



RESEARCH ARTICLE

Gen Z's Perception of the Interpersonal Communication Behavior of Guidance and Counseling Teachers That Can Build Rapport

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Abstract

The research is based on the problem of negative perceptions of students who consider BK teachers as "school police" and lack of student trust. This study examines the important role of interpersonal communication of Guidance and Counseling teachers in building rapport with generation Z students. The method used is a qualitative survey with a non-probability sampling technique, the study involved 163 high school students in Bandar Lampung through voluntary sampling. Data were collected through online questionnaires and FGDs about the comfort of interacting with BK teachers and analyzed using thematic analysis with ATLAS.ti 9 software. The results of the study identified two themes in communication behavior that build rapport: care (12 codes) and immediacy (10 codes) and it was found that the communication behavior of guidance and counseling teachers that can build rapport with generation Z students can start with the ability to be fair as the most important top priority, followed by the ability to tell stories with humor to lighten the atmosphere, guidance and counseling teachers can begin to change negative perceptions and build a more positive rapport relationship with students, thereby increasing student trust in guidance and counseling teachers so that students will feel safer, more comfortable and confident in consulting with guidance and counseling teachers. These findings can be used as a reference in the development of interpersonal communication training programs in universities for prospective guidance and counseling teachers, as well as practical guidelines for improving the quality of guidance and counseling services in schools. This study provides an in-depth understanding of the communication behaviors expected by Generation Z for guidance and counseling teachers in increasing the effectiveness of guidance and counseling services.

Keywords: Generation Z perceptions; interpersonal communication; rapport.

INTRODUCTION

Guidance and Counseling (BK) teachers have a strategic role in supporting students' holistic development, from personal, social, academic, to career aspects. However, the effectiveness of BK services is highly dependent on the quality of interpersonal relationships between BK teachers and students (Gistituati et al., 2009). In this context, the ability to build a psychological rapport characterized by trust, openness, and comfort is the main foundation for the success of the guidance and counseling process. Without strong rapport, guidance and counseling services risk being ineffective, even counterproductive, as students tend to be reluctant to open up and share their problems honestly.

This issue becomes even more complex when dealing with Generation Z students (born 1995–2010), who have different communication characteristics than previous generations. Generation Z grew up in a digital era that prioritizes speed of information, authenticity, and equal interaction (Farozin, 2007). They tend to be more critical of authority figures and have high expectations for transparency and responsiveness in communications (Bencsik et al., 2016). In the context of education, these characteristics demand a more adaptive and responsive communication approach from educators, including guidance counselors. Traditional hierarchical and directive communication approaches that may have been effective for previous generations are no longer adequate for building rapport with Generation Z students. Classic instructional communication theories that emphasize one-way information transmission need to be expanded with a more relational and responsive approach.

In this regard, the Relational-Responsiveness Genre Theory (RRGT) developed by (Mottet, Richmond, and McCroskey, 2006) offers a relevant theoretical framework. RRGT emphasizes that effective instructional communication is not only about conveying information, but also about how the communicator (in this case the guidance counselor) responds to the relational needs of the audience (students) through an adaptive and responsive communication style. This theory identifies that The

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effectiveness of communication is largely determined by the communicator's ability to adapt his communication approach with the characteristics and expectations of the message recipient (Mottet et al., 2006). In the context of guidance and counseling, this means that guidance and counseling teachers need to develop sensitivity to the communication preferences of Generation Z students, who value openness, empathy, and equality in interactions.

However, the reality on the ground shows a significant gap between the expectations of Generation Z students and the communication practices of guidance counselors. Various studies have revealed that guidance counselors are still often perceived negatively by students, even labeled as "school police" who focus more on enforcing discipline than providing supportive counseling services (Aisyah, 2022; Barokah, 2017). This phenomenon of "school police" is not just a local Indonesian issue, but rather reflects a universal challenge in the modern education system where counseling professionals are often trapped in a contradictory dual role, on the one hand expected to be a trusted advisor, on the other hand, are tasked with enforcing disciplinary rules (Carney & Hazler, 1998). This perception severely damages rapport, as students become distrustful and reluctant to open up to guidance counselors (Suliyarti et al., 2020). This distrust is exacerbated by students' experiences of feeling disrespected, judged, or even having their confidentiality violated when interacting with guidance counselors.

