expressions, or ongoing situations to understand the intent behind the response given.

One of the experiences that made me realize this was when I offered Julio a piece of cake. When I asked, "Deck, do you want this cake?", he almost always replied, "Yes, you do." Verbally, the answer sounds like a clear agreement. However, my experience afterwards showed something different. When eating the cake, Julio sometimes showed a face that looked uncomfortable and forced. After that, he can even immediately drink a few glasses of water. These experiences do not only happen once, but are repeated in daily life. Therefore, I began to realize that Julio's "Yes, I want" answer could not always be understood as a sign that he really wanted something.

The repeated experience made me slowly learn not to stop immediately at the answer given by Julio. I began to notice what happened after he responded, how he expressed, as well as the situation that was going on when he answered. In the process, I realized that understanding Julio is not only about hearing what he has to say, but also about recognizing the habits and responses that arise afterwards. That understanding develops from repeated experience of interaction, not from my ability to always know what it means in the first place.

I also experienced the same thing when my daily routine changed. On one occasion, I got an extra day off so that I was still home at the time I usually used to go to work. Julio then became angry and agitated because my presence at home was not in accordance with the routine he had been familiar with. To ease the situation, I finally pretended to say goodbye and left the house as if I was going to work. After doing this, the situation becomes calmer.

The experience made me understand more and more that things that seemed simple to me, such as changing my work schedule or being home at unusual times, could be something I needed to pay attention to when interacting with Julio. I started to get used to anticipating certain situations based on previous experiences. However, these habits still do not make me fully able to predict the response. Precisely from these experiences, I realized that the understanding of Julio's way of communicating continues to develop through the process of daily interaction. The experience of living with Julio also does not only take place in the house. When I was in the public space, I began to realize that the way others understood their behavior was also part of my experience as a brother. One of the experiences I still remember happened when we were in a shopping mall. At that time, my attention was distracted so Julio moved to another store and approached someone who was using a mobile phone. Julio's interest in mobile phones is not something new to me. Ever since he was a child, he has had a keen interest in the

device, including memorizing various brands, specifications, and features that I think he sometimes understands even better than I do.

However, for people who don't know Julio, these actions can certainly be perceived differently. When I saw the look on the person's face and gaze that showed displeasure, I immediately approached and apologized. At the time, I felt upset, sad, and offended at how Julio's behavior was perceived by others. On the other hand, I also realized that the person may not know the reason for Julio's approach or understand his interest in mobile phones. The experience made me see again that the same behavior can be understood differently by people who have different experiences and understandings of Julio.

The experience also reminded me of the feelings that once arose when I had to take Julio out of the house. There were times when I felt reluctant to take him away, not because I was ashamed or didn't love him, but because even before something happened I had imagined how others would look at him. I often imagine the cynical gazes or judgments of people when Julio exhibits behavior that they may not understand. This feeling makes me more alert when I am in public spaces with him. Not only did I notice Julio's behavior, but I also began to notice how the people around him responded to it.

The experience made me realize that the experience of communicating with Julio is not only related to how I understand him, but also to how I as a family member learn to deal with situations when his behavior is understood differently by others. I realized that the understanding I had for Julio was formed from years of living together. Therefore, when dealing with people who have just seen or interacted with him, I cannot expect the same understanding. This realization then made me pay more attention to how the communication process took place, both from Julio's side and from the side of the people who interacted with him.

Communication Experience in a School Environment

My experience in understanding communication with Julio doesn't just take place in family life. I then had the opportunity to see it in the school environment, namely Sekolah Surya Bangsa. Being in that environment gave me a different experience because for the first time I was able to see Julio interact in a space that was not entirely in the family's daily life. I no longer only see how he communicates with family members who have known him for years, but also how he responds to his teachers and friends at school.

