

The link between communication competence and family communication patterns

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Abstract The quality of the close relationship between parents and children is difficult for parents of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). Many parents do not have the communication competence to build strong interaction with autistic children, which causes interaction patterns at home to be inappropriate. This study aims to determine the influence of communication competence on the relationship quality of parents and children, determine the effect of family communication patterns on the relationship quality of parents and children, determine the effect of family communication patterns on relational maintenance behaviour, determine the effect of relational maintenance behaviour on relationship quality of parents and children, determine the role of relational maintenance behaviour as a mediator of the influence between communication competence and family communication patterns on the quality of the relationship between parents and children. This study uses quantitative research methods with survey methods and purposive sampling techniques. The results of the sample (N=202) indicate that communication competence significantly affects the quality of the relationship between parents and children, family communication patterns significantly affect the quality of the relationship between parents and children, family communication patterns significantly affect relational maintenance behaviour, and relational maintenance behaviour significantly affects the relationship on the quality of the relationship between parents and children, and relational maintenance significantly mediates the influence between communication competence and family communication patterns on the quality of the relationship between parents and children.

Keywords: communication competence; family communication patterns; relational maintenance; autism

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INTRODUCTION

In family life, the parent-child relationship quality can be considered intimate if marked by the perception of closeness and satisfaction by the individuals in the relationship. The closeness of the parent-child relationship is defined as the emotional connection between parents and children (Grant Marsney, Grotevant, & Sayer, 2015; Guan & Li, 2017). Close relationships are an important source of social support (Burleson and MacGeorge, 2002; Ledbetter et al., 2010). Empirical studies indicate that the relationship between parents and children is often related to the communication competence of parents.

The close relationship between parents and children is very difficult for parents with children with Autism Spectrum Disorder. Raising children with autism is a big challenge because their limitations are a tremendous pressure for parents (Hastings & Johnson, 2001; Davis & Carter, 2008). Parents find it difficult to build interactions with children because they rarely communicate or sometimes use special forms of communication (Biggs & Medan, 2018). This shows the lack of competence of parents to communicate with children and the lack of ability of parents to create warmth at home. There are still many parents who do not have sufficient competence, skills and confidence to encourage effective communication in autistic children (Kent-Wash et al., 2015; Biggs and Carter, 2017). There is no evidence that parental involvement improves the development of verbal communication, such as language and expressive vocabulary (Te Kaat-van de Os et al., 2017; Biggs & Meadan, 2018). Parental involvement resulted in small improvements in autism severity (Nevil et al., 2016). Meanwhile, the incompatibility of communication patterns built in the family is indicated because parents' knowledge about autism is still lacking.

In family life, the parent-child relationship can be considered intimate if marked by the individuals' perception of closeness and satisfaction. Close relationships are an important source of social support (Burleson and MacGeorge, 2002; Ledbetter et al., 2010). Empirical studies indicate that parent-child relationships are often related to family communication patterns (FCP). For example, relationship maintenance and closeness behaviours mediate the effect of FCP on parent-child relationships (Ledbetter & Beck, 2014). Koerner & Fitzpatrick (2002a) said that communication from the parent-child relationship encourages individuals on cognitive skills for social relations in the future. To create a climate for warm parent-child relations, a sense of closeness and satisfaction is needed, especially for parents because they play a role in creating an atmosphere of good relations in the family.

Compared to mothers of normal children and children with other disabilities, mothers of autistic children are noted to have higher levels of stress and are at risk of depression (Olsson & Hwang, 2001; Eisenhower, Baker & Blacher, 2005; Estes et al., 2009; Montes & Halterman, 2007; Rao & Beidel, 2009; Meirsschaut, Roeyers & Warreyn, 2010). This risk can be minimised if parents encourage open communication so that more intimate relationships occur between parents and children. Parents need certain

behaviours to create and maintain a close relationship with their children. In communication science, this behaviour is known as relationship maintenance (Relational Maintenance, Stafford & Canary, 1992).

In realising the relationship between parents and children with autism, communication competence is still lacking, causing a mismatch in family communication patterns. This hinders the creation of a close parent-child relationship. There is a need for behaviour to maintain a relationship that can bridge communication competence and the relationship between parents and children.

Parents are central in shaping interactions in family relationships, so qualified competence is needed. Family processes can vary in relational contexts depending on how parents display patterns of interaction within the home (Schordt and Ledbetter, 2009). Communication competence is a person's assessment of his own or other people's ability to communicate, which requires a certain level of assertiveness, social skills, suitability, patience, flexibility and adaptation, which will result in an effective way of interpersonal interaction (Schordt and Ledbetter, 2009, Afifi and Schrod, 2003; Guerrero, 1994; Spitzberg and Cupach, 1984, 1989). Communication competence positively affects more meaningful relationships (Asher, Parker and Walker, 1996). Furthermore, when individuals have communication competence in interpreting the world, they will be better able to manage the environment around them (Delia, O'Keefe, and O'Keefe, 1982; Koesten and Anderson, 2004). In the context of children with special needs, the communication competence of parents in respecting and involving children with special needs influences the child's willingness to participate in every aspect of family life, such as playing, shopping, vacationing, and weddings (Biklen, 2015).

