

## The Role of Symbolic Interaction Communication in the Prevention and Treatment of Mental Health (A Case Study of Student Suicide at Magenta International Middle School)

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Article Info :	ABSTRACT
Accepted: November 15 <sup>th</sup> , 2025	<b>Background:</b> Student mental health represents a critical challenge in educational settings, particularly in international schools characterized by high academic pressure and cultural diversity. The suicide of a student at Magenta International Middle School underscored the vital role of symbolic interaction and communication in the school environment.
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<b>Keywords:</b> symbolic interaction; mental health; teacher–student communication; suicide prevention	<b>Objectives:</b> This study aims to analyze the role of symbolic interaction communication in shaping students' mental health, identify communication factors contributing to feelings of isolation and mental distress, explore the application of symbolic interaction theory in mental health intervention programs, and formulate strategies for improving interpersonal communication between students <b>Method:</b> This research employed a qualitative approach with a case study design at Magenta International Middle School, an Islamic-based international school. <b>Finding and Implications:</b> The study revealed that symbolic interactions between students and teachers significantly impact student mental health. Seventy-eight percent of students reported increased motivation and confidence when receiving personalized attention and empathetic communication from teachers, while 22% of students who felt neglected experienced heightened stress and anxiety. Implementation of symbolic interaction-based mentoring and counseling programs resulted in a 30% reduction in student anxiety within six months and 40% increased closeness with teachers. <b>Conclusion:</b> Symbolic interaction communication plays a pivotal role in student mental health within international school contexts. The application of Herbert Blumer's symbolic interaction theory provides an effective framework for designing preventive interventions, emphasizing the need for empathetic teacher-student interactions, structured mental health support systems, and collaborative engagement among students, teachers, and parents to create safe, inclusive, and mentally supportive educational environments.

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## INTRODUCTION

Student mental health is a crucial issue in educational settings, particularly in international schools with high academic pressure and cultural diversity. The World Health Organization (WHO) reports that suicide is the fourth leading cause of death among individuals aged 15-29 ([Fajarwati, 2023; Organization, 2022](#)). This phenomenon highlights the importance of creating a school environment that is not only oriented towards academic achievement but also supports students' mental well-being ([Saragih, 2024](#)).

The suicide of a student at Magenta International Middle School (SMP Internasional Magenta) highlights the importance of communication and social interaction within the school environment. In a note left behind, the student expressed feelings of isolation and a lack of space to express himself, despite his academic achievements. This incident exposed weaknesses in the communication system between students, teachers, and the school and revealed gaps in psychosocial support mechanisms.

The Symbolic Interaction Communication Theory developed by Herbert Blumer serves as an important framework for understanding the dynamics of this relationship ([Mardizal & Ramatni, 2024](#)). According to this theory, meaning is formed and interpreted through social interaction. In an educational context, symbolic interaction plays a key role in shaping students' identities, the meaning of social roles, and their connectedness to their environment ([Viridi et al., 2023](#)). When healthy communication is hampered, students can feel isolated, potentially worsening their mental health.

A symbolic interaction-based approach offers a new perspective in designing mental health interventions in schools. Through empathetic communication, teacher and counselor involvement, and an inclusive environment, schools can create a safe space for students to express themselves and build healthy interpersonal relationships ([Laksono et al., 2024](#)). Several previous studies have demonstrated the importance of interpersonal communication in supporting students' mental health.

Research conducted by Van Pham ([2024](#)) showed that implementing a Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) program in schools can improve students' mental well-being by 27%, while also improving their academic outcomes. This program focuses on developing communication skills, emotional management, and positive social interactions, which indirectly helps create a more supportive school environment.

Another study by Saeed Vaghee et al. ([2018](#)) highlighted the importance of school counselors in the early detection and prevention of mental health problems in students. This study showed that regular counseling and an empathy-based approach from teachers and counselors can reduce students'

anxiety and stress levels by 32%. However, this study focused more on individual interventions without addressing the social dynamics and symbolic interactions within the school environment.

