

Analysis of Non-Fitting Relations in the Context of Interpersonal Communication Between Individuals with Disabilities and Companions in the Maros Disability Forum

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Abstract

This research is motivated by the reality that interpersonal communication between individuals with disabilities and their companions often does not run in harmony. Barriers arise when the messages conveyed are not always understood as intended, leading to misalignment of meaning (non-fitting relations). This situation impacts the optimization of social relationships and reduces the effectiveness of assistance. Therefore, this study aims to uncover the forms of communication barriers experienced by both parties, as well as the strategies they employ to overcome these issues. The research method used is descriptive qualitative, with techniques including in-depth interviews and participatory observation, alongside the use of MaxQDA software for coding the research data. The study participants consist of individuals with various physical and cognitive disabilities, as well as companions actively involved in the Maros Disability Forum. The results indicate that communication barriers manifest in the form of differing perceptions, limitations in the use of verbal and non-verbal language, and discomfort arising when expectations are unmet. To address these issues, both parties strive to adjust their communication behaviors, involve family mediators, use alternative media such as writing or sign language, and establish more adaptive communication patterns. This research emphasizes that the success of interpersonal communication heavily relies on the ability to adapt, empathy, and awareness of inclusive communication. It is hoped that these findings can contribute meaningfully to the development of more effective and equitable assistance strategies.

Keywords: *Non-Fitting Relations, Interpersonal Communication, Individuals with Disabilities, Companions.*

Introduction

In the era of hyperconnectivity, communication has become a key factor in social interaction and the formation of collective meaning (Lande et al., 2024). Tubbs and Moss (as cited in Maryam & Paryontri, 2020) emphasize that the purpose of communication is to achieve mutual understanding, which enables individuals to express emotions accurately. Interpersonal communication skills contribute to emotional stability and conflict resolution (Merlin & Soubramanian, 2024), as well as fostering inclusive relationships.

However, communication is not always effective, particularly among vulnerable groups such as individuals with disabilities. This term, recognized by the UNCRPD in 2011, replaces the term 'handicapped' to emphasize human rights (Hikam, 2023). Despite reform efforts, inclusive practices are still often lacking. In some places, such as China, the dichotomy between 'normal' and 'abnormal' persists, functioning as a form of discrimination (Lin et al., 2025). Discrimination and stigma have a damaging impact, extending beyond mere negative attitudes (Corrigan & Penn, 1999).

Individuals with disabilities experience consequences related to their conditions, influenced by social and cultural contexts (Imama, 2021). They are often treated as second-class citizens, facing stigma and discrimination that hinder access to their rights (Saran et al., 2023). In Indonesia, individuals

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with disabilities continue to experience marginalisation in social life, exacerbating cognitive dissonance psychological discomfort arising from the conflict between beliefs and experiences (Kurnia et al., 2024).

At a global level, about 16% of the population, which equates to 1.3 billion individuals, live with disabilities (Mugisha et al., 2024). In Indonesia, around 8.5% of the population, or 22.97 million people, are individuals with disabilities, making it the country with the highest prevalence of disabilities in Southeast Asia (Data Kemenko PMK, 2023). In Maros Regency, South Sulawesi Province, Indonesia, 44.3% of the population has disabilities (Ashar & K, 2022), and despite an increase in formal employment, education levels remain low. Many work in the informal sector with unstable incomes, reinforcing the cycle of poverty (Gaffar, 2021).

For individuals with disabilities, stable employment not only enhances independence but also serves as a symbol of social recognition (Liao et al., 2024). However, difficulties in demonstrating progress can lead to anxiety, impacting social interactions. Discrimination and social stigma continue to limit their participation (Ashar & K, 2022). In response to these challenges, the INKLUSI-BaKTI Programmer, in collaboration with the Maros Regency Government, established the Maros Disability Forum on 15 November 2022. This forum seeks to foster inclusion and empowerment for people with disabilities, providing a platform for advocacy and networking. However, the success of this programmer depends on social facilitators who act as mediators and motivators (Aulia & Apsari, 2020).

Social facilitators, according to Law No. 11 of 2009, assist individuals with disabilities in building autonomy and social competence (Rahayu et al., 2025). The involvement of empathetic facilitators can eliminate relational barriers and strengthen inclusive communication (Sarjiyanto et al., 2022). Therefore, communication within the Maros Disability Forum goes beyond mere coordination; it reflects negotiations of equality and identity. When interactions become dissonant, non-fitting relations may occur, creating deeper inequalities. Understanding this phenomenon is crucial for achieving inclusive communication and addressing social inequalities in Maros Regency.

Literature Review

In various disciplines, the terms fitting and non-fitting are frequently used. In the sociology of fashion, fitting signifies the distinction between suitable and unsuitable forms, relating to the balance of shape and idea. In the context of modernism, fitting pertains to the coherence of aesthetic forms, whereas in avant-gardism, it is determined by the relationship of ideas (Peer & Laermans, 2025).