A preliminary study conducted by researchers at several high schools in Bandar Lampung City corroborates these findings. Of the 10 Generation Z students interviewed, 7 expressed negative perceptions of their guidance counselors. These complaints included: the guidance counselor being untrustworthy because they leak confidential information, being aggressive and intimidating, belittling students' problems, being too formal and rigid, creating an awkward atmosphere, showing favoritism, and not allowing students to express themselves. Conversely, the 3 students with positive perceptions described their guidance counselor as open, trustworthy, and capable of providing effective guidance. This difference in perception indicates that the quality of the BK teacher's interpersonal communication, especially the ability to build rapport, is a determining factor in how students perceive and respond to BK services.

Effective interpersonal communication, according to (Sari, 2020), is a process of interaction between two or more people that involves conveying messages with the aim of establishing positive social relationships. In the context of guidance and counseling, interpersonal communication is not only a technical competency but also a manifestation of the personal and social competencies of guidance and counseling teachers (Oviyanti, 2017). When guidance and counseling teachers are able to communicate responsively, empathetically, and authentically—values highly valued by Generation Z—they can create a safe and conducive counseling environment for students to express themselves openly. Research shows that positive rapport not only increases students' trust in guidance and counseling teachers but also contributes to increased motivation and academic achievement (Xie & Derakhshan, 2021).

However, to date, there has been little research specifically exploring how Generation Z students perceive ideal interpersonal communication from guidance counselors in the context of building rapport. Understanding students' perceptions of communication patterns they consider effective is crucial for designing strategies to improve guidance counselor competency, particularly in addressing the unique characteristics of

Generation Z. This study aims to fill this gap by exploring the forms of interpersonal communication among guidance counselors that Generation Z students perceive as being able to build positive rapport. The findings of this study are expected to provide practical insights for guidance counselors in improving their communication with students, serve as a basis for developing interpersonal communication training programs for prospective guidance counselors in higher education, and contribute to increasing the effectiveness of guidance and counseling services overall.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study uses a qualitative survey design that combines two main data sources, namely a large-scale open-ended questionnaire and a Focus Group Discussion (FGD). This design was chosen to capture Generation Z students' perceptions broadly and deeply regarding the interpersonal communication behavior of BK teachers that build rapport. A total of 163 high school students in Bandar Lampung participated in an open questionnaire distributed online. The purposive sampling technique was used to ensure that participants had real experience interacting with guidance counselors. From the questionnaire participants, and 13 students were selected to participate in the FGD based on the richness of their narrative answers and willingness to discuss further. This selection was carried out using criterion-based selection to ensure that FGD participants could provide relevant and representative perspectives.

The focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted online via Google Meet and lasted approximately 60 minutes per session. The discussion was guided by the principal researcher, who acted as moderator and note-taker. The FGD guidelines covered five main aspects: students' experiences interacting with guidance counselors, communication behaviors considered comfortable or uncomfortable, guidance counselor behaviors that foster closeness, the meaning of justice and empathy according to Gen Z students, and the behaviors most influential in building trust. Although guided by structured questions, the interview technique was semi-structured. This allows researchers to dig deeper into issues that emerge naturally during discussions.

Because this study involved students aged 15–19, strict ethical procedures were implemented. The study obtained ethical approval from the respondents themselves, using non-probability sampling with purposive sampling, and they volunteered to be research respondents without any coercion. The participant selection process began with the creation of an engaging and informative digital poster to invite voluntary participation, and all participants provided voluntary consent to participate. Students' identities were kept confidential, and they were given the freedom to withdraw at any time without consequence. All research processes adhered to the principles of confidentiality, voluntariness, and protection of vulnerable groups.

The research instruments consisted of an open-ended questionnaire and focus group discussion (FGD) guidelines. The questionnaire was designed to explore students' experiences of interacting with guidance counselors, communication behaviors that foster feelings of comfort or discomfort, and the meaning of communication behaviors that build closeness. The FGD guidelines served to validate, expand, and deepen the data obtained from the

questionnaire. All data, from both the questionnaire and the FGD, was transcribed verbatim to ensure accuracy.

Data analysis was conducted using the thematic analysis approach from Braun and Clarke (2006). The analysis process included six stages: data familiarization through in-depth reading, initial coding, theme development, theme review, theme definition, and writing a narrative of the findings. The coding process was assisted by ATLAS.ti 9.1.3.0 software. Although the process of reducing codes from 47 to 22, and then to two main themes, was carried out systematically, the data processing process is explained narratively in the Methods section, while the final table containing thematic codes is presented in the Results section.

