



An Overview of Toxic Disinhibition among Teachers and Its Implications for Students' Career Guidance

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the level of toxic disinhibition among teachers and its implications for students' career guidance services. The research was motivated by the importance of teachers' communication quality in supporting students' career development and maintaining healthy social interactions. A quantitative descriptive design was employed, involving 30 teachers from various regions of Indonesia, selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected via a questionnaire on aspects of the online disinhibition effect and analysed using descriptive statistics. The findings showed that 53.3% of teachers were in the low category of toxic disinhibition, 36.7% were in the moderate category, and 10% were in the high category. The study concludes that most teachers demonstrate good self-control in social interactions and highlights the importance of strengthening communication competence and emotional regulation in career guidance services.

KATA KUNCI

Toxic Disinhibition;
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ABSTRAK

perkembangan karir siswa, khususnya terkait fenomena *toxic disinhibition* dalam interaksi sosial. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mendeskripsikan tingkat *toxic disinhibition* pada guru serta implikasinya terhadap layanan bimbingan karir siswa. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kuantitatif dengan desain deskriptif. Partisipan berjumlah 30 guru dari berbagai daerah di Indonesia yang dipilih melalui purposive sampling. Data dikumpulkan menggunakan kuesioner berbasis aspek *online disinhibition effect* dan dianalisis dengan statistik deskriptif. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan mayoritas guru berada pada kategori rendah (53,3%), diikuti sedang (36,7%), dan tinggi (10%). Kesimpulannya, sebagian besar guru memiliki kontrol diri yang baik dalam interaksi sosial. Penelitian ini berkontribusi pada penguatan kompetensi komunikasi dan regulasi emosi guru guna meningkatkan efektivitas layanan bimbingan karir siswa.

1. INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of interaction in today's educational environment has increasingly become a major concern, particularly regarding the quality of communication between teachers and students. The quality of such communication plays an important role in supporting students' learning engagement, emotional well-being, academic development, and career development. Previous studies have shown that positive teacher-student relationships significantly contribute to students' learning motivation and psychosocial development (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Pianta et al., 2012; Roorda et al., 2011; Quinones & Griffiths, 2019; Hirschi, 2018; Sari, 2022; Hidayat, 2022). However, in practice, ineffective and even negative communication patterns are still frequently

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observed, indicating a gap between the ideal conditions of educational interaction and the realities of educational settings (Mulyani, 2021; Wahyuni, 2020).

Previous studies have demonstrated that positive teacher–student relationships contribute to learning motivation, academic engagement, and students' psychosocial development (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Pianta et al., 2012; Roorda et al., 2011). In addition, supportive teacher communication influences students' career readiness and self-confidence in making career decisions (Hirschi, 2018; Sari, 2022; Hidayat, 2022).

Nevertheless, several studies have also revealed the persistence of negative communication patterns in educational interactions, including the use of demeaning language, impulsive emotional responses, aggressive communication styles, a lack of empathy, and teachers' tendency to assign negative labels to students (Mulyani, 2021; Wahyuni, 2020). Such conditions indicate a discrepancy between the ideal concept of educational communication and actual interaction practices in schools. In the long term, negative communication patterns may affect students' learning comfort, interpersonal relationships, and even their career development.

From a theoretical perspective, this phenomenon can be explained through the concept of disinhibition, which refers to an individual's tendency to express themselves freely without adequate self-control. According to the Online Disinhibition Effect theory, John Suler (2004) explained that individuals may display behaviours such as verbal aggression, impulsivity, and reduced empathy when social control weakens. Although this theory was originally developed within the context of online communication, its fundamental principles are also relevant to direct interactions in educational environments. In the context of teachers, toxic disinhibition may emerge when individuals experience emotional pressure, psychological exhaustion, or reduced self-control, resulting in maladaptive communication behaviours toward students.

Previous research has shown that low emotional regulation and self-control are associated with increased impulsive and aggressive behaviour in social interactions (Lapidot-Lefler & Barak, 2015; Cuervo & Wyn, 2014; Quinones & Griffiths, 2019). Furthermore, occupational stress and teacher burnout may reduce teachers' ability to manage emotions, thereby increasing the risk of negative communication, excessive emotional reactions, and low interpersonal sensitivity toward students (Baumeister et al., 2007; DeWall et al., 2011; Oberle & Schonert-Reichl, 2016; Hajovsky et al., 2018).