On the first day of observation, I participated in school activities from the ceremony to the learning process in class. I deliberately positioned myself outside the field during the ceremony so that my presence would not be a distraction for the students. After the ceremony was over, I was accompanied by Julio's homeroom teacher, Miss M, to class. On the way to class, Miss M had told me that Julio was one of the students who was enthusiastic about doing assignments. He usually completes tasks and takes notes quickly. However, when all his work was done, he became impatient and asked for another job. If not given activities, according to Miss M, Julio can sometimes experience tantrums. I then replied that I also recognized the habit at home. I said to Miss M, "I know Miss, she actually wants everything to go quickly, so it's all over. Like at home, if we eat for a long time, he will help us eat too, so that everything is in order."

When entering the classroom, there were five students in it. One of the students, Kenji, immediately asked, "Who is this?" I smiled at the question. Miss M then explained that Kenji

was a quite critical child. I later learned that Kenji did not have ASD, but rather had ADHD. He was quite interactive and could have long conversations with me, especially about music that he enjoyed, although sometimes his conversation moved to topics that had little to do with his previous conversation. At the same time, I noticed Julio who seemed to remain calm when he found out about my presence in the classroom. This was quite surprising to me because a few days earlier my parents and I had worried that my presence would make it difficult for him to concentrate. This concern arose because when Julio was still in elementary school, I used to accompany him in class and he actually joked more with me than he followed the lessons.

In class, I also noticed Leo, Juli's classmate who has ASD. Leo sometimes mutters randomly, for example by mentioning the names of KRL stations such as "Pesing.. Grogol.. Hamlet Atas BNI". However, when asked by the teacher, he can give an answer that is appropriate to the context. Two other students, Faris and Noel, are slow learners. I saw that Faris, Noel, and Kenji could interact with each other, for example by borrowing each other's tip-ex or asking, "What number is it?" when working on assignments.

The thing that caught my attention was Julio's interaction with Leo. Like Leo, Julio sometimes still throws seemingly random words. I later learned that Julio often mentions his favorite animated title, "Sonic All-Stars". When Julio muttered, Leo, who was sitting at the table next to him, smiled and said, "Julian... Sonic All Stars." I was quite surprised to see the response. I would have previously thought someone who was preoccupied with his own world didn't pay much attention to what the people around him were doing. However, at that moment I saw that Leo apparently caught something that Julio was saying and responded in his own way.

This happened again during the break. Leo said, "Julian... Michael Jackson." When I noticed Julio, it turned out that he was playing a Michael Jackson video. Again, I saw that Leo was paying attention to Julio's activities around him. The way Leo conveyed his concerns was different from the way I usually imagined conversation, but I could see a response to what Julio was doing.

Another experience that made me think the most about the intent behind Julio's behavior occurred during the change of subjects. At that time, Miss M reminded Kenji that she had not brought the PPKN book that would be used in the next lesson.

"Kenji, you don't bring a PPKN book? After this, we have PPKN lessons with Miss N," said Miss M.

Kenji replied, "Oh, I forgot."

After hearing the conversation, Julio immediately asked Miss M several times with a pattern of alternating sentences,

"Kenji got the value..?"

Hearing the question, I tried to guess what Julio meant. I wondered, is he feeling competitive with Kenji's values? Or maybe he just wants to know how much his friend will get? At that time I did not have a definite answer.

Not long after, the atmosphere of the classroom began to change due to the change of teachers. Kenji is seen pacing back and forth in the classroom. Julio then immediately reprimanded him,

At first, I wondered if Julio was bothered by Kenji's behavior. However, after Miss N walked into the classroom, I began to understand other possibilities. As soon as she entered the class, Miss N immediately said,

"Kenji, sit down!"

The reprimand was almost the same as what Julio had previously said to Kenji. I then thought that maybe Julio had already predicted what would happen after Miss N came in. I remember that Julio himself didn't like reprimands with loud or loud voices. Therefore, I suspect that maybe Julio is trying to prevent Kenji from getting the reprimand.

Not long after, Miss N said, "Kenji doesn't bring any more books? Miss gives a score of 0."

Hearing that sentence, I began to understand Julio's question earlier. I realized that when I repeatedly asked, "Kenji scores can..?", maybe what he wanted to know wasn't Kenji's score out of curiosity or competition. Instead, I began to suspect that Julio was worried about Kenji getting a zero grade. This guess made sense to me because I knew that Julio himself really didn't like bad grades and always tried to get the answer right. I even thought that maybe, in Julio's way of thinking, not only he should get good grades, but his friends as well.