Through this methodological approach, the study was able to describe the perceptions of Generation Z students comprehensively and in-depth, providing a strong picture of how they understand the interpersonal communication behavior of BK teachers in the context of rapport building.

RESULTS OF STUDY

Thematic analysis of 163 questionnaire responses and the results of Focus Group Discussions (FGD) with 13 students produced two main themes that explain how Generation Z students interpret the interpersonal communication behavior of BK teachers that is able to build rapport, namely Care and Immediacy. These two themes show that students' experiences with guidance counselors are not only influenced by the quality of verbal communication, but by the overall interpersonal attitude that creates comfort, closeness, and a sense of safety in sharing.

Table 1. Care Theme final code

| No | Code | Short Description |
|----|----------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1 | Being fair | Guidance and counseling teachers do not judge, treat students fairly |
| 2 | Showing empathy | Teachers understand students' feelings |
| 3 | Active listening | The teacher listens without interrupting |
| 4 | Emotional safety | Teachers create a safe space for storytelling |
| 5 | Careful tone | The teacher uses a soft tone of voice |
| 6 | Openness | The teacher is open and not rigid |
| 7 | Confidentiality | Teachers maintain student confidentiality |
| 8 | Encouragement | The teacher provides verbal support |
| 9 | Guidance clarity | The teacher's explanation is clear and helpful. |
| 10 | Respect | Teachers respect students' opinions |
| 11 | Non-authoritative attitude | Teachers don't act like "rulers" |
| 12 | Warmth | Teachers show friendliness and warmth |

The first theme, Care, reflects a form of attention, empathy, warmth, and emotional security that the guidance and counseling teacher provides to students. This theme contains 12 final codes that describe how students assess the behavior of caring BK teachers. Among all the codes, the

most prominent finding is being fair. Fairness was the most frequently mentioned aspect and considered fundamental to building trust. Students perceived fair guidance counselors as non-judgmental, providing opportunities for students to share their opinions, respecting their opinions, and treating all students consistently. This demonstrates that care for Generation Z encompasses not only emotional attention but also moral integrity and relational justice.

Beyond fairness, students also emphasized the importance of being actively listened to, feeling emotionally safe, and being treated in a gentle, non-intimidating tone. The presence of a guidance counselor who can maintain confidentiality, provide positive encouragement, and demonstrate warmth is a crucial factor in building a sense of comfort. Student quotes, both from the questionnaire and the focus group discussions, reinforce this sentiment. For example, the statement that they feel like telling stories when the guidance teacher doesn't interrupt and respond empathetically. All these findings show that safe and supportive interpersonal relationships are an important prerequisite for Gen Z to open up and build closeness with their guidance counselors. The following is presented in Table 1, which contains the 12 final codes of the Care theme.

The second theme, Immediacy, describes the behavior of BK teachers who create psychological closeness. Through a communication style that is warm, responsive, and relevant to the world of Generation Z students. This theme consists of 10 final codes and all of this reinforces the understanding that effective interpersonal communication in this generation requires a more flexible and informal approach. Students said that the light humor, friendly attitude, relaxed body language, and the BK teacher's ability to adapt their communication style to their everyday language made the interaction process more comfortable.

A quick response, both in person and through digital media, is also considered a sign of caring and emotional presence among guidance counselors. Furthermore, simple interactions such as greeting with a smile, engaging in casual conversation outside of guidance counselor service hours, or using examples relevant to students' lives are factors that strengthen relationships. These findings suggest that immediacy for Gen Z is not only about verbal and nonverbal closeness as described in Andersen's (1979) classic theory, but also about the guidance counselor's ability to connect with the digital culture and communication styles of today's generation. The following is presented Table 2, which contains the 10 final codes for the Immediacy theme.

Table 2. Immediacy Theme final code

| No | Code | Short Description |
|----|-----------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1 | Light humor | Light humor to lighten the mood |
| 2 | Friendly attitude | Friendly attitude, not stiff |
| 3 | Adapted communication style | Adapting language style to students |
| 4 | Smile/positive expression | Positive expressions that make you feel comfortable |
| 5 | Peer-like approach | Act like a friend |
| 6 | Relaxed body language | Relaxed body language |
| 7 | Approachability | Easy to approach |
| 8 | Responsiveness | Quickly respond to student questions or stories |
| 9 | Using relatable examples | Providing examples that are appropriate to the student's world |
| 10 | Informal interaction | Informal interaction |

Overall, these two themes suggest that Generation Z requires a combination of emotional security and psychological closeness in their communications with guidance counselors. They desire teachers who are fair, listening, and non-judgmental, while also communicating in a warm, flexible, and culturally relevant manner. These findings provide a deeper understanding that building rapport is not solely dependent on technical counseling skills but is significantly influenced by the relationship quality and interpersonal communication style of guidance counselors in students' daily lives.