These phenomena indicate that the quality of teacher communication is influenced not only by pedagogical competence but also by teachers' psychological conditions and emotional regulation abilities. However, research on disinhibition has predominantly focused on digital communication contexts, such as cyberbullying and online aggression (Kowalski et al., 2014; Yoon et al., 2016), while educational studies have primarily examined teachers' social-emotional competence and classroom climate (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Collie, 2017; Fitriana & Arifin, 2020; Utami, 2023). Therefore, the research gap addressed in this study lies in the limited number of studies that specifically analyse teachers' toxic disinhibition in educational interactions and its implications for students' career guidance services.

This study offers novelty by integrating the concept of toxic disinhibition into the context of students' career guidance services. This focus is important because negative teacher interactions may reduce students' self-confidence, career self-efficacy, and readiness for career decision-making. Based on Social Cognitive Career Theory and self-efficacy theory, positive social interactions with teachers can shape students' confidence in their abilities and future careers (Hirschi, 2018; Santilli et al., 2017; Xie et al., 2016; Rahmawati & Hasan, 2014). Conversely, aggressive, impulsive, or less empathetic teacher communication may hinder students' psychological development and career readiness. Based on these considerations, this study aims to describe the level of toxic disinhibition among teachers and its implications for students' career guidance services.

Based on the explanations above, this study aims to analyse the level of teachers' toxic disinhibition across the dimensions of communication regulation, verbal impulsivity, emotional control, and tendencies toward negative interpersonal behaviour, and to describe its implications for students' career guidance services. In practice, the findings of this study may serve as a foundation for developing teacher emotional regulation training programs, adaptive interpersonal communication modules, and school policies grounded in teachers' psychological well-being to improve the effectiveness of students' career guidance services.

2. METHOD

2.1 Research Design

This study employed a quantitative, descriptive research design. The research design was a descriptive survey aimed at objectively describing the level of toxic disinhibition among teachers, based on empirical data collected

from respondents. This approach was selected because it aligns with the study's purpose, which is to describe the condition of the variables without examining relationships among them (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Sugiyono, 2016). Through this descriptive approach, the study sought to provide a comprehensive overview of teachers' toxic disinhibition tendencies in educational interactions and their implications for students' career guidance services..

2.2 Research Participants.

This study was conducted in several regions of Indonesia, including West Sumatra, North Sumatra, Jambi, Riau, Aceh, and West Sulawesi. Data collection was carried out both online and through limited direct distribution. The research was conducted from January to February 2026. The participants in this study were teachers actively involved in teaching and learning. The total sample consisted of 30 teachers with varying educational levels and teaching experience. The sampling technique used was purposive, with inclusion criteria for teachers who were actively teaching and willing to participate as research respondents.

2.3 Data Collection

Data collection was conducted using a toxic disinhibition scale developed based on the dimensions of the Online Disinhibition Effect theory, including dissociative anonymity, invisibility, asynchronicity, solipsistic introjection, dissociative imagination, and minimisation of status and authority. The instrument was presented as a series of closed-ended Likert-scale statements. Before being administered to respondents, the instrument underwent content feasibility testing through expert validation to ensure the relevance and appropriateness of the items with the research objectives. The data collection process was carried out through the distribution of questionnaires both online and directly to respondents.

2.4 Data Analysis

The data were analysed using descriptive statistical techniques. Respondents' scores were calculated to obtain total scores, which were then categorised into three levels: low, moderate, and high based on criteria established by the researcher. Furthermore, frequency and percentage analyses were conducted to describe the distribution of toxic disinhibition levels among teachers. The analysis results were then interpreted descriptively to provide an overview of teachers' toxic disinhibition tendencies and their implications for students' career guidance services.