In the oil and gas sector, fitting is a crucial component in pipes that changes the direction of flow or connects pipes of different sizes (Ulfah et al., 2020). The concept of fitting necessitates interconnection. In communication studies, fitting and non-fitting are applied to understand interpersonal communication. Non-fitting relations refer to dissonance in interactions, where speech, feelings, and nonverbal expressions are not aligned, hindering effective communication.

Indicators of non-fitting relations include: first, cognitive dissonance, which is the discomfort arising from conflicting cognitions (Festinger, 1968). Second, the inconsistency between verbal and nonverbal messages, which is evident when the meaning of words does not align with body language (Patterson et al., 2023). Third, mismatch of expectations, where one party's expectations are not met. Fourth, differences in values and life goals that can trigger conflict within relationships (Novianty & Husain, 2025).

Conversely, ideal interpersonal communication is characterised by fitting relations, which relate to social interaction and the intensity of relationships (Listiyani et al., 2024). Interpersonal attraction influences communication patterns and decision-making processes (Krech et al., 1996; Hamzani & Wijayani, 2021). DeVito (1996) states that the success of communication can be measured through qualities such as openness and empathy, which are influenced by internal and situational factors (Khotijah, 2023; Tuhuteru et al., 2021).

In the realm of social inclusion for people with disabilities, communication is not merely an exchange of information but also a tool for gaining recognition and participation (Gjermestad et al., 2023). Communication is vital for reducing non-fitting relations such as alienation and lack of self-confidence (Sacharissa & Shalehah, 2023). However, mismatches in communication often lead to misunderstandings (Bourke et al., 2025).

Earlier studies have demonstrated a connection between interpersonal communication and the autonomy of individuals with disabilities. For instance, Imama (2021) found that empathetic communication supports the independence of students with intellectual disabilities. Similar findings

were reported by Hsb & Yusniah (2024) regarding two-way communication that enhances students' self-confidence. However, many studies still focus on effective communication (fitting) and explore less the dynamics of non-fitting situations.

The strengths of previous research lie in their depiction of communication practices; however, they are limited to formal contexts and do not adequately explore problematic relational dimensions. This study differs as it analyses the mechanisms of communication non-fitting between individuals with disabilities and facilitators within the social community of Maros District, which are horizontal, informal, and dynamic.

Local studies in Maros are relevant, such as the research by Ashar & K (2022) regarding the social marginalization of people with disabilities. Gaffar (2021) and Kurniati (2024) investigated the role of empathetic communication in enhancing the independence of beneficiary families. Rasyid J et al., (2024) highlighted the disparities in public services for individuals with disabilities. This research, however, expands the scope by examining the dynamics of communication between individuals with disabilities and informal facilitators.

Theoretically, this study is grounded in three frameworks: Cognitive Dissonance Theory (Festinger, 1968), which explains the tension arising from the inconsistency between beliefs and behaviours; Communication Accommodation Theory (Dragojevic et al., 2015), which emphasises adaptation in conversations that affect interpersonal relationships; and Expectancy Violation Theory (Burgoon, 1978), which elucidates social expectations in interactions, where violations can disrupt relationships (Burgoon & Hale, 1988). These three theories help explain the non-fitting relations between individuals with disabilities and their facilitators.

Based on the literature and empirical findings, there remains a gap in research regarding non-fitting relations in the communication between individuals with disabilities and their facilitators. This research seeks to explore the following questions:

Q1: What are the forms and dynamics of non-fitting relations between individuals with disabilities and their facilitators?

Q2: What factors contribute to non-fitting relations between individuals with disabilities and their facilitators?

Q3: How do individuals with disabilities and facilitators in the Maros Disability Forum address the forms and dynamics of non-fitting relations that occur?

Methodology

This research employs a qualitative approach with in-depth interviews to comprehensively explore the dynamics of interpersonal communication between individuals with disabilities and their companions in the context of the Maros Disability Forum. This approach was chosen because it can reveal the subjective meanings behind personal communication experiences, including the misalignments or non-fitting relations that emerge in daily interactions (Hajaroh et al., 2025).

Participant selection was conducted using purposive sampling, considering representation from various types of disabilities and their level of involvement in forum activities. Additionally, snowball sampling techniques were employed to increase the number of informants based on recommendations from initial participants who had relevant experiences related to the phenomenon under investigation.

The interviews were held in person by going to each participant's home, accompanied by a companion from the Maros Disability Forum to assist in the communication process and ensure participant comfort. Prior to starting the interviews, the researcher distributed a consent form that outlined the research objectives, participant rights, and guarantees of data confidentiality and anonymity. Each interview lasted 45 to 60 minutes and was recorded with the consent of the participants or their representatives, such as family members, and was complemented by field notes to capture nonverbal context, emotional expressions, and social situations accompanying the interactions. The interview data was then transcribed verbatim and stored in separate files for each informant.

Data Analysis Techniques

Braun and Clarke (in Naeem et al., 2023) explain that data analysis was conducted using a thematic analysis approach that emphasizes the search for meaning and patterns from participants' communication experiences. Data analysis was assisted by MAXQDA software to systematically

organize, code, and trace themes. The researcher performed open coding on segments of interview data that displayed forms of communication misalignment, such as misunderstandings of messages, differences in perception, and emotional tensions. The coding process was conducted inductively, referencing the four dimensions of non-fitting relations mentioned above. Subsequently, codes with similar contexts were grouped into main themes that illustrated the patterns of interaction and adaptation efforts made by both parties.