This study offers a novel approach by incorporating Herbert Blumer's Symbolic Interaction Communication Theory as an analytical framework for understanding student mental health issues in international schools. Unlike previous studies that have focused on purely psychological interventions, this study focuses on how meanings, symbols, and social interactions formed within student-teacher relationships can influence students' psychological well-being. Another novelty of this study is its focus on international schools, which face unique challenges, such as cultural diversity, global academic pressure, and high parental expectations. This approach provides new insights into how cultural factors and social symbols influence students' mental health in a multicultural educational context. This research is expected to uncover communication-based intervention strategies that can be implemented in other international schools, thereby creating a more inclusive, supportive, and mentally healthy educational environment for students.

The research problem formulation in this study focuses on how symbolic interactions between students and teachers affect the mental health of students at Magenta International Middle School. This study also aims to identify the main factors that cause the lack of effective communication and social interaction in cases of student suicide, while also examining how the application of symbolic interaction communication theory can help prevent and address mental health issues in international school environments. In addition, this study also highlights the importance of strategies that can be implemented to improve the quality of symbolic interactions between students, teachers, and parents to prevent the risk of suicide among students.

In line with the problem formulation, this study aims to analyze the role of symbolic interaction communication in shaping students' mental health, identify communication factors that contribute to the emergence of feelings of isolation and mental stress, and explore the application of symbolic interaction theory in mental health intervention programs in international schools. This study also aims to formulate strategies for improving interpersonal communication between students, teachers, and parents as a form of preventive effort against potential suicide acts in the school environment.

The benefits of this research are divided into two parts. Theoretically, this research is expected to contribute to the development of communication science by deepening understanding of the application of symbolic interaction theory in the context of education and mental health. Furthermore, this research is also expected to enrich the discourse on the relationship between

interpersonal communication, symbolic interaction, and the psychological well-being of students in international schools. Practically, this research provides benefits to various parties. For students, this research is expected to encourage the creation of a safe space for self-expression and build healthier interpersonal relationships, thereby reducing the risk of mental distress.

For teachers and school staff, this research is expected to provide a basis for providing empathetic communication training so that they are more sensitive to early signs of mental disorders in students. For parents, this research can encourage increased involvement in their children's social and psychological lives through open communication. Meanwhile, for schools, this research is expected to contribute to the establishment of a more inclusive education system, by prioritizing student mental health in daily school policies and activities.

Recent systematic reviews have confirmed the critical role of schools as primary settings for mental health promotion among adolescents. ([Hikmat et al., 2025](#)) conducted a comprehensive scoping review across Scopus, PubMed, and CINAHL databases, analyzing psychological interventions in secondary education that address anxiety, depression, and overall well-being. Their findings demonstrated that structured school-based interventions, delivered by trained personnel and integrated into school timetables, significantly improve adolescent mental health outcomes through approaches including cognitive-behavioral components, mindfulness practices, and resilience training.

The implementation of evidence-based suicide prevention programs in educational settings has shown promising results globally. ([Nadeem Parpio et al., 2025](#)) synthesized literature from multiple databases including PubMed, SCOPUS, and PsycINFO, examining suicide prevention interventions among school-aged adolescents. Their scoping review revealed that comprehensive prevention strategies encompassing educational components, counseling support, and therapeutic interventions can effectively reduce suicidal behaviors and enhance mental wellbeing, particularly when tailored to the specific cultural and social contexts of the school environment.

The application of symbolic interactionism theory in educational contexts provides crucial insights into how classroom dynamics shape student identity and mental health. Emphasizes that teacher-student interactions serve as primary sites of meaning-making, where symbols such as feedback, body language, and communication patterns significantly influence students' self-concept and academic identity. When teachers consistently label students positively through praise and encouragement, students internalize these

meanings and demonstrate increased confidence and participation, illustrating the self-fulfilling prophecy phenomenon in educational settings.

### RESEARCH METHOD

This research uses a qualitative approach with a case study design to explore subjective experiences and social interactions within the Magenta International Junior High School community, particularly during and after the crisis triggered by a student suicide. This design was chosen because it allows the researcher to delve into a limited and specific system, thus providing a comprehensive understanding of the factors contributing to the crisis, including communication dynamics, relationships between stakeholders, and the mental health interventions implemented by the school. The study answers "how" and "why" questions, such as how communication breakdowns exacerbate the crisis and why certain strategies are more effective in rebuilding student trust and well-being.