However, I don't want to stop at my own guesses. On the way home when I drove Julio home, I tried to reconfirm what was happening in class. I asked,

"How much did Kenji get?" Julio replied,

"100."

I then gave two choices, as our family usually uses when they want to know what Julio really wants or intends.

"Kenji gets 100 or 0?"

Julio then replied in a loud voice, "100!!!"

From that brief conversation, I became more and more convinced that my previous interpretation was correct: Julio didn't want Kenji to get bad grades. For me, this experience was interesting because the understanding did not come directly. I initially thought Julio might be competitive or just curious about Kenji's value. I then saw his behavior towards Kenji, heard Miss N's reprimand, and finally reconfirmed the allegations to Julio.

The experience at school then made me realize that I myself can still carry assumptions when dealing with people with ASD that I do not know. I experienced this on the observation of the second day when I participated in a cooking class activity which was attended by students from grade 7 to grade 12 with various developmental characteristics. One of the students who caught my attention was Welly, a student with ASD. My first impression of Welly came when I saw him bite his fingers and smile to himself. Unknowingly, I immediately made the assumption that his communication skills might not be very good based on the behavior I saw.

I then tried to get him to interact. "Welly, you don't want to try cooking?" I asked.

Beyond my expectations, Welly replied with clear articulation and complete sentences, "I don't like pudding, Miss."

I was quite surprised to hear the answer. In fact, after that he continued the conversation by asking,

"Who is this Miss?"

At that moment I realized that I had just made assumptions based on the behavior I saw before actually talking to him. I thought that behaviors like biting a finger and smiling

themselves would be directly related to their communication skills. However, those brief interactions showed me that those estimates weren't always accurate. Instead, I need to interact first before understanding how someone communicates.

I also noticed Welly's interaction with Gerald, another student in the class. Welly several times asked to borrow Gerald's smartwatch because he seemed very interested in the object. Gerald showed no objection. Welly also invited me to speak spontaneously several times, for example by saying,

"Miss Carina, I like basketball." He then asked,

"Where is Miss Carina?"

After that, he continued with a not-so-subtle murmur. I see that Gerald also doesn't look uneasy when Welly interacts with him. Several times Gerald did remind Welly to be quiet, but the way he said it didn't sound harsh. For me, the way Gerald reprimands Welly reminds me of my own way of reprimanding Julio, like an older brother reminding his younger brother. I am quite grateful to see Gerald's patience because he is not Welly's brother. Gerald even embraced Welly a few times in a friendly manner and showed no anger when his hair was ruffled by Welly.

The experience made me notice again that interactions that may seem unusual to someone who is seeing it for the first time can become something familiar to people who are used to being in the environment. I also see this in Leo's interaction with elementary school students. When I was about to go home, I passed Leo and saw him smiling at some elementary school students. The students then smiled back, and soon after they were playing chase together. I then remembered the story of the janitor mother on the first day who said that Leo was often the subject of jokes by lower-level children. After seeing the interaction for myself, I began to question my meaning of the word "joking" that I had previously heard. Maybe what was meant was not an act of making fun of Leo, but a form of interaction playing as I saw it at the time.

The experience also made me pay closer attention to Julio's relationship with his friends. After the learning process was completed on the first day, I talked to Miss M and asked if Faris, Kenji, and Noel had ever felt disturbed or angry when confronted with Julio and Leo's behavior. The question arises because I see some situations that for unfamiliar people might be considered annoying, such as Leo's mutter, the way some students read aloud, and when Julio searches for Kenji's PPKN book by opening his bag and drawer. Interestingly enough, Kenji doesn't show any anger when Julio checks his things.

Miss M explained that they had previously been in the same class since elementary and junior high school so they understood each other enough. According to him, when there were previously students who reprimanded Julio, for example by saying, "J, shut up," the reprimand was also not conveyed in an angry tone. Hearing this explanation, I felt grateful to see that the children in the environment had become accustomed to living and interacting with friends with diverse characteristics.