To guarantee the accuracy and consistency of the data, the researcher applied validation strategies such as member checking with key participants and peer debriefing with forum companions to review the consistency of the coding results and interpretations. Additionally, the researcher maintained an audit trail as systematic documentation of the analysis process and used researcher reflection to uphold transparency and accountability. These strategies ensure that the research findings possess strong credibility, dependability, and confirmability, while authentically representing the interpersonal communication experiences between individuals with disabilities and their companions in the Maros Disability Forum.

Participant Selection

The selection of participants for this study was based on purposive sampling as decided by the researcher, focusing on companions and different types of disabilities such as physical, visual, hearing, speech, and sensory disabilities, associated with the Maros Disability Forum.

Table 3.1 Data of Companion Informants

Participant	Age	Gender	Description	Supported Sub-Districts
P1	36	Male	Companion/Village Staff	Bantimurung, Simbang, Tanralili, Maros Baru
P2	40	Male	Companion/Village Staff	Bantimurung, Simbang, Tanralili, Maros Baru
P3	39	Female	Companion/Pharmacist	Tompobulu

Table 3.2 Data of Disability Informants

Participant	Age	Gender	Type of Disability
P4	45	45	Hearing and Speech Impairment
P5	31	31	Visual Impairment
P6	50	50	Hearing and Speech Impairment
P7	8	8	Cerebral Palsy
P8	7	7	Visual Impairment
P9	27	27	Dwarfism
P10	31	31	Physical Disability
P11	19	19	Down Syndrome
P12	31	31	Physical Disability

Result and Discussion

Findings

Theme 1: Non-Fitting Relations Between Individuals with Disabilities and Companions

The results of the visual analysis using MaxQDA software reveal the complex dynamics of communication relationships between individuals with disabilities (represented in dark green) and their companions (represented in lime) in the Maros Disability Forum. The relationship map (see Figure 1) shows that interpersonal communication between the two is not entirely aligned but is characterized by various forms of non-fitting relations.

While there are some positive relations indicating efforts to build empathetic connections, the majority of communication relationships exhibit differences in perception, expression, and interaction goals (Cashin et al., 2024). This phenomenon can be explained through four main dimensions found in the analysis results: cognitive dissonance, verbal and nonverbal mismatches, mismatched expectations, and differences in values and goals.

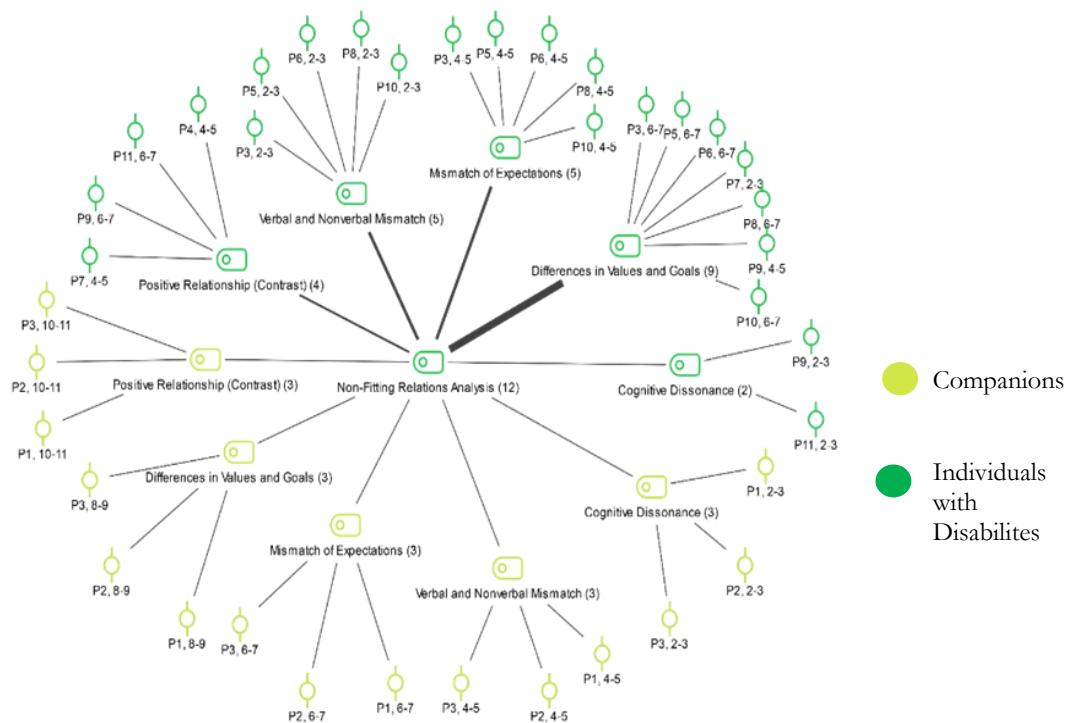


Figure 1. Non-Fitting Relations Between Individuals with Disabilities and Companions

Theme 1.1: Cognitive Dissonance

This dimension arises from the differences between the thoughts and feelings experienced by individuals with disabilities when interacting with their companions. In the relationship map, nodes representing "feelings of discomfort," "over-adjustment," and "differences in perceived meaning" are strongly connected on the dark green side. This condition indicates that individuals with disabilities often experience internal tension when their companions' responses do not align with the intended message. Conversely, the lime-colored nodes indicate the companions' tendency to maintain their role as helpers rather than as equal communication partners. This pattern results in cognitive clashes (Giles, 2016). Individuals with disabilities wish to be seen as equals, while companions position themselves as the ones providing assistance.