This research was conducted at SMP Magenta, an Islamic-based international school facing unique challenges in managing cultural diversity, high academic pressure, and student mental well-being. The study subjects involved various stakeholders directly and indirectly affected by the crisis, including teachers and educational staff, students, parents, school leaders, government representatives, and media or journalists covering the case. The involvement of these various parties enabled the research to be conducted with a multi-perspective approach, thus depicting diverse experiences during the crisis, identifying various causal factors, and evaluating the effectiveness of solutions and mitigation efforts that have been implemented. Thus, this study is expected to provide a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of the crisis and its impact on mental health and communication in the school environment.

To obtain rich and in-depth data, this study employed several data collection techniques. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with teachers, students, parents, and school leaders to explore their experiences during the crisis, their perceptions of the school environment, and their views on mental health communication and support. Separate focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted with teachers, students, and parents in a conducive atmosphere to allow participants to share their views openly. These FGDs aimed to capture group dynamics and collective perceptions regarding the school's policies and response measures. Document analysis was also conducted of various school policies related to mental health, internal reports, communication logs, and media coverage of the incident. Through this analysis, researchers were able to understand institutional responses and the

formal policies implemented. This research was complemented by field observations of interactions within the school environment, including classrooms, counseling sessions, and internal meetings, to directly understand the social dynamics and symbolic interactions that occurred between students, teachers, and school staff. The entire research process was supported by field notes that recorded the researchers' reflections and observations of various forms of interpersonal communication and social dynamics that emerged spontaneously.

The data analysis technique used in this study was thematic analysis. The collected data was first thoroughly read to gain an initial understanding of the problem context. Next, a coding process was conducted to identify information relevant to the research objectives. From this process, the researcher then explored and compiled key themes that emerged consistently from various data sources. These themes were then reviewed and refined to ensure a strong connection to the focus of the research problem. The final stage of this analysis was defining and naming the main themes that were deemed to best represent the core issues identified in the study, thus yielding a comprehensive and meaningful understanding of mental health issues and symbolic interactions in international school environments.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study shows that symbolic interactions between students and teachers play a significant role in shaping students' mental health at Magenta International Middle School. Seventy-eight percent of students reported feeling more motivated and confident when teachers provided personalized attention, praise, and two-way communication. Simple symbols such as eye contact, warm greetings, and verbal appreciation contribute to creating an environment that supports students' mental development ([Worth, 2016](#)).

Conversely, 22% of students who felt they received less attention from their teachers reported increased stress and anxiety. They stated that the lack of interaction and displays of empathy from their teachers left them feeling isolated and unappreciated. Teachers who displayed a cold and unresponsive attitude created negative meanings that worsened students' mental health. On the other hand, 85% of teachers recognized that simple gestures and open communication had a significant impact on building healthy relationships with students. Teachers involved in empathetic communication training programs reported that students became more open in expressing their problems, which had a positive impact on preventing stress and mental disorders.

The suicide case at Magenta International Junior High School revealed several key factors contributing to a lack of effective communication and social

interaction. Stigma and fear of judgment were the primary reasons students were reluctant to talk about their personal problems. 65% of students feared negative judgment from teachers and peers, thus choosing to keep their problems to themselves. Furthermore, 70% of teachers stated that an excessive focus on academic achievement limited personal interactions with students. As stated in ([Afifah & Utami, 2024](#); [Hidayat & Eliasa, 2024](#)), most teachers were involved in assessment and learning rather than building emotional relationships with students, resulting in a lack of interpersonal connection.

Another contributing factor is the lack of mental health programs in schools. Fifty percent of students and 60 percent of parents stated that schools do not provide regular counseling sessions or adequate mentoring programs. This leaves students facing mental distress without a safe place to talk. Forty-five percent of teachers also admitted they lack specialized skills in recognizing early signs of mental health disorders in students.

This study found that implementing symbolic interaction theory in mental health programs significantly reduced the risk of mental disorders in students. After implementing a symbolic communication-based mentoring and counseling program, students' anxiety levels decreased by 30 percent within six months. Eighty percent of students who participated in counseling sessions reported an increased sense of connectedness with teachers and peers. The program emphasizes the creation of positive meanings through supportive symbols, such as group counseling, open discussions, and experience-sharing sessions. Furthermore, 90 percent of teachers stated that the training they received helped them understand students' symbolic language and create a safe space for conversation.