Researchers visualized the relationship between themes and codes, researchers developed a qualitative data network analysis using ATLAS.ti 9 software. Figure 1 shows

the systematic relationship between each code and its parent theme.

The analysis map results above show a visualization of code groupings based on predetermined themes. To facilitate reader understanding of the data, the researchers used different colors in the visualization, with the theme of concern marked in yellow and the theme of closeness marked in blue. The use of different colors serves as visual markers to differentiate between codes and facilitate understanding of the relationships between themes. This visualization helps researchers present data in a more organized manner, while also making it easier for readers to understand the relationships between the various research findings identified.

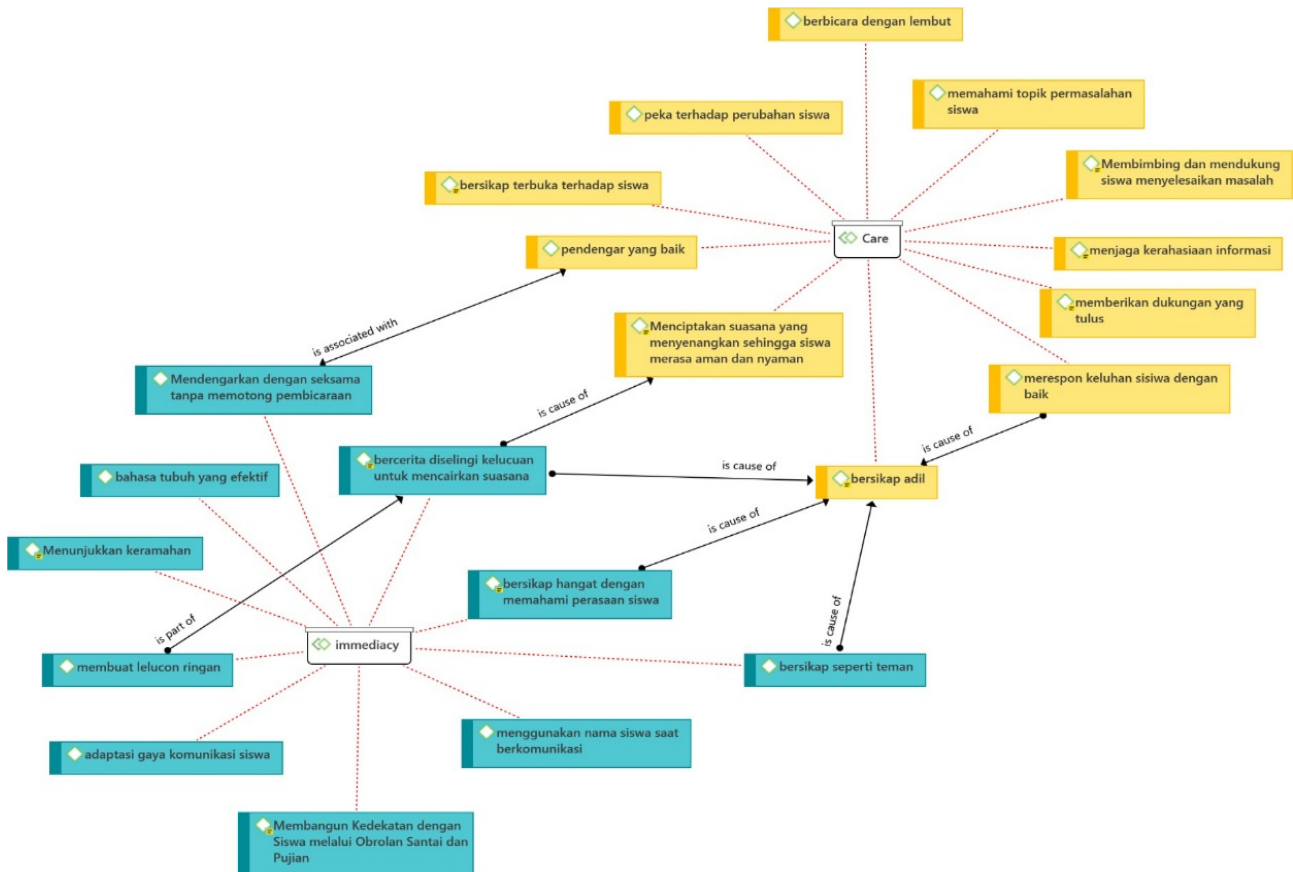


Figure 1. Analysis Map

DISCUSSION

This study identified two main themes of BK teachers' communication behavior that can build rapport with Generation Z students, based on an analysis of 22 codes that emerged from the research data. These findings have global relevance given the phenomenon of "school policing" and the challenges of building trust with Generation Z students, not only occurs in Indonesia, but is a universal challenge faced by counseling professionals in various countries (Carney & Hazler, 1998; Jerome et al., 2009). The characteristics of Generation Z who value authenticity, equality, and informal communication are also cross-cultural phenomena that require adaptation of the communication approaches of BK teachers throughout the world (Bencsik et al., 2016).

Network analysis showed that "being fair" had the most significant correlation with various other aspects of communication behavior, making it a key foundation in

building rapport. The fair attitude of the guidance counselor is reflected in behaviors such as showing equal concern for all students, not judging, viewing problems from various perspectives, and not cornering students for mistakes they make. Respondents emphasized the importance of guidance counselors who "do not judge, try to see from many perspectives, not just from their own perspective" and "do not judge students and corner them excessively for mistakes they have made."

This finding is very consistent with the Relational-Responsiveness Genre Theory (RRGT) developed by (Mottet, Richmond, and McCroskey, 2006). RRGT emphasizes that effective instructional communication depends not only on content delivery but also on the communicator's ability to respond to the audience's relational needs through relational responsiveness—that is, sensitivity to the emotional and relational needs of the message recipient (Mottet et al., 2006). In this context, the fair attitude of the guidance and counseling teacher is a concrete manifestation

