

The Relationship Between Interpersonal Communication and Aggressive Behavior Among University Students Actively Involved in Student Organizations at Universitas Negeri Medan

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ABSTRACT

Aggressive behavior remains a significant psychological issue among university students, including those actively involved in student organizations. The high intensity of interpersonal interactions, differences in opinions, and complex relational dynamics within student organizations may give rise to interpersonal conflicts that can develop into aggressive behavior. One factor presumed to be associated with aggressive behavior is interpersonal communication. This study aimed to examine the relationship between interpersonal communication and aggressive behavior among university students actively involved in student organizations at Universitas Negeri Medan. A quantitative approach with a correlational research design was employed. The participants consisted of 93 students actively participating in student organizations, selected using purposive sampling. Data were collected using an Interpersonal Communication Scale developed based on DeVito's theory and an adapted version of the Aggression Questionnaire (AQ) developed by Buss and Perry. Data were analyzed using the Pearson Product-Moment correlation test with IBM SPSS Statistics version 26. The results revealed a significant negative relationship between interpersonal communication and aggressive behavior ($r = -0.521$, $p < .001$). These findings indicate that students with higher levels of interpersonal communication tend to exhibit lower levels of aggressive behavior, whereas lower interpersonal communication is associated with a greater tendency toward aggressive behavior. The coefficient of determination showed that interpersonal communication accounted for 27.1% of the variance in aggressive behavior. The findings suggest that interpersonal communication is an important relational factor associated with aggressive behavior among students actively involved in student organizations. Therefore, strengthening interpersonal communication skills may serve as an effective strategy for reducing aggressive behavior and fostering healthier and more supportive student organizational environments.

Keywords: Interpersonal Communication, Aggressive Behavior, University Students, Student Organizations, Social Psychology.

I. Introduction

University students are in the stage of *emerging adulthood*, a developmental period characterized by significant cognitive, emotional, and social changes that shape individuals' readiness for adult life. In addition to developing academic competencies, university students are expected to acquire strong interpersonal, leadership, and collaborative skills to cope with the various challenges encountered in higher

education and the workplace. One of the most important contexts for developing these competencies is student organizations. Through active participation in student organizations, students engage in intensive interpersonal interactions, collaborate in teams, solve organizational problems, and develop communication and leadership skills. Previous studies have demonstrated that involvement in student organizations contributes positively to social competence, communication skills, self-confidence, and career readiness (Astin, 1999; Trolan et al., 2022). Despite these benefits, the high frequency of interpersonal interactions within student organizations also increases the likelihood of interpersonal conflict. Differences in personal characteristics, values, communication styles, and organizational interests may lead to misunderstandings and disagreements when they are not managed constructively. Consequently, conflicts may not only reduce organizational effectiveness but may also escalate into aggressive behavior. Among university students, aggressive behavior is more likely to manifest as verbal aggression, social exclusion, psychological intimidation, insults, and hostile communication rather than direct physical violence. Such behaviors can damage interpersonal relationships, reduce group cohesion, hinder teamwork, and negatively affect students' psychological well-being.

Previous studies have consistently identified aggressive behavior as a significant issue among university students. Martínez-Monteaudo et al. (2021) reported that aggression is associated with poor interpersonal relationships and lower levels of social adjustment. Similarly, Runions and Bak (2021) found that inadequate communication skills increase the likelihood of verbal aggression during social interactions. Furthermore, Zsila et al. (2023) demonstrated that aggressive behavior is associated with poorer social relationships and reduced psychological well-being among individuals in the *emerging adulthood* stage. These findings suggest that aggressive behavior not only affects individual functioning but also undermines the quality of social relationships and group effectiveness. Therefore, identifying factors that may reduce aggressive behavior has become an important issue in educational and social psychology research. One factor that may contribute to reducing aggressive behavior is interpersonal communication. According to DeVito (2019), interpersonal communication refers to the process of exchanging messages that enables individuals to establish effective relationships through openness, empathy, supportiveness, positiveness, and equality. Individuals with effective interpersonal communication skills are generally more capable of expressing opinions assertively, understanding others' perspectives, and resolving conflicts constructively without provoking hostility. Consequently, interpersonal communication can be viewed as an important relational resource that promotes healthier social interactions while reducing the likelihood of aggressive behavior.