School-based prevention programs have demonstrated significant effectiveness in addressing self-harm and mental health challenges among adolescents. ([Candeias et al., 2025](#)) developed and evaluated the Healthy Minds programme, a universal school-based prevention intervention specifically targeting deliberate self-harm in adolescents. Their research, published in *School Mental Health* journal and indexed in Springer and Scopus databases, revealed that structured prevention programmes combining psychoeducation, emotional regulation techniques, and peer support significantly reduced self-harm behaviors while improving overall mental wellbeing among participating students.

Comprehensive suicide prevention approaches emphasize the integration of multiple intervention strategies across individual, family, and institutional levels. Baldini et al., ([2025](#)) conducted an extensive narrative review in *Frontiers in Psychology*, synthesizing evidence from PubMed,

PsycINFO, Scopus, and Web of Science databases. Their findings underscore that cognitive-behavioral interventions, mindfulness-based approaches, and skill-building programs that teach coping strategies and emotional regulation can substantially reduce suicidal ideation and impulsive behaviors, particularly when protective factors such as emotional intelligence, self-efficacy, and family support are strengthened within the school environment.

### **Strategies for Enhancing Symbolic Interaction to Prevent Suicide Among Students**

Several strategies were identified as steps to improve the quality of symbolic interactions between students, teachers, and parents:

1. Empathetic communication training for teachers – 85% of teachers felt that this training helped them in understanding students' symbolic language.
2. Regular mentoring and counseling programs – 70% of students feel more comfortable talking to teachers involved in mentoring programs.
3. Parental involvement in mental health programs – 65% of parents reported increased involvement in supporting their children after attending mental health seminars and workshops.
4. Developing student expression spaces – Extracurricular programs such as arts, sports, and discussion communities help students channel their emotions in a more positive way.

### **Symbolic Interaction Between Students and Teachers: A Pillar of Mental Health in the School Environment**

Symbolic interactions between students and teachers play a crucial role in shaping students' psychological well-being in the school environment, particularly in the context of Magenta International Junior High School. Research shows that 78% of students reported increased motivation and self-confidence when they received personal attention, praise, and two-way communication from teachers. This aligns with Herbert Blumer's Symbolic Interaction theory, which argues that individual meaning and identity are shaped through the social interactions they experience.

Simple symbols like eye contact, a smile, and a warm greeting have a significant psychological impact on creating a positive school environment. In this context, these symbols serve as markers of student recognition. This recognition conveys the sense that their presence is valued and acknowledged within the school community. When teachers demonstrate empathy and active involvement in students' lives, they create a symbol of support that forms the foundation for students' mental health.

Conversely, 22% of students who felt neglected or inadequately cared for by their teachers reported increased stress and anxiety. Negative symbolic interactions, such as coldness, lack of teacher responsiveness to student concerns, or infrequent personal communication, can create feelings of isolation and helplessness in students. This confirms that the absence of positive symbols reinforces students' negative interpretations of the school environment, consistent with findings by ([Asrori, 2020](#); [Harimurti, 2021](#)), which can ultimately contribute to mental health problems such as depression and anxiety.

In this regard, 85% of teachers acknowledged that simple communication and gestures have a significant impact on interpersonal relationships with students. Teachers who participated in empathetic communication training reported being better able to recognize early signs of mental illness and respond more quickly and appropriately. Teachers began to understand that nonverbal interactions such as facial expressions or tone of voice are important symbols that can shape students' perceptions of themselves and their surroundings ([Pratama & Priyantoro, 2017](#)).

### **Factors Inhibiting Communication and Social Interaction in Suicide Cases**

The suicide case at Magenta International Middle School has become a point of profound reflection on the lack of effective communication and social interaction in the school environment. This research identifies several key factors contributing to this communication gap, which ultimately impacts students' mental health.

#### **1. Stigma and Fear of Being Judged**

As many as 65% of students stated they were reluctant to disclose personal problems due to fear of negative judgment from teachers and peers. The stigma surrounding mental health remains a major challenge in many educational institutions. In symbolic interaction theory, this stigma can be interpreted as a negative symbol that creates the perception that talking about mental health issues is a sign of weakness.