of relational responsiveness, where the guidance and counseling teacher demonstrates sensitivity to the psychological needs of Generation Z for equal, non-discriminatory, and judgment-free treatment. RRGT identifies that the effectiveness of instructional communication is largely determined by the audience's perception of the communicator's credibility and concern (*caring*) (Richmond & McCroskey, 2000). When guidance and counseling teachers are fair, they simultaneously build perceptions of caring and trustworthiness, which are prerequisites for rapport.

Theoretically, these findings are also supported by Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory (1954), which emphasizes that basic needs for safety and acceptance must be met before an individual can develop optimally. In the context of counseling, fairness fulfills students' psychological needs for unconditional positive regard, a concept proposed by Rogers (1957) as one of the core conditions of an effective therapeutic relationship. Previous research supports these findings (Hidayat and Supriatna, 2019), who found that guidance counselors who provide unconditional positive regard successfully build deeper rapport; Rahmawati (2021), who revealed that equality in service increases student trust; Widodo and Pratiwi (2020), who emphasize the importance of supportive communication that avoids judgmental statements; and Wahyuni and Pratama (2020), who show that consistency in providing equal treatment increases student trust.

For Generation Z students growing up in a digital culture that emphasizes transparency and equality, fairness is not just a preference but a fundamental expectation. Injustice or discrimination—whether in the form of favoritism, one-sided judgment, or marginalization—immediately undermines a guidance counselor's credibility and destroys the potential for building rapport. Therefore, fairness must be a top priority in every interaction between guidance counselors and students.

The second important finding is the guidance counselor's ability to tell stories interspersed with humor to lighten the mood. Network analysis showed that the use of humor was significantly correlated with the creation of a pleasant and relaxed counseling atmosphere. Respondents described the ideal guidance counselor as someone who "jokes a lot when talking, gives advice or suggestions seriously but doesn't make students afraid, tense, or intimidated, because there are jokes inserted when advising" and "is good at lightening the mood."

Within the RRGT framework, the use of humor is a communication strategy that reflects genre flexibility—the communicator's ability to adapt their communication style to suit the context and characteristics of the audience (Mottet et al., 2006). Generation Z, accustomed to entertaining and authentic digital content, expects interactions—even in formal settings like counseling—to feel natural and relaxed. Appropriate humor reduces the psychological distance between the guidance counselor and students, creating a more immediate and relatable communication climate. The concept of immediacy in instructional communication refers to verbal and nonverbal behaviors that reduce the psychological and social distance between the communicator and the audience (Mehrabian, 1969; Richmond et al., 2003). Contextual and appropriate humor enhances verbal immediacy, making students feel closer and more comfortable with the guidance counselor.