The whole experience at school made me see Julio in a slightly different way than my experience with him at home. At home, I have a relationship that has lasted since he was born and an understanding formed through years of experience. At school, I saw how he interacted with teachers and peers who had their own experiences and ways of understanding themselves. At the same time, my observation of other students also made me realize that my own understanding was not always free from assumptions. I once felt like I knew what I was going

to see, but then found a different response after interacting in person. I also had to observe an event several times longer before I understood its meaning. Therefore, my experience at school made me realize more and more that understanding communication with people with ASD is an ongoing process, including for me who has lived with Julio for many years.

Analysis of Communication Experiences in Family Life

My experience in communicating with Julio shows that the communication process cannot always be understood through verbal messages alone. Although I have lived side by side with Julio since he was born, there are still situations when I cannot immediately understand the meaning of the response given. One of them happened when I offered him a piece of cake. When I asked, "Deck, do you want this cake?", Julio replied, "Yes, you do." If I had only seen the answer, I would have understood that he did want the cake. However, after paying attention to his facial expressions and behavior when eating cakes, I noticed signs of discomfort. He even drank a few glasses of water afterwards. Because the experience was repeated, I came to understand that the "Yes, I want" answer that Julio gave could not always be interpreted literally.

When viewed through Social Presence Theory, the experience shows the importance of the presence of the other party along with the social information that emerges during the interaction. In face-to-face communication, I can receive various information directly through Julio's voice, facial expressions, body movements, and behavioral responses. This is related to the concept of sensory presence, which is the availability of sensory information about other parties during the communication process. Meanwhile, temporal presence is related to how soon information about the other party can be received during the interaction.

In my experience, the understanding of Julio's answer actually develops through the observation of verbal messages and nonverbal cues that appear at the same time. If I only pay attention to the answer "Yes, I want", then the communication seems to go unimpeded. However, when I noticed facial expressions, behavior after receiving the cake, as well as experiences that occurred repeatedly, I gained additional information that helped me understand those responses. As such, Julio's presence in person provided a variety of cues that I could use to interpret his response.

The findings also show that my understanding of Julio's communication develops through repetitive interactions. I don't immediately understand that the answer "Yes" can have different meanings. This understanding came after I had been in the same situation several times and began to recognize Julio's response patterns. This is in line with Freeth and Morgan (2023) who emphasize the importance of face-to-face interaction and the existence of social partners in understanding the behavior of autistic individuals, because behavior in real life takes place in the context of interaction with other parties.

Julio's experience of changing his routine also shows the importance of context in the communication process. When I got extra days off and was still home at the time I usually used to work, Julio became angry and agitated. To ease the situation, I even had to pretend to say goodbye and leave the house as if I was going to work. From this experience, I understood that changes to his familiar routine could affect Julio's response in daily interactions.

If it is associated with Social Presence Theory, this situation shows how my presence is directly part of the information that Julio receives. My presence at home at an unusual time was different from the pattern of interaction he had been known for. The change then gets a

direct response through Julio's behavior and emotional expression. Thus, the interaction that occurs is not only in the form of conveying messages from one party to the other, but involves responses that arise directly from both parties. This is related to temporal presence that allows for direct and reciprocity in face-to-face interactions.

This experience is in line with the research of Nabila and Nadhira (2024) which shows a tendency to rigid routines and anxiety when there is a change in routine in children with ASD. However, my experience provided a different perspective because I not only saw routine as a characteristic of Julio, but also saw how it became something that I needed to understand in carrying out daily communication with him. I learned to tailor my responses based on previous interaction experiences.

This also strengthens the findings of Dewi and Morawati (2024) that the characteristics of autism in each child are different and cannot be equaled. In my experience, the understanding of Julio developed based on the characteristics and habits that I encountered firsthand over the years. Thus, I am not only dealing with the communication characteristics of ASD in general, but also need to understand how these characteristics arise specifically in Julio.