Implementing the relationship between parents and children is closely related to daily interaction and communication patterns. In the study of communication science, it is better known as the pattern of family communication (FCP). Ritchie & Fitzpatrick (1994) sparked the FCP theory by paying more attention to the urgency of the communication patterns of family members. Family Communication Patterns is a theory that focuses on relationships and interactions carried out in order to reach a mutual agreement between parents and children (Koerner and Fitzpatrick (2004). There are two dimensions in the pattern of family communication, namely, the dimensions of conversation orientation and conformity orientation. Conversational orientation represents how much family communication can create broad communication openness. Conversation orientation is the extent to which families can encourage members to interact intensely about various topics. Individuals with families with high conversational orientation can freely engage in dialogue to share ideas and concerns and participate in decision-making (Koerner and Fitzpatrick, 2002b, p. 85). Conformity orientation emphasises the climate of homogeneity of values, attitudes, and beliefs. Families with high conformity tend to have the same beliefs, pay attention to hierarchical structures and place family interests above personal interests (Koerner and Fitzpatrick, 2002b, p. 85).

Relationship maintenance is a theory in interpersonal communication that generally refers to a group of behaviours, actions, and activities individuals use to maintain desired relational states (e.g., closeness and intimacy) (Littlejohn and Foss, 2016). There are several definitions of relational maintenance. First, maintaining existing relationships with daily routine behaviour. Second, maintaining relationships under certain conditions or circumstances to maintain a certain level of intimacy. Third, maintain a relationship, so it is always in a satisfactory condition. Fourth, maintain the relationship in pairs (Dindia and Canary, 1993; Littlejohn and Foss, 2016).

The seven relationship maintenance behaviours include joint activities (sharing time), talking (discussing various topics), communication through mediation (communication other than face-to-face), avoiding conflict when the partner is in a negative emotional state, and anti-social behaviour (such as sarcasm or jealousy), affection (showing affection), and self-focus (relationship-enriching behaviour) (Stafford and Canary, 1991, cited in Littlejohn and Foss, 2016).

The relationship between parents and children influences the quality of individuals to adulthood. Koerner and Fitzpatrick (2002a) say that communication from parent-child relationships will encourage individuals in the cognitive skills and intelligence needed for social relationships in the future. To create a climate of warm parent-child relations, it is necessary to have a sense of belonging, closeness, and satisfaction to be felt, especially for parents because they play the main role in creating an atmosphere of good relations in the family.

The relationship between parents and children can be good if the perception of closeness and satisfaction in the relationship by the individuals in it marks it. The behaviour of family members can be assessed accurately through the closeness between members, which is influenced by family communication patterns (Sillars and Canary, 2013; Guan and Li, 2017). The closeness of the parent-child relationship is defined as the emotional connection between parents and children (Grant Marsney, Grotevant, and Sayer, 2015; Guan and Li, 2017). A well-maintained parent-child relationship creates feelings of closeness and attachment. Proximity in relationships (Vangelisti and Caughlin, 1997) is often used to see the quality of various types of relationships, such as family, romantic relationships and friendship (Ledbetter, Mazer, DeGroot, Meyer, Mao, and Swafford, 2010). Close relationships are an important source of social support (Burleson and MacGeorge, 2002; Ledbetter et al., 2010).

A healthy relationship between parents and children depends on how parents perceive creating a relationship climate. Empirical studies have found that depressed parents will not be emotionally available for their children (Blankers, 2013; Khawaja et al., 2017), meaning that these parents adopt more conformist communication patterns. Parents with conformity place more emphasis on obedience to socio-culture, rules, harmony, and respect for older people (Koerner and Fitzpatrick, 2002, 2004; Ledbetter and Beck, 2014; Ritchie and Fitzpatrick, 1990; Schrod, 2004).

Witt, and Messersmith, 2008; Khawaja et al., 2017). However, communication and sharing remain helpful for family relationships in difficult circumstances (Measham and Rousseau, 2010; Khawaja et al., 2017).

When parents apply competent communication behaviours and create an environment that facilitates children to discuss various topics, it is believed to instil cognitive flexibility (Schordt and Ledbetter, 2009; Koesten et al., 2009) and have more effective conflict management skills (Schordt and Ledbetter, 2009; Koerner and Fitzpatrick, 1997). Furthermore, Hart et al. (2003) argued that parents could positively improve social communication characteristics in children depending on the practices and interaction styles that parents apply. In the context of children with special needs, the communication competence of parents in respecting and involving children with special needs influences the child's willingness to participate in every aspect of family life, such as playing, shopping, vacationing, and weddings (Biklen, 2015).

Based on the description above, the first hypothesis that can be developed is (H1) communication competence significantly affects the quality of the relationship between parents and children with autism. In families with a high level of conformity, parents usually have almost unilateral control in forming family connectedness; in the absence of mutual giving and trusting conversations, the family system becomes less flexible and cohesive. This affects children to distance and withdraw from their parents (Schrodtd, 2005; Ledbetter, Heiss, et al., 2010a; Ledbetter and Beck, 2014).

Based on the description above, the second hypothesis that can be developed is (H2) Conformity orientation significantly affects the relationship quality between parents and children.

