

Interpersonal Communication and Long-Distance Relationships: A Narrative Study of Romantic Relationships Among Students Participating in Community Service Program in the Village of Ciledug Kulon

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ABSTRACT

The Community Service Program (KKN), which requires students to be physically separated from their partners, often results in relationships that are fraught with emotional challenges and communication limitations, making interpersonal communication an important element in maintaining the quality and meaning of those relationships during service. This research aims to understand the experiences and difficulties faced by students during KKN, especially how they manage interpersonal communication to sustain their relationships despite distance and differing schedules. This study uses a qualitative method with a narrative approach. The researcher collected data through in-depth interviews, observations, and structured documentation with three students who were undergoing KKN and had long-distance relationships, as well as from books and journals. The data were also supported by observations and personal files. The results show that students experience various complex feelings, such as longing, sadness, anxiety, and frustration, mainly due to changes in communication routines, heavy KKN workloads, and limited time. Their communication patterns shifted from emotional to more functional, using digital media such as WhatsApp for text messages and video calls. The main strategies for maintaining relationships are honesty, regular communication, conflict resolution, commitment, and mutual understanding. This study concludes that successful long-distance relationships during KKN require flexible communication skills, good emotional management, and a willingness to understand one's partner's limitations. It provides additional insights into interpersonal communication in specific situations and emphasizes the importance of flexibility and emotional intelligence in maintaining relationships under pressure.

Keywords:

*Interpersonal Communication;
Long-Distance Relationships;
Digital Media, Students;
Fieldwork*

INTRODUCTION

The Community Service Program (KKN) is a form of student service to the community that requires students to live and carry out activities in a specific location for a certain period of time. This situation often causes students to be physically separated from their partners, giving rise to the phenomenon of long-distance relationships (LDR) (Copeland, 2021; Murikkattu et al., 2024). This situation requires good interpersonal communication skills to maintain the relationship despite the limitations of distance, time, and the demands of a busy KKN schedule (Kalandara et al., 2023; Yuliantoro et al., 2026). Research shows that in the

context of KKN, interpersonal communication is a key factor in maintaining long-distance relationships among students (Lukman, 2024).

Interpersonal communication is a crucial element in building and maintaining connections between individuals, especially in romantic relationships. Through interpersonal communication, individuals can convey messages, build understanding, manage emotions, and form emotional closeness with their partners (Gesselman et al., 2019; Rimé et al., 2020). Research shows that the quality of interpersonal communication greatly influences the sustainability of relationships, including in terms of conflict resolution, commitment formation, and long-term relationship maintenance (Anggraini et al., 2022). In the realm of students, interpersonal communication is increasingly crucial because individuals are in a stage of relationship development that is volatile and full of obstacles, including long-distance relationships that require a greater level of communication adaptation (Lukman & Wijayani, 2023).

Long-distance relationships (LDRs) present more complex communication challenges than face-to-face relationships. Physical distance, limited time, and dependence on digital communication tools affect the dynamics and quality of interactions between couples (Jabali et al., 2024; Tammissalo & Rotkirch, 2022). Several studies indicate that students involved in long-distance relationships tend to experience emotional stress such as anxiety, loneliness, and dissatisfaction in their relationships due to reduced frequency and depth of interpersonal communication (Pratiwi & Wijayani, 2023). If not managed properly through supportive communication, this emotional pressure has the potential to impact an individual's mental health (Nurfalalah et al., 2025). Although communication technologies such as chat applications and digital platforms can support relationship maintenance, their effectiveness greatly depends on how each person understands and handles communication (Anuggerah & Nurfalalah, 2024).

Long-distance relationships become increasingly challenging when students participate in the Community Service Program (KKN). This program requires students to live in the service location with intense social and academic activities, limiting the time and energy available for communicating with their partners (Cress et al., 2023; Klinenberg, 2018). Previous research shows that KKN students in long-distance relationships face additional obstacles in the form of differing schedules, physical exhaustion, and limited access to communication, which impact interpersonal communication patterns and relationship quality (Kalandara et al., 2023). In this situation, students are required to flexibly adjust their communication so that relationships can be maintained (Bostock, 2018; Reif-Stice & Smith-Frigerio, 2021).