Empirical evidence supports the important role of interpersonal communication in reducing aggressive behavior. Several studies have reported that individuals with better interpersonal communication skills tend to exhibit lower levels of aggression (Rose et al., 2021; Garaigordobil & Machimbarrena, 2021; Wang et al., 2023). Effective interpersonal communication enables individuals to manage disagreements more adaptively, minimize misunderstandings, and foster mutually respectful relationships. However, most previous studies have focused on secondary school students, adolescents in general, or young adults, while explaining aggressive behavior primarily from individual psychological factors such as self-control, emotional intelligence, and emotion regulation. Studies specifically examining interpersonal communication as a relational factor associated with aggressive behavior among university students actively involved in student organizations remain limited, particularly within Indonesian higher education. This limitation highlights an important research gap. Students who actively participate in organizations differ from the general student population because they are continuously engaged in leadership, teamwork, negotiation, and conflict resolution. Moreover, Indonesia's collectivistic culture, which emphasizes social harmony, mutual respect, and togetherness, may shape interpersonal communication differently from Western cultural contexts. Consequently, empirical evidence is needed to better understand the relationship between interpersonal communication and aggressive behavior among university students actively involved in student organizations in Indonesia.

The present study offers a novel perspective by positioning interpersonal communication as a relational factor associated with aggressive behavior among students actively participating in student organizations, a population that has received relatively limited attention in previous research. Theoretically, this study contributes to expanding the literature on interpersonal communication and aggressive behavior within the context of student organizations. Practically, the findings are expected to provide a scientific basis for universities to develop interpersonal communication training, conflict management programs, and leadership development initiatives aimed at fostering healthier and more supportive organizational environments. Based on the theoretical framework, empirical evidence, and identified research gap, this study aims to examine the relationship between interpersonal communication and aggressive behavior among university students actively involved in student organizations at Universitas Negeri Medan. It is hypothesized

that interpersonal communication is negatively associated with aggressive behavior, such that students with higher levels of interpersonal communication are expected to exhibit lower levels of aggressive behavior.

II. Research Method

2.1. Research Design

This study employed a quantitative approach with a correlational research design to examine the relationship between interpersonal communication as the independent variable and aggressive behavior as the dependent variable. A quantitative approach was selected because it allows variables to be measured objectively using numerical data analyzed through inferential statistical techniques. A correlational design was considered appropriate because the purpose of this study was not to establish causal relationships but to identify the direction and strength of the association between the two variables without manipulating the research variables. Accordingly, this design was suitable for addressing the research objective of examining the relationship between interpersonal communication and aggressive behavior among university students actively involved in student organizations at Universitas Negeri Medan.

2.2. Participants

The participants were university students actively involved in student organizations at Universitas Negeri Medan who met the following inclusion criteria: (1) currently enrolled as active undergraduate students during the academic year, (2) actively participating in student organizations, such as the Student Executive Board (BEM), Student Association (HMJ), Student Activity Units (UKM), or other officially recognized student organizations for at least one semester, and (3) willing to participate voluntarily in the study. Participants were selected using purposive sampling because the study specifically required respondents who had extensive experience interacting within student organizational settings. Students actively involved in organizations were considered more capable of providing relevant information regarding interpersonal communication dynamics and aggressive behavior than students without organizational experience. Based on these criteria, a total of 93 participants were included in the study.

2.3. Research Variables

This study involved two primary variables: interpersonal communication as the independent variable and aggressive behavior as the dependent variable. Interpersonal communication was defined as an individual's ability to establish effective relationships through the exchange of information, ideas, thoughts, and feelings. The construct was based on DeVito's (2019) interpersonal communication theory, which comprises five dimensions: openness, empathy, supportiveness, positiveness, and equality. Beyond serving as a message exchange process, interpersonal communication was conceptualized as an adaptive social competence that facilitates constructive conflict resolution. Aggressive behavior was defined as an individual's tendency to engage in behaviors intended to harm or injure others, either physically or psychologically. This definition was based on Buss and Perry (1992) and supported by more recent literature conceptualizing aggression as a multidimensional construct encompassing physical aggression, verbal aggression, anger, and hostility.