The relationship between parents and children is a fundamental part of the family that builds whether or not family relationships are healthy. Several studies say that conversational orientation in FCP has a positive effect on family relationships, such as parenting style (Hamon and Schrodtd, 2012; Koerner and Schrodtd, 2014), parental conflict styles (Beck and Ledbetter, 2013), and individual privacy orientation (Bridge and Schrodtd, 2013), produces children who are more open in expressing emotions in front of their parents (Schrodtd, 2019). Some researchers suggest the importance of conversational orientation in the family to foster healthy behaviour and interpersonal skills (Schordtd et al., 2009; Koesten, 2004). Based on the description above, the third hypothesis that can be developed is (H3) Conversational orientation significantly affects the relationship quality between parents and children.

High conformity orientation without balance makes the atmosphere in the family less warm. Individuals from high-conformity families have higher privacy preferences that make them prefer to be alone and have less self-disclosure. High-conformity families tend not to assert a commitment to relationships because commitments are not spoken to one another (Bridge and Schrodtd, 2013; Hall and Nallie, 2016). Relationship

closeness will not be created if the family climate does not support its members in maintaining relationships through communication behaviour. From the explanation above, the fourth hypothesis that can be developed is (H4) Conformity orientation significantly affects maintaining relationships.

Viewed from the point of view and empirical studies on family communication patterns, the conversational orientation of relationship maintenance is interconnected because relationship maintenance behaviour influences the satisfaction of partner relationships, parent-child relationships, sibling relationships, and children's interpersonal skills in social relationships (Ledbetter and Beck, 2014; Pauley, Hesse, Mikkelsen, 2014; Hall and McNallie, 2016).

Based on this description, the fifth hypothesis that can be developed is (H5). Conversational orientation has a significant effect on maintaining relationships.

There have been many communication studies on relationship maintenance that focus on romantic relationships (Stafford, 2003), relationship maintenance in various family relationships, including between siblings (Myers, Brann, and Rittenour, 2008), older siblings (Goodboy, Myers, and Patterson, 2009), grandparents and grandchildren (Mansson, Myers, and Turner, 2010), as well as children and parents (Myers and Glover, 2007; Vogl-Bauer, Kalbfleisch, and Beatty, 1999). Previous research has found a correlation between relationship maintenance and some relational characteristics, including love, satisfaction, commitment, and mutual control (Canary and Stafford, 1992; Dainton, Stafford and Canary, 1994), and similar findings emerge in studies of family relationships (Myers and Glover, 2007; Ledbetter and Beck, 2014). If parents create maintenance of family relationships, it will support the creation of good parent-child relationships.

Based on the description above, the sixth hypothesis that can be developed is (H6) relationship maintenance significantly affects the relationship quality between parents and children with autism.

In the context of children with special needs, the communication competence of parents in appreciating and involving children with special needs influences the child's willingness to participate in every aspect of family life (Biklen, 2015). Communication competence leads to a person's assessment of his own or other people's ability to communicate, which will result in an effective way of interpersonal interaction (Schordt and Ledbetter, 2009, Afifi and Schrodtd, 2003; Guerrero, 1994; Spitzberg and Cupach, 1984, 1989). Relationship maintenance influences several positive findings, including love, communication, and sibling relationship satisfaction (Myers and Members of COM 200, 2001; Myers, Goodboy, and Members of COMM 201, 2013; Myers and Weber, 2004; Hall and McNallie, 2016). Therefore, parents with good communication competence will be more skilled in maintaining relationships to build quality parent-child relationships.

Thus, the seventh hypothesis that can be developed is (H7) relationship maintenance can mediate the influence of communication competence on the quality of the relationship between parents and children with autism.

Koerner and Fitzpatrick (2002a) posit that the prevailing FCP theory (i.e. conversational orientation and conformity) is mediated by relational maintenance behaviour. Ledbetter (2009) shows that friendship maintenance behaviour mediates the effect between FCP and friendship closeness, with both FCP orientations having a positive effect on relationship maintenance.

Thus, the eighth hypothesis that can be developed is (H8) relationship maintenance can mediate the effect of family communication patterns (conversation orientation and conformity orientation) on the quality of the relationship between parents and children with autism.

METHODOLOGY

This study uses a positivist paradigm with quantitative research methods. Quantitative research explains a problem whose results can be generalised (Kriyantono, 2006, p. 45). This study's population were all parents with children with autism in Surabaya. This study used a non-probability sampling technique with Purposive Random Sampling, a non-random sample using various methods to find all possibilities from very specific populations that tends to be difficult to reach (Neuman, 2013, p. 273). A sample of 202 parents was taken from four autistic schools in Surabaya.

The technique used in this study is the Structural Equation Models-Partial Least Square (SEM PLS) statistical technique. SEM was chosen because this technique is a type of multivariate statistical analysis that can handle the relationship of several explanatory variables despite multicollinearity. The advantages of this method include being immune or robust, not requiring various assumptions or conditions, being suitable for all types of data scales and not requiring a large number of samples (Hair, Black, Babin and Anderson, 2010).