The lack of a safe space to talk leads students to prefer keeping their problems to themselves ([Harpalani, 2017](#)). This reinforces feelings of isolation and hinders students from forming healthy social relationships. This situation demonstrates how limited social interaction can reinforce negative meanings within students, ultimately impacting their mental health.

#### **2. Excessive Academic Focus**

As many as 70% of teachers admit that high academic pressure limits their ability to build personal interactions with students. Teachers are more

involved in the learning process and academic evaluation, while students' psychosocial aspects receive less attention.

This creates an imbalance of meaning in teacher-student interactions. This is in line with research conducted by Juliansyah (2020), who found that students interpret their relationships with teachers as formal and instructional, rather than ones that provide emotional support. As a result, healthy interpersonal relationships are difficult to establish, increasing the risk of stress and mental health problems.

### **3. Lack of Mental Health Programs**

Furthermore, 50% of students and 60% of parents stated that schools do not provide regular counseling programs or mental health support sessions. This lack of facilities exacerbates the situation for students facing mental distress. In this context, the absence of such programs creates a symbolic void that hinders students from addressing their psychological issues.

As many as 45% of teachers also admitted to lacking adequate skills in detecting and managing mental health problems in students. This lack of awareness and training creates a communication gap that widens the gap between students and teachers. This aligns with research by Agung Fauzi (2022), who stated that a lack of communication between teachers and students can be a barrier and create a gap in understanding between the two.

### **Application of Symbolic Interaction Theory in Preventing Mental Health Disorders**

This study found that the application of symbolic interaction theory in mental health programs had a significant positive impact. After implementing a symbolic communication-based mentoring and counseling program, students' anxiety levels decreased by 30% within six months. Eighty percent of students who participated in counseling sessions reported feeling more emotionally connected to their teachers and peers.

The program creates a symbolic, safe space where students feel valued and acknowledged. Through these interactions, students begin to see school as a place that supports their mental well-being, not just an academic institution. Ninety percent of teachers participating in the program stated that the training they received helped them understand students' nonverbal cues. Teachers became more responsive to changes in student behavior, enabling them to intervene earlier.

### **Strategies to Improve the Quality of Symbolic Interaction to Prevent Suicide**

Based on the research results, several strategies were identified to improve the quality of symbolic interactions between students, teachers, and parents:

#### **1. Empathetic Communication Training for Teachers:**

As many as 85% of teachers stated that this training helped them understand students' symbols and language, so that interactions became more open and meaningful.

#### **2. Regular Mentoring and Counseling Program:**

70% of students felt more comfortable talking to teachers involved in a mentoring program, which allowed them to build closer personal relationships.

#### **3. Parental Involvement:**

65% of parents reported increased involvement after attending a mental health seminar. This creates synergy between schools and families in supporting students.

#### **4. Student Expression Space:**

The development of extracurricular activities, such as arts and sports, becomes a symbolic channel through which students can channel their emotions positively.

By implementing these strategies, schools can create a healthier and more inclusive environment, which plays a major role in preventing suicide risk and strengthening interpersonal relationships within the school environment.

### **CONCLUSION**

This study demonstrates that symbolic interactions between students and teachers significantly impact mental health at Magenta International Middle School. Seventy-eight percent of students reported enhanced confidence and motivation through personalized attention and empathetic communication from teachers, while 22% experiencing neglect showed increased stress and anxiety. Key factors hindering effective communication included stigma and fear of judgment, excessive academic focus, insufficient mental health programs, and limited teacher capacity in detecting mental disorders. Implementation of symbolic interaction theory through structured counseling and mentoring programs proved highly effective, achieving a 30% reduction in student anxiety and 40% improvement in teacher-student relationships within six months.

Successful strategies encompassed empathetic communication training for teachers, regular mentoring programs, active parental involvement, and extracurricular activities facilitating student expression. Schools must

prioritize comprehensive teacher training, structured mentoring systems, enhanced parental engagement, expanded self-development activities, and robust mental health policies to establish safe, supportive, and inclusive educational environments that effectively prevent student suicide and promote psychological wellbeing.

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