2.4. Research Instruments

Data were collected using two psychological scales employing a five-point Likert response format ranging from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (5). Favorable items were scored from 1 to 5, whereas unfavorable items were reverse scored. Higher scores indicated higher levels of the measured construct.

2.5. Interpersonal Communication Scale

Interpersonal communication was assessed using a scale developed based on DeVito's (2019) interpersonal communication theory. The initial instrument consisted of 25 items, representing the five dimensions of interpersonal communication openness, empathy, supportiveness, positiveness, and equality with five items representing each dimension. Before being administered in the main study, the instrument

was evaluated for theoretical content validity and subsequently subjected to validity and reliability testing through a pilot study. Only items that satisfied the required psychometric criteria were retained for the final analysis.

2.6. Aggressive Behavior Scale

Aggressive behavior was measured using an adapted version of the Aggression Questionnaire (AQ) developed by Buss and Perry (1992). The instrument consisted of 29 items covering four dimensions: physical aggression, verbal aggression, anger, and hostility. The adaptation process involved modifying the wording of the items to suit the Indonesian university student context while preserving the original conceptual meaning of each indicator.

2.7. Instrument Validity and Reliability

Prior to the main study, all instruments were examined for validity and reliability. Item validity was assessed using the Corrected Item–Total Correlation (CITC), with a minimum acceptable coefficient of 0.30. Internal consistency reliability was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha, with values of 0.70 or higher considered acceptable (Hair et al., 2022). Only items meeting both validity and reliability criteria were retained for the final analyses, indicating satisfactory internal consistency of the instruments.

2.8. Research Procedure

The study commenced with an extensive literature review and the development of research instruments based on relevant theories and previous empirical studies. Following the assessment of instrument validity and reliability, approval to conduct the study was obtained, and coordination was established with student organization administrators at Universitas Negeri Medan. Data were collected online using Google Forms. The questionnaire link was distributed through student organization administrators to members who met the inclusion criteria. The first page of the questionnaire contained an electronic informed consent form explaining the purpose of the study, its potential benefits, the estimated completion time, participants' right to decline or withdraw from the study at any time without consequences, and a statement indicating that participation was entirely voluntary. To maintain data quality, participants were allowed to complete the questionnaire only once. Responses were collected anonymously without requiring personally identifiable information, thereby ensuring participant confidentiality. Participants were also informed that there were no right or wrong answers and were encouraged to respond honestly to minimize social desirability bias. All collected data were used solely for academic purposes and were accessible only to the research team. After data collection was completed, the dataset underwent editing, coding, tabulation, and data cleaning before statistical analyses were conducted.

2.9. Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics version 26. Descriptive statistics were first computed to summarize participants' characteristics and the distribution of scores for each study variable. Prior to hypothesis testing, the data were examined to ensure that the assumptions required for parametric statistical analysis were met. The Kolmogorov–Smirnov normality test was employed to assess whether the data followed a normal distribution, while the linearity test was conducted to verify the linear relationship between interpersonal communication and aggressive behavior. These tests were performed as prerequisites for Pearson correlation analysis. Once all assumptions had been satisfied, the relationship between interpersonal communication and aggressive behavior was analyzed using the Pearson Product–Moment correlation coefficient, as both variables were measured on an interval scale and met the assumptions of normality and linearity. Statistical significance was determined at $p < .05$. In addition, the coefficient of determination (R^2) was calculated to estimate the proportion of variance in aggressive behavior explained by interpersonal communication.

III. Result and Discussion

3.1. Instrument Validity and Reliability

Prior to the main study, the research instruments were evaluated for validity and reliability to ensure that they accurately and consistently measured the intended constructs. Item validity was assessed using the Corrected Item–Total Correlation (CITC) technique, whereas internal consistency reliability was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha. Following Azwar (2018), items with a CITC value of 0.30 or higher were considered valid, while instruments with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.70 or above were regarded as reliable.