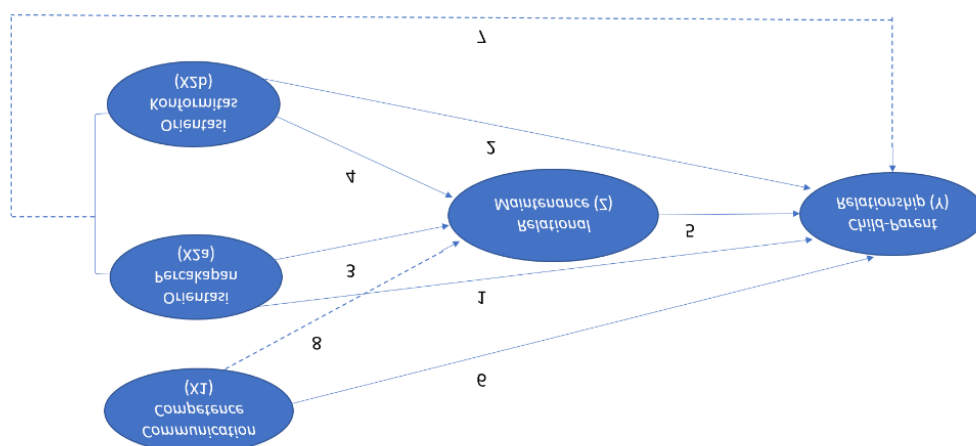


Figure 1. Conceptual Frameworks
 Source: Author (2023)

Figure 1 explains that the main issue discussed in this study is the quality of the relationship between parents and children with autism. A good parent-child relationship will be formed depending on the communication competencies applied. The relationship between parents and children with autism requires the full contribution of the family. Parental cooperation will build a balanced and positive interaction pattern in the family environment to encourage healthy parent-child relationships. The variables in this study depart from several studies and empirical findings regarding the relationship between communication competence and relationship maintenance on the quality of the parent-child relationship.

Operational definition and variable measurement as follow: a) Communication competence is a person's assessment of his own or other people's ability to communicate, which requires a certain level of assertiveness, social skills, suitability, patience, flexibility and adaptation, which will result in an effective way of interpersonal interaction. Communication competence was measured using 10 statement items from the indicators B. Rubin, M. Rubin, Graham, Perse and Seibold (2009) using a Likert scale from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. b) Family communication patterns focus on the interaction between parents and children to reach an agreement between family members. Two approaches to the agreement are conformity orientation, and conversation orientation (Fitzpatrick and Koerner, 2006) using a Likert scale from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. c) Relationship maintenance refers to the group of behaviours, actions, and activities individuals use to maintain a desired relational state. Relationship maintenance was measured using 27 statement items from the indicators B. Rubin, M. Rubin, Graham, Perse and Seibold (2009) using a Likert scale of 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. d) Quality of parents-children relationship - The parent-child relationship can be good if the individuals' perception of closeness and satisfaction marks it. The quality of the parent-child relationship was measured using 15 statement items from indicators from Driscoll and Pianta (2011) using a Likert scale from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Measurement Model (Outer Model)

The measurement model in this study is used to test the variables' validity and the instrument's reliability. Construct validity shows how well the results (scores) are obtained to define a construct whose test consists of convergent and discriminant validity. The test model in question consists of five variables: Communication Competence (X) and Sub Family Communication Patterns, Conversational Orientation (X2), Family Communication Patterns Sub, Conformity Orientation (X3), Relationship Maintenance (Z), and Quality of Parent and Child Relations (Y). The relationship between the three variables is presented in Figure 2 as follows:

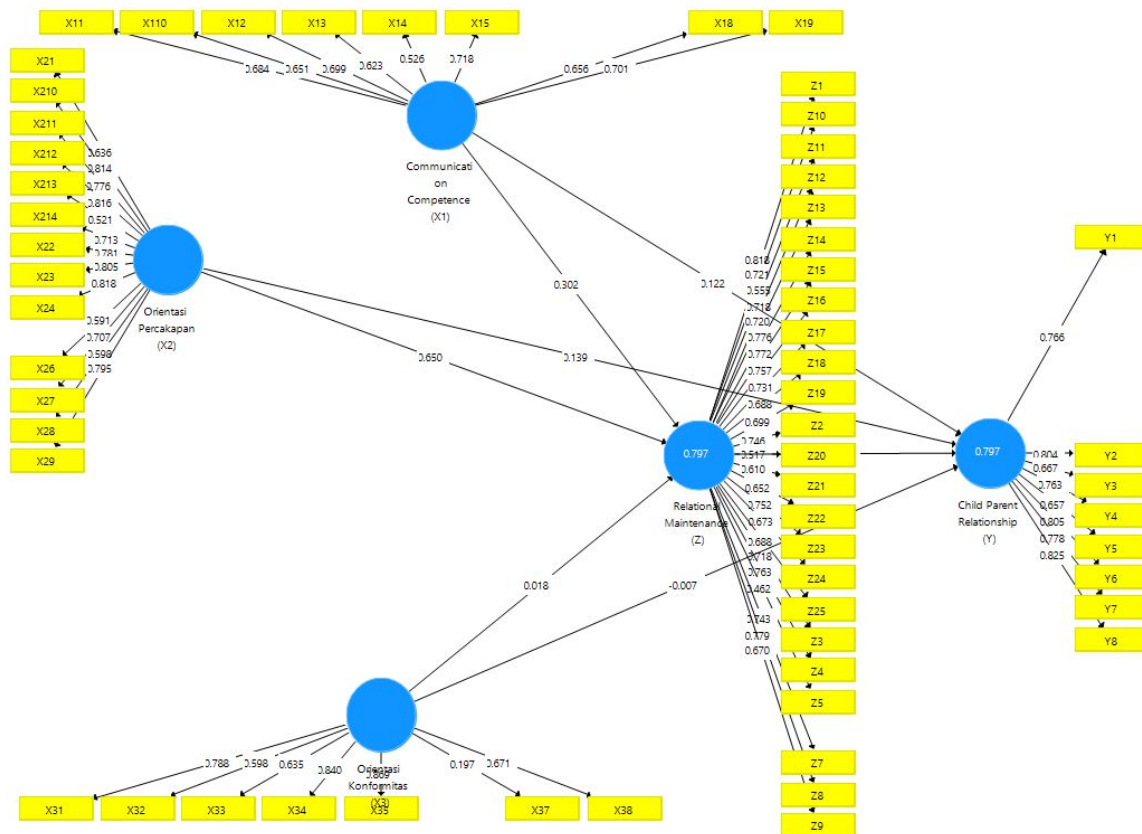


Figure 2. Outer Model Output
 Source: Author (2023)

Convergent Validity and Discriminant Validity Tests

Each indicator in the model must meet convergent validity with a loading factor value of > 0.5 . If the value of each indicator has a loading factor value > 0.5 , then it can be used for further analysis. Based on Table 1, it is known that the AVE value of all variables is more than 0.5. This means that the convergent validity test is fulfilled, so it can be concluded that each latent variable can represent an indicator.

After the convergent validity test is fulfilled, it is continued by conducting a discriminant validity test by looking at the correlation value between latent variables provided that the correlation between indicators and latent variables $>$ correlation between indicators and other latent variables (outside the block). The final path analysis model is obtained based on the evaluation process, as shown in Figure 2.

Table 1. Convergent Validity Test Results

Variable	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Communication Competency	0,501
Family Communication Patterns (O. Conversation)	0,529
Family Communication Patterns (O.Conformity)	0,510
Relationship Maintenance	0,504
Quality of Parent-Child Relationship	0,576

Source: Author (2023)

Reliability Test

The reliability test was carried out using Composite Reliability. It is said to be reliable if the Composite Reliability value is > 0.7 . The results of the reliability test can be seen in Table 2. Based on Table 2, it can be seen that each composite reliability value for each variable in this study was > 0.7 . Thus, it can be concluded that all variables in this study have good reliability.

Table 2. Reliability Test Results

Variable	Composite Reliability
Communication Competency	0,860
Family Communication Patterns (O. Conversation)	0,935
Family Communication Patterns (O.Conformity)	0,852
Relationship Maintenance	0,958
Quality of Parent-Child Relationship	0,916

Source: Author (2023)

Hypothesis test

The test begins by examining the direct effect between variables seen in the path coefficients by evaluating them based on the coefficient values and t-statistics or p-values. The coefficient value is used to see the direction of the hypothesised relationship, namely positive or negative. In contrast, the t-statistic or p-value is used to determine the estimated value or the magnitude of the influence of the independent variables on the dependent variable (Table 3).

Table 3. Results of the Direct Effect Test

	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics (O/STDEV)	P Value s	Information
KK-> KHO	0,122	0,355	0,057	6,203	0,000	Significant
PKK3 -> KHO	-0,007	-0,009	0,050	0,482	0,630	Not Significant
PKK2 -> KHO	0,139	0,548	0,055	9,967	0,000	Significant
PKK3 -> PH	0,018	0,017	0,037	0,313	0,754	Not Significant
PKK2 -> PH	0,650	0,636	0,047	13,539	0,000	Significant
PH -> KHO	0,797	0,670	0,083	8,121	0,000	Significant

Source: Author (2023)

The results of the H1 test prove that communication competence has a positive effect on the quality of parent-child relationships with a coefficient value of 0.122, a t-statistic of 6.203, and a significance of 0.000. A positive coefficient value of 0.122 indicates that the influence of the two is in the same direction, and it can be said that the higher the communication competence, the higher the quality of the parent-child relationship. The first hypothesis, which states that communication

competence has a positive and significant effect on the quality of the relationship between parents and children with autism, is accepted.

The results of the H2 test prove that conformity orientation does not affect the quality of the parent-child relationship, with a coefficient value of -0.007, a t-statistic of 0.482, and a significance of 0.630. The significance value of 0.630 indicates that there is no effect on both. The second hypothesis, which states that conformity orientation affects the quality of the relationship between parents and children with autism, is rejected.

The results of the H3 test prove that conversational orientation positively affects the quality of the parent-child relationship with a coefficient value of 0.139, a t-statistic of 9.967, and a significance of 0.000. The positive coefficient value of 0.139 indicates that the influence of the two is in the same direction, and it can be said that the higher the conversation orientation, the higher the quality of the parent-child relationship. The third hypothesis, which states that conversational orientation has a positive and significant effect on the quality of the relationship between parents and children with autism, is accepted.