Cognitive dissonance is evident in the condition of individuals with disabilities who struggle between the desire for acceptance and feelings of inferiority due to physical and social differences. Some informants with disabilities go through phases of rejecting their condition, feeling ashamed, and even avoiding social interactions for fear of being belittled.

"If we have had a disability since birth and then grow up, it is easier to accept. It's different if you are normal and then become disabled due to an accident. That can really bring you down and make you prefer to avoid social contact. (P10)

On the other hand, companions also experience similar inner tension when their intention to help is met with closed attitudes or subtle rejection from individuals with disabilities. Both parties face a conflict between beliefs and reality, which then leads to awkward and cautious communication.

"When we conduct home visits to these individuals with disabilities, many of them still find it difficult to open up. Some families even hide their family members with disabilities, which makes it challenging for us to provide assistance." (P1)

Theme 1.2: Verbal and Nonverbal Mismatch

This misalignment is evident in the relationships between the nodes of "word choice," "intonation," "facial expressions," and "body gestures." The dark green color shows connections that depict honest nonverbal expressions, which are often not responded to in the same way by companions. The lime-colored nodes are more associated with "self-control" and "safe communication strategies," indicating a tendency to maintain politeness without clear reciprocal meaning. These results suggest that verbal

and nonverbal communication do not always align; messages conveyed verbally can be neutral, while nonverbal expressions indicate emotional distance. The mismatch between verbal and nonverbal messages reinforces the impression of disjointed communication and makes it difficult to establish mutual understanding.

The mismatch between verbal and nonverbal expressions is particularly evident in the initial interactions between companions and individuals with disabilities, especially those with Down syndrome, cerebral palsy, hearing impairments, and speech impairments. They often exhibit rejecting gestures such as looking down, avoiding eye contact, or crying, while not verbally expressing objections. Companions who lack an understanding of these expressions often misinterpret the messages being communicated, leading to tense and awkward interactions. This barrier is not solely caused by the physical or psychological limitations of individuals with disabilities but also by the companions' lack of skills in reading nonverbal signals and mastering alternative forms such as sign language.

However, using writing as a temporary alternative does not guarantee understanding in these interactions. This is evident from the differences in verbal and nonverbal expressions shown by individuals with disabilities, proving that communication between individuals with disabilities and their companions does not effectively occur.

"We still do not fully understand the use of sign language with individuals with disabilities, so when we want to talk to them, we use writing on paper as an alternative solution, even though we sometimes still do not understand it." (P2)

Theme 1.3: Mismatched Expectations

The relationship patterns in this dimension are evident from the connections between the nodes of "expectations for support," "social roles," and "self-acceptance." Individuals with disabilities have the expectation of being treated as independent individuals and valued in every conversation, while companions tend to maintain a protective approach. The lime color surrounding the nodes of "moral support" and "supervision" illustrates the still-dominant role of companions, whereas the dark green color surrounds the nodes of "need for autonomy" and "recognition." These differing expectations lead to misaligned communication: when individuals with disabilities seek equality, companions exhibit supervisory attitudes that make communication feel imbalanced. As a result, interpersonal tension arises, affecting the effectiveness of messages and emotional connections.

Mismatched expectations occur when the manner and timing of communication do not align with one party's expectations. Some individuals with disabilities feel uncomfortable when companions visit their homes without prior confirmation, as it is perceived to violate personal space and make interactions feel forced. Informants with disabilities display flat expressions and respond minimally, indicating their displeasure when companions arrive unexpectedly without prior notice.

Meanwhile, companions view door-to-door approaches as a form of care and attention. They believe that good intentions delivered through visits can always be welcomed; however, misunderstandings in the form of attention can lead to feelings of undervaluation for individuals with disabilities, while also creating confusion for companions about the appropriate way to interact.

"We believe that home visits are very effective because we can see the conditions of individuals with disabilities directly and understand what their needs are." (P3)

Theme 1.4: Differences in Values and Goals

This dimension is evident from the distribution of nodes depicting "activity orientation," "meaning of participation," and "value of togetherness." The dark green color indicates a strong relationship between personal motivation and the social meaning that individuals with disabilities wish to build through the forum, such as the need to be recognized as part of society and to express their capabilities. On the other hand, the lime-colored nodes reflect a more pragmatic orientation, such as ensuring program smoothness and providing logistical support. These differences in values and goals lead to communication moving in different directions: individuals with disabilities emphasize participatory meaning, while companions focus on functional outcomes. This misalignment of orientations reinforces the formation of non-fitting relations at the level of meaning and communication goals.