2.4 Research Procedure

The research procedure was conducted through several stages: (1) developing the research instrument; (2) validating the instrument through expert judgment; (3) determining the sample according to the established criteria; (4) distributing questionnaires to respondents; (5) collecting and verifying the data; and (6) processing and analysing the data before concluding. All research procedures were carried out in accordance with research ethics principles, including voluntary participation by respondents and the confidentiality of the collected data.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Results

The results of this study describe the level of toxic disinhibition among teachers based on data obtained from 30 respondents. The data were analysed by classifying the scores into three categories: high, moderate, and low. The distribution of teachers' toxic disinhibition levels is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Distribution of Teachers' Toxic Disinhibition Levels

Category	Frequency (F)	Percentage (%)
High	3	10%
Moderate	11	36.7%
Low	16	53.3%
Total	30	100%

Table 1 presents the distribution of teachers' toxic disinhibition levels, categorised into three levels. Based on the total scores obtained from the toxic disinhibition questionnaire completed by the respondents, most teachers were categorised as low, comprising 16 teachers (53.3%). Furthermore, 11 teachers (36.7%) were categorised in the moderate level, while only 3 teachers (10%) were categorised in the high level. These findings indicate that the

low category had the highest percentage, followed by the moderate category, whereas the high category represented the smallest proportion of respondents.

Overall, the findings indicate that most teachers demonstrated low levels of toxic disinhibition. At the same time, a considerable proportion fell within the moderate category, and only a small number were classified in the high category. The data distribution also suggests that most respondents had scores ranging from low to moderate, with relatively small variation among individuals.

3.2. Discussion

The results of this study indicate that the majority of teachers were categorised at a low level of toxic disinhibition. These findings suggest that most respondents maintained emotional control and adaptive interpersonal communication during the teaching and learning process. This condition may be influenced by the characteristics of the respondents, who were predominantly active teachers with relatively good social interaction experiences within the school environment. In addition, the professional culture of teachers, which emphasises communication ethics and educational responsibility, also contributed to a low tendency toward toxic disinhibition.

Although the Online Disinhibition Effect theory was originally developed within the context of digital communication, its principles regarding weakened self-control and emotional regulation remain relevant in direct interpersonal interactions. In educational settings, work pressure, emotional exhaustion, and the intensity of social interactions may trigger offline disinhibition, including impulsive communication, excessive emotional reactions, and less empathetic verbal behaviour toward students.

These findings are consistent with the Online Disinhibition Effect theory proposed by John Suler, which holds that disinhibited behaviour is not always negative and can be controlled by individuals with strong emotional regulation (Suler, 2004). In this context, the low level of toxic disinhibition indicates that most teachers were able to restrain impulsive, aggressive, or less empathetic tendencies in their interactions with students. This finding is also supported by previous studies indicating that self-control plays an important role in reducing impulsive and aggressive behaviour in social interactions (Baumeister et al., 2007; DeWall et al., 2011; Prasetyo, 2022).

Compared to previous studies, research on disinhibition has generally focused on digital communication contexts, such as cyberbullying and online aggression (Kowalski et al., 2014; Yoon et al., 2016). In contrast, this study provides a different perspective by examining toxic disinhibition within educational interactions, particularly among teachers. Therefore, this study extends the scope of disinhibition research from the digital domain to the educational context, a domain that has previously received limited scholarly attention (Tangney et al., 2004).

Although most teachers were categorised as low-level, the presence of respondents in the moderate and high categories indicates that there remains potential for maladaptive communication behaviours. This condition may be influenced by various psychosocial factors, such as occupational stress and emotional exhaustion experienced by teachers. Previous studies have shown that these conditions may reduce the quality of teacher-student interactions (Oberle & Schonert-Reichl, 2016; Hajovsky et al., 2018). Work stress and burnout may influence toxic disinhibition through decreased emotional regulation capacity and reduced self-control. Teachers experiencing emotional exhaustion tend to react more impulsively, experience frustration during classroom interactions, and display less supportive communication toward students. Ultimately, these conditions may increase the tendency toward toxic disinhibition behaviour. These findings reinforce the notion that the quality of teacher communication is determined not only by professional competence but also by individuals' psychological conditions.

From a career guidance perspective, the quality of teacher communication plays an important role in shaping students' self-efficacy and career readiness. Teachers, as educational agents, hold a strategic role in shaping students' self-perception, self-efficacy, and career preparedness (Roorda et al., 2017). Based on Social Cognitive Career Theory, positive social interactions with teachers can enhance students' confidence in their abilities to plan and make career decisions (Hirschi, 2018b; Santilli et al., 2017; Xie et al., 2016b). Therefore, the low level of toxic disinhibition among teachers becomes a supportive condition for creating more effective and supportive career guidance services. Albert Bandura (1997) explained that positive social interaction experiences can strengthen individuals' self-confidence in making career decisions.