From this experience, I realized that communication with Julio is a process that constantly requires observation and adjustment. I don't always immediately understand the intent of the message they convey, but I can build understanding through direct presence, attention to various communication cues, and repeated interaction experiences. In the perspective of Social Presence Theory, the experience shows that the communication process is not only related to the message conveyed, but also to how the parties involved are present, receive information about each other, provide responses, and build reciprocity during the interaction.

Analysis of Communication Experience in the School Environment

My experience in the school environment shows that the process of communication with people with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) takes place through various forms of presence and response in direct interactions. During my observations at Sekolah Surya Bangsa, I not only noticed how Julio communicated with teachers and peers, but also how I myself understood the behavior and responses of other students after interacting directly with them. This experience made me realize that the meaning of a behavior cannot always be understood based solely on what is seen at the beginning of the interaction.

One of the experiences that caught my attention was the interaction between Julio and Leo. When Julio mentioned "Sonic All-Stars", Leo who was sitting next to him smiled and said, "Julian... Sonic All Stars." The same thing happened again when Leo said, "Julian... Michael Jackson", while at the same time Julio was playing a video of Michael Jackson. To me, both incidents show Leo's concern for Julio's activities and the direct response given to what Julio did or said. Although Leo's response was not in the form of a long conversation, I saw a process of reciprocity between the two.

If associated with Social Presence Theory, the experience can be understood through the presence of other parties in the interaction as well as information that is available directly during the communication process. Social presence includes how the other party's presence can be perceived through the various social information available during interaction. In face-to-face interactions, this information can be present through sounds, facial expressions, body movements, and behavior that can be observed directly.

In my experience, Leo's response to Julio shows that social presence doesn't always have to be demonstrated through long verbal conversations. Leo's smile, the mention of Julio's name, and his ability to relate Julio's speech or activities to "Sonic All Stars" and Michael Jackson are information that helps me see that there is concern for other parties. Thus, I no longer see communication only from the many or few words used, but from how the parties involved respond to each other's existence.

This experience is in line with research by Christyastari and Rusmawan (2023) which shows that students with ASD can engage in social interaction through verbal and nonverbal communication, emotional expression, and prosocial behavior. The research also emphasizes the importance of supporting the school environment, including teachers and shadows, in helping the development of children's social interaction with ASD. In my observation, Leo's response to Julio provided a similar experience, but from a different point of view. I'm not assessing a Leo's ability to interact, but rather trying to understand how a simple response can show concern for others in a direct interaction.

I found a more complex experience when observing Julio's interaction with Kenji. When Miss M said that Kenji had not brought the PPKN book, Julio asked several times, "Kenji can do it..?" At that time I did not understand the meaning of the question. I even thought that Julio might be feeling competitive or just want to know Kenji's value. However, when Kenji walks around the classroom and Julio repeatedly says, "Kenji, sit down!! Oh my gosh. Sit down, Kenji!! Kenji sat down!!", I began to notice the connection between Julio's behavior and the ongoing situation. When Miss N then walked in and said, "Kenji, sit down!", I began to consider the possibility that Julio was actually anticipating a response from his teacher.

My understanding changed even more when Miss N said, "Kenji doesn't bring any more books? Miss gives a score of 0." At that point I began to connect Julio's question about Kenji's grades with concerns about the possibility of Kenji getting a zero grade. I then confirmed the allegation to Julio on the way home. When I asked, "How much did Kenji get?", he replied "100". After I gave the choice "Kenji can get 100 or 0?", Julio replied again, "100!!" The experience showed that my understanding of Julio's intentions was not formed by a single message, but by a series of responses that I observed directly and then reconfirmed to him.

When viewed through Social Presence Theory, the experience shows the importance of temporal presence in the interaction process. In face-to-face interactions, information about the other party can be received directly, allowing for responses that also take place in person. This condition allows for the formation of direct reciprocity, which is a reciprocal response that arises as long as the parties involved are in the same interaction. In my experience with Julio and Kenji, Julio's response to the situation in the classroom is inseparable from the presence of Kenji, the teacher, as well as the change in the situation that occurred at that moment.