The differences in values and goals are apparent in how both parties interpret the relationship of companionship. Individuals with disabilities believe that companionship should be a space for mutual sharing and understanding, not merely a form of assistance.

"I still feel afraid to socialize directly with large groups of people. So, I try to connect through social media like TikTok to find friends." (P9)

Meanwhile, companions still position themselves as helpers or guides. This imbalance is further reinforced by gender factors, where the majority of companions are male, while many individuals with disabilities are female, leading to personal topics often going unaddressed. These differences in values and goals make communication tend to be more functional than relational.

"The companions appointed by the Social Service are very limited, with only two male companions. Therefore, the scope of our communication discussions is also limited, only revolving around providing assistance." (P1)

Theme 1.5: Positive Relations (Contrast)

Although the communication patterns are dominated by misalignments, the analysis results reveal several nodes depicting positive relationships between both parties. These nodes include "sincere empathy," "emotional support," and "togetherness." This interconnection indicates active efforts from both sides to understand each other, especially in the context of joint activities and group discussions. The overlapping dark green and lime colors in several areas indicate constructive communication points. These positive relations contrast with the broader non-fitting patterns, affirming that the potential for communicative equality remains when both parties open spaces for dialogue and share meanings without preconceived roles.

The phenomenon of non-fitting relations is not final. The research findings also indicate patterns of positive relations (contrast) that illustrate the adaptive communication processes between the two parties. Some individuals with disabilities demonstrate self-acceptance and openness to interaction.

"Through the continuous efforts of companions inviting me to join the Maros Disability Forum, I realized that there are others who face greater challenges than I do." (P5)

Meanwhile, companions adjust their communication style with empathy, patience, and modifications in their speech. Both parties do not get trapped in their differences but rather build mutual understanding through self-acceptance. At this point, the communication relationship evolves into an accommodative, equal, and supportive one.

"We cannot deny that obstacles are always present, but through regular socialization visits to individuals with disabilities, it will eventually yield positive outcomes, even if just a little." (P2)

Overall, the MaxQDA analysis results indicate that communication between individuals with disabilities and companions in the Maros Disability Forum is not entirely aligned. Misalignments arise from differences in perception, expression, and underlying values in their interactions. However, the existence of several positive relations demonstrates the potential for forming more reflective and equitable inclusive communication.

Theme 2: Causes of Non-Fitting Relations Between Individuals with Disabilities and Companions

The visual analysis results from MaxQDA reveal a complex relationship between individuals with disabilities (represented by red nodes) and their companions (represented by orange nodes) in the context of interpersonal communication within the Maros Disability Forum. The relationships depicted in the map indicate an imbalance of roles, perceptions, and psychosocial pressures experienced by both parties. The differing patterns of interconnection between the red and orange nodes emphasize that the causes of non-fitting relations do not stem from a single party but are the result of a mutual interaction that influences both sides. In general, these causes can be explained through two major groups: (1) internal factors of individuals with disabilities and (2) structural and relational factors of companions.

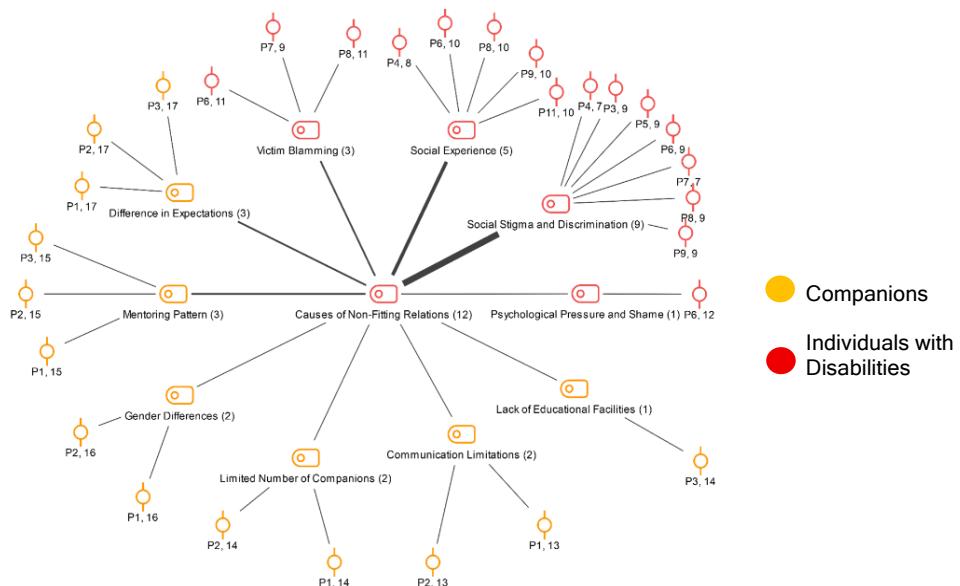


Figure 2. Causes of Non-Fitting Relations Between Individuals with Disabilities and Companions

Theme 2.1: Individuals with Disabilities

The analysis results show that individuals with disabilities face communication barriers rooted in psychological pressures, negative social experiences, and the construction of stigma within their social environments. The red nodes form a dominant cluster on the right side of the map, indicating a strong connection with themes such as "shame," "self-doubt," and "social stigma."