The primary finding of this study is that teachers' toxic disinhibition tended to be at a low level; however, variations among individuals were still identified, including a small proportion demonstrating high tendencies. This finding implies that although teacher communication conditions were generally adaptive, preventive efforts and teacher capacity development remain necessary, particularly in emotional regulation and interpersonal communication skills.

The findings of this study are consistent with the literature, which emphasises the importance of teachers' social-emotional competence in fostering positive learning interactions (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Collie, 2017). However, this study also offers new insights by demonstrating that the dimension of toxic disinhibition may serve as an additional indicator of the quality of teacher communication.

Several limitations should also be acknowledged. First, the relatively small sample size limits the generalizability of the findings to respondents with similar characteristics. Second, the descriptive research design was unable to explain causal relationships among variables. In addition, the use of self-report instruments may have introduced subjectivity bias and social desirability bias, as respondents may have tended to provide socially acceptable responses.

The findings of this study reinforce the importance of managing psychosocial factors to improve the quality of teacher communication. Furthermore, this study opens the door to future research on the role of toxic disinhibition across various educational service contexts, particularly in guidance and counselling. Future studies are recommended to develop correlational or experimental research models to examine the relationships between toxic disinhibition, burnout, occupational stress, teacher self-efficacy, and the effectiveness of career guidance services. In addition, the findings may serve as a basis for developing school policies focused on teachers' psychological well-being and for strengthening preventive guidance and counselling services.

4. RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS

The findings of this study have several important implications for guidance and counselling, particularly regarding the quality of teacher communication in the context of students' career guidance services.

From a theoretical perspective, this study enriches the discussion of teacher interactions by introducing the concept of toxic disinhibition as a relevant variable in educational settings. Previously, the concept of disinhibition had been predominantly examined in the context of digital communication; this study contributes new insights by integrating it into educational interactions. In addition, the findings strengthen the relevance of the Online Disinhibition Effect theory, self-efficacy theory, and Social Cognitive Career Theory in explaining the importance of teacher interaction quality for students' career development and career readiness.

From a practical perspective, the findings indicate that most teachers demonstrated low levels of toxic disinhibition, suggesting that they generally possess good self-control in communication. However, a small proportion of teachers still exhibited high tendencies toward toxic disinhibition, indicating the need to strengthen communication competencies and emotional regulation skills. These findings may serve as a foundation for developing teacher-training programs focused on improving interpersonal communication skills, emotional management, and more supportive approaches to students' career guidance services.

5. CONCLUSIONS

This study concludes that teachers generally demonstrated adaptive communication patterns and adequate emotional regulation in educational interactions. These findings indicate that most teachers maintained professional and supportive communication with students, thereby contributing positively to the implementation of career guidance services within the school environment.

The study also confirms that the quality of teacher communication plays an essential role in supporting students' psychosocial and career development, particularly in strengthening self-confidence, interpersonal relationships, and career readiness. Nevertheless, the presence of several teachers who still demonstrated less adaptive communication tendencies highlights the need for continuous improvement in emotional regulation, interpersonal communication skills, and social-emotional competence as part of teacher professional development.

This study emphasises the importance of integrating psychological well-being and communication competence into educational development programs. Schools and educational stakeholders are encouraged to provide sustainable support through emotional regulation training, adaptive interpersonal communication workshops, and preventive psychological assistance for teachers. Future research is recommended to examine toxic disinhibition using broader samples and more comprehensive research designs to deepen understanding of its influence on educational interactions and the effectiveness of guidance and counselling services.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

RH, FSS, R, N, NF, and ZZ contributed to the study's research design and conceptualisation. RH was responsible for instrument development, data collection, and data analysis. FSS and R conducted research supervision and validation. N, NF, and ZZ contributed to data processing and literature review. RH prepared and drafted the manuscript. All authors reviewed and approved the final version of the article.

DECLARATION OF COMPETING INTEREST

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this study.

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