Table 1. Instrument Validity Results

Variable	Initial Number of Items	Valid Items	Removed Items	CITC Range
Interpersonal Communication	25	23	2	0.321–0.742
Aggressive Behavior	29	27	2	0.338–0.781

As presented in Table 1, most items in both instruments met the required validity criteria. The Interpersonal Communication Scale retained 23 valid items, with CITC values ranging from 0.321 to 0.742, whereas the Aggressive Behavior Scale retained 27 valid items, with CITC values ranging from 0.338 to 0.781. Items that failed to satisfy the validity criterion were excluded from subsequent analyses.

Table 2. Instrument Reliability Results

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha	Category
Interpersonal Communication	0.904	Excellent
Aggressive Behavior	0.918	Excellent

As shown in Table 2, the Interpersonal Communication Scale yielded a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.904, while the Aggressive Behavior Scale produced a coefficient of 0.918. Both values exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.70, indicating excellent internal consistency and confirming that both instruments were suitable for data collection.

3.2. Score Categorization

Score categorization was conducted to describe the levels of interpersonal communication and aggressive behavior among the participants. Categories were established based on the normative classification proposed by Azwar (2018), using the mean (M) and standard deviation (SD) approach. Scores were classified into three categories: low, moderate, and high. Participants with scores below $M - 1$ SD were categorized as low, those with scores between $M - 1$ SD and $M + 1$ SD were categorized as moderate, and those with scores above $M + 1$ SD were categorized as high. This approach was selected because it provides a more representative description of score distributions according to the characteristics of the collected data.

3.3. Participant Characteristics

Participant characteristics were described based on gender, age, and type of student organization to provide an overview of the study sample.

Table 3. Participant Characteristics

Characteristic	Category	n	%
Gender	Male	39	41.9
	Female	54	58.1
Age	18–20 years	28	30.1
	21–23 years	51	54.8
	>23 years	14	15.1
Type of Organization	Student Executive Board (BEM)	21	22.6
	Student Association (HMJ)	36	38.7
	Student Activity Unit (UKM)	27	29.0

	Others	9	9.7
Total		93	100

As shown in Table 3, the study involved 93 university students actively participating in student organizations. Female students constituted the majority of participants (58.1%), while male students accounted for 41.9%. Most participants were between 21 and 23 years old (54.8%). Regarding organizational affiliation, the largest proportion of respondents were members of the Student Association (HMJ) (38.7%), followed by the Student Activity Unit (UKM) (29.0%), the Student Executive Board (BEM) (22.6%), and other student organizations (9.7%).

3.4. Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics were calculated to summarize the levels of interpersonal communication and aggressive behavior among the participants.

Table 4. Descriptive Statistics

Variable	N	Min	Max	Mean	SD
Interpersonal Communication	93	67	122	96.84	10.92
Aggressive Behavior	93	39	103	68.17	11.76

As presented in Table 4, the mean score for interpersonal communication was 96.84 (SD = 10.92), whereas the mean score for aggressive behavior was 68.17 (SD = 11.76). These findings indicate that, overall, students actively involved in student organizations demonstrated relatively good interpersonal communication skills while exhibiting low to moderate levels of aggressive behavior.

3.5. Variable Categorization

The categorization analysis was conducted to examine the distribution of participants across different levels of interpersonal communication and aggressive behavior.

Table 5. Levels of Interpersonal Communication

Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Low	13	14.0
Moderate	58	62.4
High	22	23.6
Total	93	100

Table 6. Levels of Aggressive Behavior

Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Low	26	28.0
Moderate	49	52.7
High	18	19.3
Total	93	100

As shown in Tables 5 and 6, most participants were classified in the moderate category for both interpersonal communication (62.4%) and aggressive behavior (52.7%). These findings suggest that the majority of students actively involved in student organizations possess reasonably good interpersonal communication skills while displaying relatively controlled levels of aggressive behavior.