"Many individuals with disabilities still often face ridicule and even ostracism. Although it doesn't reach physical treatment, just the words alone can be painful." (P3)

"Because I can't stand the ridicule from my surroundings, I chose to avoid it by moving." (P7)

This indicates that communication barriers are primarily influenced by emotional and personal social factors. Many individuals with disabilities feel uncomfortable or afraid of making mistakes when communicating, especially when interacting with companions perceived to have a higher social status. This situation leads to a tendency for self-censorship, where they prefer to remain silent rather than express opinions that could lead to misunderstandings or conflicts. These feelings of shame are further reinforced by experiences of being treated unequally within a broader social context.

Additionally, the connection of red nodes with the themes of "being blamed" and "not being trusted" illustrates experiences of victim blaming, where individuals with disabilities feel considered the cause of communication barriers or failures. Such experiences diminish their self-confidence and affect how they interpret and respond to messages in the forum, leading to more passive and defensive interaction patterns.

The interconnections among the nodes on the outer part of the map also indicate a strong influence from the social environment, which still holds negative views towards disabilities. Stigma and social discrimination create symbolic barriers: individuals with disabilities often believe that their opinions will not be valued, leading to a reluctance to participate actively in conversations. This pattern shows that non-fitting relations on the side of individuals with disabilities are primarily caused by the internalization of stigma and psychological pressures that hinder their courage to communicate.

Theme 2.2: Companions

The orange nodes reflect the sources of non-fitting relations that are structural and situational, related to differences in expectations, support patterns, and limitations in the communication process. The patterns of interconnection among the nodes indicate that although companions have positive intentions to support participation, they often become trapped in forms of unbalanced communication. Companions see themselves as "bridges" ensuring the smooth running of the forum; however, their expectations of effective communication do not always align with the desires of individuals with

disabilities to gain equal participation space. The differing interpretations of these roles create a misunderstanding between the intention to provide help and how that help is received.

Furthermore, the node analysis indicates a tendency among some companions to use directive approaches to guide, lead, and even interpret messages for individuals with disabilities. While aimed at facilitating the process, this approach can suppress communication autonomy and reinforce hierarchical positions. When companions dominate interactions, the opportunities for individuals with disabilities to express their personal views become limited. Gender factors also influence the dynamics of interaction. The small orange nodes related to "discomfort in speaking" and "social boundaries" indicate that gender differences can create specific emotional barriers. For example, female individuals with disabilities tend to be more cautious when communicating with male companions, especially in formal situations.

At the bottom of the map, the orange nodes related to "fatigue," "time constraints," and "dual responsibilities" show that the workload of companions can lead to rushed and less sensitive communication.

"Due to the limited number of companions, we struggle to reach all individuals with disabilities in a short time. It takes time because, in addition to supporting individuals with disabilities, we also have permanent jobs." (P3)

In such conditions, it is also evident that some companions have not fully mastered inclusive communication skills. These limitations widen the gap in understanding, as messages intended as support can sometimes be perceived as neglect or correction. In summary, this pattern indicates that non-fitting relationships arise not only from individual factors but also from the interplay between the emotional pressures and social experiences of individuals with disabilities and the structural and relational constraints of their companions. This situation results in communication grounded in good intentions, but it has not yet achieved alignment due to disparities in capacity, experience, and interpretations of communication goals.

Theme 3: Strategies to Overcome Non-Fitting Relations Between Individuals with Disabilities and Companions

The results show that efforts to address non-fitting relations in the Maros Disability Forum come not only from individuals with disabilities and their companions but also from the involvement of third parties, namely the families of individuals with disabilities. In the visual map, the blue, green, and red nodes form a relationship pattern that is more balanced compared to the previous two maps, indicating a shift in communication direction from a hierarchical approach to a more participatory one. The prominent relationships are the connections among nodes that demonstrate forms of collaboration, emotional support, and cross-role adaptation. Efforts to address non-fitting relations can be explained through three main groups: (1) strategies employed by individuals with disabilities, (2) strategies utilized by the families of individuals with disabilities, and (3) strategies adopted by companions.