The results of the H4 test prove that conformity orientation does not affect maintaining relationships with a coefficient value of 0.018, a t-statistic of 0.313, and a significance of 0.754. The significance value of 0.754 indicates that there is no effect on both. The fourth hypothesis, which states that conformity orientation influences relationship maintenance, is rejected.

The results of the H5 test prove that conversation orientation has a positive effect on maintaining relationships with a coefficient value of 0.650, a t-statistic of 13.539, and a significance of 0.000. The positive coefficient value of 0.650 indicates that the influence of the two is in the same direction, and it can be said that the higher the conversation orientation, the higher the relationship maintenance. The fifth hypothesis, which states that conversation orientation has a positive and significant effect on relationship maintenance, is accepted.

The results of the H6 test prove that relationship maintenance has a positive effect on the quality of the parent-child relationship, with a coefficient value of 0.797, a t-statistic of 8.121, and a significance of 0.000. The positive coefficient value of 0.797 indicates that the influence of the two is in the same direction, and it can be said that the higher the relationship maintenance, the higher the quality of the parent-child relationship. The sixth hypothesis, which states that relationship maintenance has a positive and significant effect on the quality of the relationship between parents and children with autism, is accepted.

The next test examines the role of relationship maintenance in mediating the influence of communication competence on the quality of parent-child relationships. The results of the H7 test prove that relationship maintenance mediates the influence of communication competence on the quality of parent-child relationships with a coefficient value of 0.214, a t-statistic of 5.377, and a significance of 0.000 (Table 4). The fourth hypothesis, which states that relationship maintenance mediates the effect

of communication competence on the quality of parent-child relationships, is accepted.

The following result is the H8 test proving that relationship maintenance mediates the effect of family communication patterns (Sub. Conversation orientation) on the quality of parent-child relationships with a coefficient value of 0.430, a t-statistic of 6.454, and a significance of 0.000. The eighth hypothesis, which states that relationship maintenance mediates the influence of family communication patterns on the quality of parent-child relationships, is accepted.

Table 4. Mediation Variable Test Results

	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics (O/STDEV)	P Values	Information
MEDKK -> PH -> KHO	0,214	0,213	0,040	5,377	0,000	Significant Not
MEDPKK3 -> PH -> KHO	0,008	0,012	0,025	0,314	0,754	Significant
MEDPKK2 -> PH -> KHO	0,430	0,427	0,067	6,454	0,000	Significant

Source: Author (2023)

The Effect of Communication Competence on the Quality of Parent-Child Relationships

The results of the SEM analysis show that communication competence has a positive and significant relationship with the quality of the relationship between parents and children. These results are consistent with Asher et al. (1996) statement that communication competence positively affects more meaningful relationships. Parents with communication competence reported having a good relationship with autistic children. Parents who have communication competence will find it easier to build intimacy so that they can feel the quality of a close relationship with their child. This is in accordance with the results of research by McManus and Denovan (2014) that family welfare is influenced by the ability of parents to build effective and clear messages by articulating all the messages needed by the interlocutor. Relationship closeness is rated lower when parents are perceived as communicating ambiguously, and this ambiguity causes more negative effects on relational closeness.

In other words, the greater the ambiguity that their children interpret, it is possible to cause inconsistencies in the information they perceive. This causes a negative cycle to develop due to ambiguous communication. Conversely, if parents can interpret messages well, this allows parents to express emotions and verbal messages according to the needs of autistic children. Given that autistic children have limitations in capturing and interpreting the messages they receive. In line with research findings in the context of children with autistic needs, the communication

competence of parents in respecting and involving children influences the child's willingness to participate in every aspect of family life (Biklen, 2015). The results of this study provide meaning, parents who have good communication competence by being able to express emotions appropriately, and convey messages tailored to the abilities and needs of autistic children, will make children understand and interpret parental messages more clearly and consistently. This will naturally encourage children to give back to their parents by wanting to be involved in family interactions and to be more open to parents through verbal or nonverbal communication, so such situations can create a closeness that parents feel in the relationship between parents and children. These findings underscore the importance of communication in healthy relationships, especially the ability of parents to communicate clearly, precisely, and effectively to make it easier for autistic children to receive messages.

The Effect of Conformity Orientation on the Quality of Parent-Child Relationships

This study proves that conformity orientation does not significantly affect the quality of the relationship between parents and children with autism. These findings suggest that family harmony does not, in fact, make parents perceive the quality of the relationship to be better or worse. This research supports the claims of empirical findings that high conformity usually causes parents to have almost unilateral control so that children distance and withdraw from their parents (Schrodt, 2005; Ledbetter, Heiss, et al., 2010a; Ledbetter and Beck, 2014). Thus, the higher the conformity applied, the further away the family members are from a quality parent-child relationship. This indicates that the inflexible conformity family climate makes autistic children less willing to get closer to their parents.

Regarding parental power, parents expect their children to always obey them and get the highest point from the respondents. Through this power shows a lack of openness in the house. Parents consider autistic children "special," so they cannot carry out activities like normal children to avoid tantrums. Indirectly, parents apply limits in interaction and argue so that they impose rules that children must obey. This ultimately causes autistic children not to have the freedom to express themselves in the family and continue to depend on the words and orders of their parents. Implementing such a system eventually causes the family atmosphere to become less warm because there is no giving-and-receiving interaction and very little trust. This makes it more difficult for children to interpret messages and tends to ignore the family's existence.