These findings can also be seen with the research of Yuswatingsih (2021) which shows that most children with ASD have adequate social interaction skills, including asking for help, responding to calls to play, answering questions, and following directions from peers. My experience with Julio shows a different form, but it still shows a response to the existence and condition of others. Julio did not explicitly say that he was worried about Kenji's grades. However, through a series of questions and his behavior, I then interpreted that there was attention to the situation experienced by his friend.

Another interesting thing came up when I interacted with Welly on the second day of observation. When I first saw Welly biting his finger and smiling to himself, I subconsciously immediately made the assumption that his communication skills might not be very good. However, when I asked her to speak, she replied clearly, "I don't like pudding, Miss," and then asked, "Who is this Miss?"

The experience made me realize that I myself can form an understanding too quickly based on the behavior seen before the interaction took place. After actually interacting with Welly, I obtained information that was different from my initial estimate.

This experience is in line with the view of Freeth and Morgan (2023) that research on interactions in autistic individuals needs to consider real social interactions and the existence of social partners. They emphasize that social presence can affect attention, information processing, and interaction behavior, so understanding autistic interactions should not be based solely on situations without the presence of a real interaction partner. In my experience, this is an important reflection because I actually gained a different understanding after actually attending and interacting with Welly.

My experience observing Welly's interaction with Gerald also shows how the relationship formed in the school environment can make a form of behavior easier to understand by those who are used to interacting. Gerald doesn't seem bothered when Welly asks for his smartwatch or when Welly interacts with him. When Gerald reminded Welly to be quiet, the reprimand was also delivered without anger. I even compared the way Gerald interacted with Welly to my own when reprimanding Julio as his brother. For me, the experience shows that the communication process is not only influenced by the characteristics of the individual who communicates, but also by the experience of interaction that has been formed between the parties.

I see the same thing when Leo interacts with elementary school students. I saw Leo smile at some of the students, then they smiled back and played catch-up together. This experience made me question the information I had previously heard about Leo which was often the subject of "jokes" by lower-level children. After seeing the interaction firsthand, I realized that I couldn't immediately give the term a negative meaning without looking at the context of the interaction. Direct observation provides more complete information about the relationships that occur between Leo and other students.

From all of these experiences, I realized that the school environment provides a different form of communication experience than family life. At home, I have had the knowledge of Julio formed from the experience of living together since he was born. At school, I actually need to go back to observing, interpreting, and sometimes questioning my own understanding. Interactions with Julio, Leo, Welly, Gerald, and other students showed that the presence of other parties, various verbal and nonverbal cues, immediacy of response, and reciprocity were part of my process of understanding communication.

Thus, my experience in the school environment shows that Social Presence Theory helps me understand communication with people with ASD as an interactional process that takes place through the real presence of the parties who communicate. I not only look at what people with ASD say or do, but also pay attention to how others respond, how I interpret those responses, and how my understanding can change after the interaction has taken place. This is in line with the position of Social Presence Theory in this study which views the

communication process through the existence of other parties, verbal and nonverbal information, the immediacy of response, and the reciprocal process formed in interaction.

CONCLUSION

Based on this autoethnographic research on communication experiences with individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), it can be concluded that communication does not rely solely on verbal messages but also involves expressions, behaviors, contextual factors, responses, and reciprocity within interactions. Julio's experiences and interactions with other individuals with ASD demonstrate that communication understanding is developed through direct interactions, repeated observations, and adaptations to each individual's characteristics. From the perspective of Social Presence Theory, communication with individuals with ASD requires attention to interpersonal presence, verbal and nonverbal responses, and mutual engagement. Further research is recommended to explore broader contexts, longer observation periods, and perspectives from families, teachers, peers, and caregivers. Practically and socially, the findings are expected to promote a more open understanding of communication diversity among individuals with ASD and support the development of more inclusive environments. This study has limitations because it focused primarily on the researcher's experiences with Julio and limited observations in school settings; therefore, the findings are contextual and reflect the subjective nature of autoethnographic inquiry. Future research may employ longitudinal observations, examine more diverse social contexts, and incorporate additional communication theories to further explore the dynamics of communication among individuals with ASD.

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