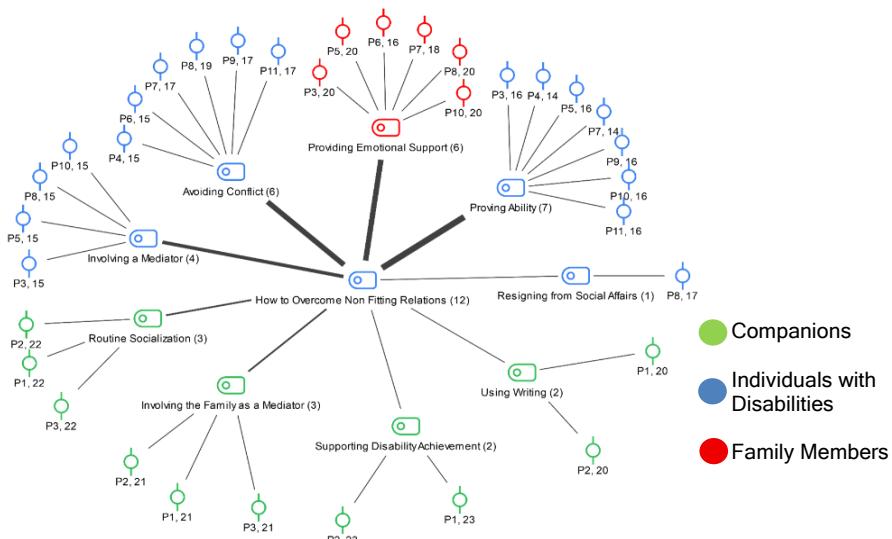


Figure 3. Strategies to Overcome Non-Fitting Relations Between Individuals with Disabilities and Companions

Theme 3.1: Individuals with Disabilities

The blue nodes illustrate various forms of adaptation and interpersonal strategies employed by individuals with disabilities to reduce communication tensions and strengthen relationships with companions and family members. The connection patterns on the map indicate a dominance of concepts such as "adjustment," "initiative," and "conflict avoidance" (Cashin et al., 2024). In situations where tensions or misunderstandings arise, individuals with disabilities often involve third parties, such as family members, to act as mediators. The presence of a mediator is considered effective because it can bridge differences in communication styles without creating emotional conflict.

"Due to my vision impairment, my mother always explains what is happening around me. And I am very grateful for that." (P8)

The blue nodes connected with terms such as "self-soothing," "yielding," and "not responding" indicate the use of conflict avoidance strategies. Although passive in nature, this approach serves as a sensitive relational management mechanism, helping to maintain conducive relationships and prevent interactions from becoming defensive. Additionally, some individuals with disabilities strive to respond to tensions by demonstrating their capabilities and independence through work or achievements. This strategy boosts their self-confidence while also changing the facilitators' perceptions of their capacities. At certain points, some choose to take a brief step back from interactions when they feel uncomfortable. The connection of nodes to concepts like "temporary silence" and "absence" suggests that withdrawal is a reflective action, not a rejection, aimed at restoring emotional conditions before re-engaging in more constructive interactions.

"Although I do not have perfect hands, I can prove that I can still work diligently, such as raising ducks and providing fish transport services." (P12)

Theme 3.2: The Role of Families of Individuals with Disabilities

The red nodes emphasise the role of families as emotional and social connectors that significantly contribute to alleviating communication tensions. The centrality of themes such as "support," "acceptance," and "motivation" indicates the family's function as a source of psychological strength (Suciati & Pangestuti, 2023).

Families provide emotional reinforcement through verbal support, such as affirmative expressions and direct assistance, including acting as informal interpreters. The presence of family members boosts the self-confidence of individuals with disabilities in public communication and helps them manage social pressures and feelings of inferiority (Pudrianisa et al., 2024). In addition to emotional support, families also serve as reminders of the value of equality within the forum space, helping to balance the dynamics between individuals with disabilities and facilitators. Thus, families act as empathetic mediators that strengthen social cohesion beyond the formal structure of the forum. According to the family member of individual P11:

"As a family with a sibling who has a disability, I continuously help, guide, and provide direction and motivation so that my sibling can engage in activities like a normal person; nothing is impossible as long as we make an effort."

Theme 3.3: Companions

The green nodes illustrate a pattern of communication among companions that is beginning to shift towards a collaborative approach. The interconnection patterns demonstrate efforts to enhance adaptation and participation through family involvement, improved communication competencies, and assistance for the accomplishments of individuals with disabilities.

Companions recognize the family's important role in creating a comfortable communication environment, thus starting to involve them in dialogues and the support process. The interconnection of green and red nodes reflects the strengthening of collaboration across roles. Additionally, some companions conduct regular socialization in forums and local communities regarding the principles of inclusion and communication ethics. This step not only enhances coordination but also strengthens emotional closeness, which can reduce tensions in interactions.

"Individuals with disabilities rarely communicate openly with those around them; they always need family members to accompany them." (P2)

Companions are also beginning to shift their roles from merely "helping" to "facilitating," for example, by providing speaking space, recognizing contributions, and offering opportunities to showcase abilities. This approach enhances the self-confidence of individuals with disabilities and supports more equitable relationships. Efforts to learn sign language and alternative communication methods demonstrate increased sensitivity and readiness to adapt. The nodes pointing to "learning signs" and "understanding ways of speaking" indicate an increase in communication capacity across differences, forming the foundation for inclusive and empathetic interactions.

Overall, the findings from the node map show that the recovery and development of communication relations occur collaboratively and gradually. Individuals with disabilities strengthen their adaptive capabilities, families provide emotional and social support, while companions enhance their competencies and create spaces for participation. The patterns of interconnection display a shift from awkward and hierarchical interactions to more adaptive, equitable, and mutually reinforcing communication.