The Effect of Conversational Orientation on the Quality of Parent-Child Relationships

This study shows that conversation orientation has a positive and significant effect on the quality of the relationship between parents and children. Respondents reported that high conversation could improve the quality of parent-child relationships characterised by the greater closeness between

parents and children. This study's findings support several empirical studies regarding the relationship between family communication patterns and relational quality. Good quality parent-child relationships can be realised if parents can build family interaction through conversation and openness. This is in line with research findings which say that children will continue to learn and imitate parents' communication behaviour (Noller, 1995; Ledbetter, 2014). This indicates that if parents apply communication patterns early by prioritizing conversations at home, children will automatically imitate and be encouraged to convey everything through open conversations with their parents.

The findings of this study prove that parents with high conversation can make children with autism who are involved in family relationships love their parents and family members more. In line with Avtgis's (1999, quoted in High and Scharp, 2015) findings, individuals from highly conversation-oriented families perceive interaction as a high reward. They have the potential to discuss personal issues (Huang, 1999, High & Scharp, 2015) and tend to avoid conflict (Koerner and Fitzpatrick, 1997). This is what causes parents of autistic children to have a higher closeness with children because all family elements consider the process of interaction in relationships as something that must be prioritised and maintained. They maintain relationships from all forms of conflict so that the informal communication used by parents is carried out very carefully.

This research provides evidence that conversational orientation improves the parent-child relationship quality. These findings support the notion that informal communication can reduce depression, increase relationship satisfaction, and increase self-esteem (Guilamo-Ramos, Jaccard, Turrisi, & Johansson, 2005; Robertson, Kutcher, Bird, & Grasswick, 2001). Individuals with a high conversational orientation are often skilled at maintaining relationships (Koesten, 2004) and motivated to manage conflict (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 1997; High & Scharp, 2015). It is possible for parents of autistic children who encourage a high conversation to have high self-esteem towards themselves so that they have the confidence to build conversations with autistic children. Armed with high self-esteem and self-confidence, this ultimately gives parents extensive knowledge about how to have healthy and interactive conversations tailored to the needs of autistic children.

This study shows that conversational orientation influences high relationship quality. This finding is supported by several other studies which prove that children from highly conversational families are skilled at speaking in all positive and negative contexts (Huang, 1999; Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 1997; High & Scharp, 2015). This is what allows autistic children to be more expressive and honest in conveying something to their parents through conversations that are built in the family. So that in this family, it is not only the parents who build open communication in one way, but children will also naturally provide two-way communication to their parents so that the dynamics in the family become closer.

The Effect of Conformity Orientation on Relationship Maintenance

This study proves that conformity orientation does not affect relationships in families with autistic children. This finding is in line with empirical research that high conformity families are less likely to express family affection (Schrodt, 2007; Ledbetter and Beck, 2014), and children tend to experience a decrease in the behaviour of maintaining relationships (Koesten, 2004; Ledbetter, 2009; Ledbetter and Beck, 2014). Conformity in the family inhibits parents and autistic children from sharing affection because the family structure limits them from being able to behave carelessly.

That is, autistic children are not used to communicating affection correctly because their parents never exemplify this in family interactions, as is the empirical finding that high conformity does not confirm commitment to the relationship. After all, commitment to one another is not necessarily spoken (Bridge and Schrodt, 2013; Hall and Nallie, 2016). In other words, conformity encourages parental egotism to dominate family relationships because parents have long been accustomed to having to be obeyed and respected. This is what causes communication only to go one way. Children give no reciprocity in the form of loving behaviour to parents. The enforced uniformity causes children to be untrained to take the initiative in maintaining family relationships because they do not understand how to respect a relationship.

The Effect of Conversation Orientation on Relationship Maintenance

This study proves that conversation orientation positively and significantly affects relationship maintenance. As empirical research claims that high conversation has higher mutual dependence because it creates communal bonds in mutually communicated relationships, parents and children have ways of maintaining certain relationships built to maintain these bonds (Ledbetter et al., 2010; Ledbetter and Beck, 2014). Conversation orientation provides a special space for parents and children with autism to maintain their affection for each other. This is evidenced by the positivity indicator, which gets the highest score on positive affirmation statement items. These findings indicate that parents with a conversational orientation are very likely to appreciate the little things their children do, so they communicate their love and appreciation to their children through praise and positive sentences.

This research indicates that conversational orientation encourages parents to engage in relationship maintenance behaviour. The high communication climate shown through conversation creates cheerful, optimistic, and affectionate interactions in families with autistic children because conversation does not limit someone from expressing everything they think. Regular communication intensities make parents and children appreciate the quality time they have together. Parents not only consider autistic children to be children with special needs but treat them the same as normal children by respecting autistic children, giving them responsibility, and helping them interact with the social environment.

Conversation orientation greatly influences parents and children with autism to engage in relationship maintenance behaviour to create a more positive environment in the family.