Theoretically, these findings are supported by Tension Reduction Theory Schiller in Wooten, which explains that humor serves to reduce emotional tension and create a more pleasant environment. In the context of counseling, strategic humor reduces student anxiety, especially for

those who have had negative experiences or fear of guidance counselors. (Knox and Hill, 2021) found that appropriate humor during counseling reduces psychological tension and builds positive relationships. (Wijaya and Sulistyani, 2021) revealed that proportionate humor relieves tension and creates a more natural counseling atmosphere. (Rahmawati, 2020) showed that storytelling techniques with a touch of humor help students more easily remember important messages while feeling more relaxed and comfortable.

It's important to emphasize that humor in counseling isn't just entertainment, but a highly skilled communication strategy. Counselors must be able to read situations, understand student characteristics, and use humor contextually and meaningfully—not in a derogatory or inappropriate manner. Effective humor reduces formality and creates a peer-to-peer atmosphere without compromising the professionalism and seriousness of counseling goals.

The research findings show that these two themes do not stand alone but rather have a functional hierarchy. Being fair is a foundation or prerequisite that must be present first, while the ability to lighten the mood with humor serves as a catalyst that accelerates and deepens rapport once a foundation of trust has been established. Without fairness, the use of humor can be perceived as insincere or even condescending. Conversely, fairness without the ability to lighten the mood may create a safe but formal relationship that is less conducive to full openness among Generation Z students.

This model is highly relevant to the RRGT framework, which emphasizes the importance of relational goals in instructional communication. (Mottet et al., 2006) argue that effective communicators are those who focus not only on content goals (delivering information or solutions) but also on relational goals (building and maintaining positive relationships). In the context of guidance and counseling teachers, these relational goals are realized through a combination of fairness (building trust and psychological safety) and strategic humor (creating closeness and emotional comfort).

The findings of this study have global relevance because they address a universal challenge in school counseling services. The phenomenon of "school policing," where school counselors are perceived as disciplinarians rather than trusted advisors, occurs in various countries and undermines the effectiveness of counseling services (Carney & Hazler, 1998). This research shows that by prioritizing fairness and the ability to defuse tension, guidance and counseling teachers can change these negative perceptions and build positive rapport. Students will feel safe, comfortable, and confident in consulting, thus optimizing the function of guidance and counseling services in schools.

In practice, the relationship between guidance counselors and students is often characterized by weak interpersonal communication skills, particularly in terms of trust and openness. Many students still view guidance counselors as "school police" who are stern, unfriendly, and judgmental. By prioritizing fairness, coupled with the ability to lighten the mood with humor, guidance counselors can begin to change this perception and pave the way for a more positive rapport.

The findings of this study have significant implications for the competency development of prospective guidance and counseling teachers. For Guidance and Counseling study programs, the results can be used as a basis for formulating learning strategies that emphasize the development of fairness skills and the ability to create a comfortable atmosphere in counseling. The importance of these two

aspects needs to be integrated into the curriculum for prospective guidance and counseling teachers, so they are better prepared to face the challenges of building rapport with Generation Z students.

For prospective guidance and counseling students, this study provides a concrete understanding of the communication behaviors expected of Generation Z students. The findings on the importance of being fair and the ability to defuse the atmosphere can be a guideline in developing effective communication skills, in line with the goal of producing graduates who are competent in building positive interpersonal communication with students. Furthermore, the results of this study can be used as a reference in developing interpersonal communication training programs in higher education, with a focus on developing interpersonal communication skills in counseling services and skills in creating an atmosphere that supports student openness.

Thus, this research not only provides an understanding of effective communication behavior but also paves the way for the development of a more adaptive approach to guidance and counseling services. Understanding the importance of fairness and the ability to create a comfortable atmosphere can be key to overcoming negative student perceptions and building effective rapport, so that students will feel close, safe, comfortable, and trusting when consulting with guidance counselors, ultimately optimizing the function of guidance and counseling services in schools.