Previous studies have explored interpersonal interactions in the context of long-distance relationships, covering both ways of maintaining relationships and the use of communication technology. However, most of these studies have focused more on communication patterns and media effectiveness, while subjective experiences, emotional meaning, and individual adaptation processes in specific contexts have not been studied in depth (Fiqih et al., 2025; O'Toole et al., 2020; Rieger & Klimmt, 2019). In fact, interpersonal communication plays an important role in helping individuals form meaning, manage emotions, and adapt to stressful conditions (Suarna et al., 2025). Therefore, studies exploring interpersonal interactions in long-distance relationships among KKN students, with a focus on personal experiences and meanings, are greatly needed.

The novelty of this research lies in its focus on the emotional experiences and interpersonal communication strategies of students in long-distance relationships during their participation in the Community Service Program in Ciledug Kulon Village. Using a narrative study approach, this research explores the subjective meanings, emotional dynamics, and adaptive communication processes that students undergo in maintaining their relationships amidst the pressures of KKN activities. This study offers a deeper understanding of how interpersonal communication functions not only as a tool for information exchange but also as a mechanism for emotional management, meaning-making, and relationship maintenance in specific situational contexts.

Based on this explanation, this study focuses on the emotional experiences of students participating in long-distance relationships during their community service program and how interpersonal interactions are used to maintain the continuity and quality of these relationships during the program. This study is expected to contribute academically to the development of interpersonal communication studies, particularly in long-distance relationships that are influenced by social and academic pressures, such as those experienced by students participating in community service programs.

METHOD

This research adopted a qualitative approach using narrative study methods that aim to gain a deeper understanding of the interpersonal communication experiences of students who are in long-distance relationships while participating in the Community Service Program (KKN). A qualitative approach was chosen because the focus of this study is on the meaning of subjective experiences, emotional dynamics, and communication processes undergone by individuals in specific social contexts, especially physical separation during the KKN period.

Informants in this study consisted of key informants and supporting informants. Key informants were three students who were currently participating in or had previously participated in the Community Service Program (KKN) in Ciledug Kulon Village and were in long-distance relationships with their partners during the KKN period. Informants were selected using purposive sampling with the following criteria: (1) students who participated in the KKN program, (2) currently in a long-distance relationship during KKN, and (3) willing to openly share their interpersonal communication experiences. Supporting informants in this study were parties who were considered to be able to strengthen and complement the research data, such as the partners of key informants or close friends of informants who knew the dynamics of the relationship and communication patterns during the KKN period. Supporting informants were used to provide additional perspectives and help researchers gain a more comprehensive understanding of the interpersonal communication experiences of key informants.

Data collection was conducted through semi-structured in-depth interviews to explore the experiences, emotional feelings, changes in communication patterns, and strategies used by informants in maintaining long-distance relationships during community service programs. In addition to interviews, data was also supported by limited observations and relevant supporting documents to enrich and deepen the research findings. The data obtained was analyzed using thematic analysis conducted in several stages, namely transcription of interview results, coding, grouping of main themes, and interpretation of meaning based on the research focus and

theoretical framework used. The analysis process was carried out repeatedly to ensure that the themes produced truly reflected the informants' interpersonal communication experiences.

The validity of the data in this study was maintained through source triangulation techniques, namely by comparing data obtained from key informants, supporting informants, as well as observation results and supporting documents. In addition, the researcher also conducted member checks by asking informants to confirm the results of data interpretation to ensure consistency between the research findings and the actual experiences of the informants.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. Emotional Experiences of KKN Students in Long-Distance Relationships

Research shows that students who participate in the Community Service Program (KKN) while in a long-distance relationship experience variations in their emotional dynamics. At the beginning of the KKN program, informants generally felt negative emotions such as longing, anxiety, loneliness, and discomfort due to reduced communication with their partners. Changes in their living environment, the busy KKN schedule, and limited time for communication were the main factors that affected the emotional state of the informants.