"We will continue to learn sign language until we are able to communicate directly with individuals who have speech and hearing disabilities. Additionally, we will not forget to conduct regular outreach, not only for individuals with disabilities but also for the general public, so that no forms of discrimination occur." (P3)

Discussion

The research findings indicate that non-fitting relations between individuals with disabilities and their companions are largely rooted in psychological dissonance that arises when communication messages, values, or expectations do not align with each party's experiences and social realities. Individuals with disabilities experience internal pressures in the form of shame, victim blaming, negative social experiences, as well as stigma and discrimination. This condition creates cognitive conflict between the desire to be recognized as equal individuals and self-perception as being viewed as "different."

According to Festinger (1968:12-13) and Jones & Mills (1999:3-21), cognitive dissonance occurs when individuals confront two conflicting cognitions, leading to tension that prompts adjustment behaviors. In this context, individuals with disabilities adjust their behaviors through strategies such as avoiding conflict, temporarily withdrawing, and seeking communication mediators. These efforts aim to reduce the level of cognitive discomfort arising from the misalignment of communication meanings between themselves and their companions.

On the other hand, companions also experience forms of dissonance, particularly when professional expectations (to provide guidance and control) conflict with ideals of inclusivity and equality. The green nodes found in the MaxQDA map indicate that companions reduce dissonance through strategies such as learning sign language, involving families, and improving support patterns. This process aligns with research findings emphasizing that reducing dissonance in inclusive communication can be achieved through enhanced empathy and cross-difference adaptability. Thus, cognitive dissonance theory explains the internal dimensions of non-fitting, namely the psychological tensions that prompt self-adjustment behaviors from both parties to maintain the continuity of communication.

The findings in the MaxQDA map reveal increasingly adaptive communication patterns, shown by the increased interconnection of blue (individuals with disabilities) and green (companions) nodes. This phenomenon illustrates the process of communication accommodation, where both parties adjust their styles, speeds, and forms of communication to achieve meaning alignment. Giles (2016:2-3) explains that communication accommodation theory emphasizes convergence (adjustment to bring meanings closer) and divergence (refusal to adapt). In this study, convergence is evident in companions' strategies such as involving families, providing support for achievements, and learning alternative communication methods. Meanwhile, divergence appears in the form of temporary withdrawal by individuals with disabilities when there are differences in perspective.

This adjustment is not solely linguistic but also emotional and social. Companions accommodate the communication styles of individuals with disabilities by increasing sensitivity to emotional contexts and expanding participation spaces. Conversely, individuals with disabilities strive to adjust their expressions and messages to be more easily understood by companions. This phenomenon highlights that the effectiveness of inclusive communication relies on the ability of the parties involved to navigate perceptual differences through strategic adjustments. Thus, communication accommodation theory

explains the interactional dimensions of non-fitting relations, namely the processes of meaning negotiation and reciprocal adaptation that allow communication to continue despite initial misalignments.

In addition to psychological tensions and adaptation processes, non-fitting relations are also triggered by violations of interpersonal expectations. Both individuals with disabilities and companions have specific expectations regarding each other's communication behaviors. For individuals with disabilities, the expectation is to be treated equally and not reduced to the label of "aid recipients." However, when companions communicate in a directive or paternalistic manner, these expectations are violated, leading to discomfort and diminished self-confidence.

Conversely, companions expect openness and cooperation from individuals with disabilities. When the supported individuals tend to close themselves off or avoid interactions, companions experience expectancy violations that result in emotional tension and negative perceptions regarding the effectiveness of their support. Expectation violations do not always produce negative effects; in the right context, violations can lead to reorientation of meanings and open up opportunities for interpersonal learning (Burgoon & Hale, 1988). This research finding illustrates that many initial violations actually serve as triggers for mutual reflection, encouraging the emergence of new communication strategies, such as family involvement and more equitable role sharing.

Conclusion

The findings of this study indicate that interpersonal communication between individuals with disabilities and their companions in the Maros Disability Forum does not always function effectively, often hindered by various forms of non-fitting relations. This is due to the mismatch between the expectations and realities experienced by both parties, where individuals with disabilities seek recognition and equal treatment, while companions often assume a supervisory role, creating tensions that affect the effectiveness of their interactions.

This research also identifies that cognitive dissonance plays a significant role in communication misalignment, where differences in perception, expression, and goals between individuals with disabilities and companions add complexity to their relationship. Limitations in nonverbal understanding and unmet expectations often lead individuals with disabilities to feel uncomfortable and less confident, while companions, despite good intentions, sometimes fail to accommodate the need for more inclusive communication.

Furthermore, the findings emphasize the important role of families as mediators in addressing non-fitting relations. Families can offer emotional support and facilitate the resolution of communication gaps, fostering a more supportive environment for individuals with disabilities to engage with their companions. With family involvement, individuals with disabilities feel more supported and are better able to express themselves.

Overall, this study underscores that achieving inclusive and effective communication between individuals with disabilities and companions requires a collaborative effort to enhance understanding, empathy, and adaptation from both sides. Enhanced collaborative communication strategies that consider individual differences are crucial for fostering more equitable relationships and diminishing the stigma and discrimination frequently experienced by individuals with disabilities in a wider social context.

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