This study has several limitations that need to be acknowledged. First, the use of a voluntary sampling technique may introduce selection bias, as it only captures respondents with a specific interest in the research topic, making the results difficult to generalize broadly to the entire population of high school students. Second, this study is limited to the geographic context of Bandar Lampung City, which may have specific cultural and social characteristics, so the findings may not be fully applicable to other regions with different contexts. Third, Data collection was conducted online, this may limit the variety of responses, as students who are less comfortable writing at length are less likely to provide detailed answers. Fourth, the researchers did not analyze differences based on gender or school type. Although recommended by the reviewer, the data was not analyzed based on these variables. This is a limitation and warrants further investigation. Fifth, the focus group discussion (FGD) was conducted in only one session with 13 participants. In-depth data is sufficient, but more sessions would have provided a richer perspective.

CONCLUSION

This study revealed that Generation Z interprets the interpersonal communication behavior of guidance and counseling teachers through two main themes: Care and Immediacy. The Care theme emphasizes the importance of empathy, emotional safety, confidentiality, support, and most importantly, fairness. The Immediacy theme illustrates students' need for psychological closeness through lighthearted humor, flexibility in communication style, responsiveness, and informal interactions.

A key finding of this study is that being fair is a key foundation for building rapport. Gen Z places fairness, openness, and a non-judgmental attitude as prerequisites for feeling safe in engaging with guidance counselors. Therefore, a guidance counselor's interpersonal competence encompasses not only empathy but also relational integrity through fairness and consistency.

Practical Implications:

The findings of this study have several significant practical implications for the development of guidance and counseling services in schools. First, guidance and counseling teacher education and training programs need to place a stronger emphasis on strengthening interpersonal competencies, particularly in developing fair and non-judgmental attitudes, active listening skills, sensitivity to generational cultures, and creating emotional safety in communication. These competencies have been shown to be a key foundation for building rapport with Generation Z students.

Second, the finding that students feel uncomfortable when guidance counselors act as "school police" highlights the importance of repositioning the role of guidance counselors from rule enforcers to relational helpers. Guidance and counseling practices in schools need to prioritize a more humanistic and relationship-based approach that emphasizes trust-building and psychological support. This paradigm shift requires institutional policy support that clearly separates counseling functions from disciplinary roles, allowing guidance counselors to focus on providing a safe and supportive environment for students.

Third, guidance and counseling teachers are encouraged to enhance their adaptive communication skills in accordance with the characteristics of digital-native students. This includes the ability to use light and contextual humor, employ language that resonates with Generation Z, and demonstrate responsiveness in digital communication spaces, which have increasingly become an integral part of students' daily interactions. Furthermore, Generation Z students are highly sensitive to judgment and stigma; therefore, fostering an emotionally safe school environment should be a key priority. School policies must consider psychological safety across all educational interactions, not only within counseling services but also as part of the broader school culture.

Suggestions for further research:

This study opens opportunities for future research to further enrich the understanding of communication dynamics between guidance counselors and Generation Z students. First, this research did not examine differences in perceptions based on gender or school type (public/private, general/religious). Future studies may explore these variables to identify whether specific communication strategies are more effective for particular student groups. Second, expanding the cultural and geographic scope through cross-regional or cross-national studies may help distinguish universal and context-specific principles in rapport-building communication.

Third, longitudinal research is recommended to examine how students' perceptions evolve in response to curriculum changes, educational digitalization, or repeated interactions with guidance counselors over time. Such studies could provide deeper insights into the long-term effectiveness of communication-based interventions. Finally, further in-depth investigation of emotional safety one of the central concepts identified in this study is needed. Future research may adopt qualitative, quantitative, or experimental approaches to explore the dimensions of emotional safety and how they can be optimized in counseling practice. The development of an instrument to measure emotional safety in the context of school counseling would also represent a valuable methodological contribution.

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DECLARATION

Ethics approval and consent to participate

Parental consent was provided for students under the age of 18, and informed consent was provided by all participants. Student identities are kept confidential, and participation is voluntary.

Consent for publication

Not applicable

Availability of Data and Material (ADM)

Not applicable

Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

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Assisted with sentence editing, structuring the initial draft of the article, and correcting grammar. However, the data analysis, interpretation of findings, and academic decisions were entirely made by the author, in accordance with academic ethical standards and the principles of human oversight.

Authors' contributions

Yuttami Keila Azahra S.Pd. Conceptualization, instrument development, data collection, data analysis, draft writing. And **Moch Johan Pratama S. Psi., M. Psi.** Supervision, analysis validation, methodology refinement, review and editing of the final manuscript.

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

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