Physical separation from their partners made informants feel a loss of emotional closeness that had previously been built through direct interaction. This condition was exacerbated by the demands of field activities that drained their physical and emotional energy, leaving very little free time for communication. Over time, some informants began to adapt to the situation and tried to adjust their expectations of the relationship. This adaptation process helped informants overcome negative emotions so that they did not develop into more serious problems in the relationship.

2. Interpersonal Communication in Maintaining Harmony and Quality in Long-Distance Relationships

In maintaining stable relationships during the KKN period, the interpersonal communication patterns used by students shifted from quantity to quality, which was greatly influenced by environmental and technical factors. The focus of communication shifted to the effective use of limited time windows through digital media, although this was often hampered by infrastructure constraints such as unstable cellular signals and limited device power in remote locations. These technical challenges force students to adopt a more planned communication pattern, where they must search for specific signal points or take advantage of "golden" moments when the network is stable to make video calls or send voice messages. The communication patterns applied tend to be supportive and transparent, with students actively sharing their daily experiences to build mutual trust and reduce uncertainty. Self-disclosure regarding the technical constraints experienced is also crucial so that partners do not feel neglected when sudden loss of contact occurs.

By prioritizing meaningful, assertive communication and understanding technical limitations in the field, students can minimize misinterpretations that often arise in remote interactions, thereby maintaining harmonious relationships despite limited space and frequency of interaction.

The findings show that the emotional dynamics experienced by KKN students in long-distance relationships are a consequence of limited direct interaction and the pressures of field activities. This condition reinforces the view that long-distance relationships are not only

influenced by physical distance, but also by the social context and role demands experienced by individuals. These results are consistent with previous studies showing that students living far from home are more prone to emotional distress due to limitations in communication and changes in their daily routines.

The shift in communication patterns from emotional to more functional can be understood through Social Penetration Theory. In the context of KKN, the process of self-disclosure does not always develop linearly, but may experience a temporary decline due to situational pressures. These findings indicate that a decrease in the depth of communication does not always reflect a decline in the quality of relationships, but rather a form of adaptation to the conditions faced by students during KKN.

The use of digital media as the primary means of communication highlights the dual role of technology in long-distance relationships. On the one hand, technology helps couples stay in touch despite the distance between them, but on the other hand, technical issues and the psychological state of users can affect the quality of communication. This shows that the ability to communicate between individuals depends not only on the sophistication of the media used, but also on the emotional capacity and understanding between those individuals.

The relationship maintenance strategies employed by informants, such as openness, flexibility, and emotional control, are consistent with Relationship Maintenance Theory, which emphasizes the importance of commitment and adjustment in maintaining relationships. The findings of this study expand the understanding of this theory by showing that relationship maintenance strategies among KKN students tend to be realistic and contextual, adapted to the limitations of time and energy during the program.

In general, the results and discussion of this study indicate that individual communication conducted by KKN students in long-distance relationships is a process that continues to change and can adapt to the situation. Relationships can be maintained not because of the high intensity of communication, but because of mutual understanding, emotional management, and acceptance of the situational limitations faced during the KKN period.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that students in long-distance relationships during the Community Service Program (KKN) face complex emotional challenges like longing, anxiety, loneliness, and mood swings due to distance, time constraints, and program demands, directly addressing the first research objective on emotional experiences; meanwhile, interpersonal communication proves vital for sustaining relationship quality (second objective), with patterns shifting from emotional to functional through strategies like openness, flexibility, emotional control, and mutual commitment, emphasizing that success hinges on adaptive management rather than frequency alone. Recommendations include students fostering realistic communication agreements upfront, universities offering mental health counseling and considering communication needs in KKN design, and—for future research—expanding to diverse participants, longitudinal studies on post-KKN dynamics, and examining specific digital platforms' roles in such relationships.

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