The Influence of Relationship Maintenance on the Quality of Parent-Child Relationships

This study shows that relationship maintenance has a positive and significant effect on the quality of the parent-child relationship. This finding is consistent with empirical research that there is a correlation between relationship maintenance and several relational characteristics, including love, satisfaction, commitment, and mutual control (Canary and Stafford, 1992; Dainton, Stafford and Canary, 1994); and similar findings emerge in studies of family relationships (Myers and Glover, 2007; Ledbetter and Beck, 2014). This study contributes to the fact that parents who actively participate in the behaviour of maintaining relationships with autistic children are shown to be able to feel the good quality of the parent-child relationship.

Mutual loving behaviour, communicating love, and appreciating the little things can strengthen the closeness between parents and children. Such maintenance behaviour can create comfort and a sense of security in autistic children. It is indeed more difficult for autistic children to digest messages verbally, but this can be made easier by involving non-verbal communication. Children may be encouraged to do the same thing because parents exemplify this behaviour through actions such as positive affirmations every day, giving trust to children by giving them responsibility, and carrying out joint activities that encourage similar behaviour from autistic children so that a relational closeness is created between the two. That is, the quality of good family relationships will not occur naturally, but its members must ensure that these relationships are worth maintaining. This can be achieved if parents have the awareness and initiative to maintain relationships by carrying out activities to maintain closeness between parents and children.

The Effect of Communication Competence on the Quality of Parent-Child Relationships Through Relationship Maintenance

This study provides evidence that relationship maintenance can mediate the effect of communication competence on the quality of the relationship between parents and children with autism. This finding is in line with empirical research, which says that parents' communication skills to encourage autistic children to be involved in family warmth will be able to feel reciprocity in the form of warmth and love from children. This study reinforces Biklen's (2015) statement that the communication competence of parents in respecting and involving children with special needs affects the child's willingness to participate in every aspect of family life. This research supports some studies which claim that relationship maintenance behaviour influences several positive findings, including love, communication, and sibling relationship satisfaction (Myers and Members

of COM 200, 2001; Myers, Goodboy, and Members of COMM 201, 2013; Myers and Weber, 2004; Hall and McNallie, 2016).

In practice, autistic children need parents who can involve themselves in family interactions. Such parents are considered to be able to place their autistic children the same as individuals in general. Autistic children need to be treated equally, not seen as inferior. This is shown by how parents can give children responsibility, want to spend quality time doing activities together, and appreciate every simple process given by children through positive affirmations. Such parents tend to be able to feel a higher quality relationship with their children and have high closeness. Basically, autistic children have limitations in capturing the messages they receive. To encourage the willingness of autistic children to provide reciprocity, parents must have verbal communication skills and be able to create comfort in the interaction process. This comfort can be obtained through non-verbal communication such as touching, hugging, gestures and acceptance.

The influence of family communication patterns on the quality of parent-child relationships through relationship maintenance

This study proves that relationship maintenance can mediate the influence of family communication patterns with the conversational orientation sub-variable but cannot mediate the effect of the conformity orientation sub-variable. The results of this study do not support the theory's claim that, overall, both FCP (conversation orientation and conformity) can be mediated by relationship maintenance (Koerner and Fitzpatrick, 2002a). In fact, in the context of autistic special needs children, this cannot happen. Only conversational orientation can be mediated by relationship maintenance.

The findings of this study provide evidence that conformity cannot get parents or children with autism involved in relationship maintenance activities. This supports many studies that say conformity orientation is less likely to express family affection (Schrodt, 2007; Ledbetter and Beck, 2014). On the other hand, children experience a decrease in the behaviour of maintaining relationships (Koesten, 2004; Ledbetter, 2009; Ledbetter and Beck, 2014). So conformity cannot bridge autistic children and their parents to exchange affection because the climate of conformity, which tends to be "rigid," can prevent family members from expressing their feelings and thoughts. In the same situation, autistic children cannot open up if they do not accept verbal and non-verbal invitations from their parents. Children with special needs will naturally be involved in all aspects of the family if parents can communicate their appreciation to children (Biklen, 2015). Meanwhile, only families with conversation are more likely to do this, compared to conformity families, who are less likely to be able to maintain relationships.

CONCLUSION

Having an autistic child requires parents to have their skills in communicating in order to create quality parent-child relationships. Parents are the main key to successful communication with autistic children. Parents must create comfort in interacting with children using verbal or non-verbal communication and the accuracy of communication patterns within the family. Research conducted on parents of autistic children in Surabaya proves that 1) communication competence has a significant effect on the quality of the relationship between parents and autistic children, 2) conversational orientation has a significant effect on the quality of the relationship between parents and autistic children, 3) conformity orientation has no effect on the quality of the relationship between parents and children with autism, 4) conversational orientation has a significant effect on maintaining relationships, 5) conformity orientation has no effect on maintaining relationships, 6) maintaining communication relationships has a significant effect on the quality of relationships between parents and children with autism, 7) maintaining relationships is able to mediate the effect of communication competence on the quality of the relationship between parents and children with autism, 8) maintenance of the relationship is able to mediate the effect of family communication patterns sub-orientation of conversation on the quality of the relationship between parents and children with autism.

This research provides theoretical and practical implications. In the theoretical scope, the research results enrich the study of family communication science in the context of families with children with special needs. Quality family relationships can be achieved through maintaining relationships and conversation patterns within the family. While in the practical scope, parents get additional insight into building warmer family interactions to get a good quality parent-child relationship.

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