3.6. Assumption Testing

a. Normality Test

The normality of the data was assessed using the Kolmogorov–Smirnov test.

Table 7. Results of the Normality Test

Variable	Kolmogorov-Smirnov	Sig.
Interpersonal Communication	0.081	0.200
Aggressive Behavior	0.087	0.154

As shown in Table 7, the significance values for interpersonal communication ($p = .200$) and aggressive behavior ($p = .154$) were both greater than .05, indicating that the data were normally distributed and suitable for parametric statistical analysis.

b. Linearity Test

A linearity test was conducted to determine whether the relationship between interpersonal communication and aggressive behavior was linear.

Table 8. Results of the Linearity Test

Variable	F	Sig. (Deviation from Linearity)
Interpersonal Communication $\times$ Aggressive Behavior	1.281	0.241

As presented in Table 8, the significance value for Deviation from Linearity was 0.241 ($p > .05$), indicating that the relationship between interpersonal communication and aggressive behavior was linear. Therefore, the assumptions required for Pearson correlation analysis were satisfied.

3.7. Hypothesis Testing

The proposed hypothesis was tested using the Pearson Product-Moment correlation coefficient.

Table 9. Pearson Correlation Results

Variables	r	p
Interpersonal Communication – Aggressive Behavior	-0.521	< .001

As shown in Table 9, the Pearson correlation analysis revealed a significant negative relationship between interpersonal communication and aggressive behavior ($r = -0.521$, $p < .001$). The correlation coefficient indicates a moderate negative association, suggesting that students with higher levels of interpersonal communication tend to exhibit lower levels of aggressive behavior. Therefore, the research hypothesis was supported.

3.8. Coefficient of Determination

To determine the contribution of interpersonal communication to aggressive behavior, the coefficient of determination was calculated.

Table 10. Coefficient of Determination

Variable	R	R ²	Contribution (%)
Interpersonal Communication $\rightarrow$ Aggressive Behavior	0.521	0.271	27.1

As presented in Table 10, the coefficient of determination (R^2) was 0.271, indicating that interpersonal communication accounted for 27.1% of the variance in aggressive behavior. The remaining 72.9% of the variance may be explained by other psychological and contextual factors not examined in this study, such as self-control, emotion regulation, perceived stress, social environment, parenting style, and other individual characteristics.

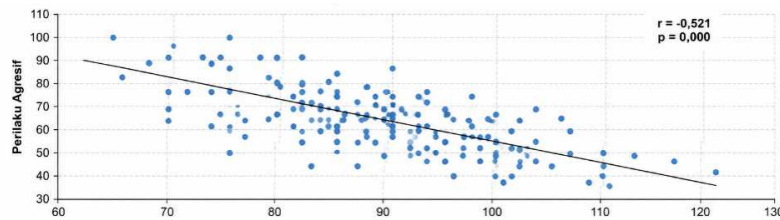


Figure 1. Scatterplot

Figure 1 illustrates the negative relationship between interpersonal communication and aggressive behavior. The scatterplot demonstrates a downward trend, indicating that higher interpersonal communication scores are associated with lower levels of aggressive behavior. The accompanying bar chart shows that the majority of participants fell within the moderate category for both interpersonal communication (62.4%) and aggressive behavior (52.7%). Overall, these findings indicate that students actively involved in student organizations generally exhibit relatively good interpersonal communication skills while maintaining relatively controlled levels of aggressive behavior.

This study aimed to examine the relationship between interpersonal communication and aggressive behavior among university students actively involved in student organizations at Universitas Negeri Medan. The findings revealed a significant negative relationship between interpersonal communication and aggressive behavior ($r = -0.521$, $p < .001$). These results indicate that students with better interpersonal communication skills tend to exhibit lower levels of aggressive behavior. However, because this study employed a correlational design, the findings should not be interpreted as evidence of a causal relationship. Instead, interpersonal communication should be understood as a factor associated with aggressive behavior rather than a direct cause of its reduction. The present findings support DeVito's (2019) theory of interpersonal communication, which emphasizes that effective interpersonal communication is characterized by openness, empathy, supportiveness, positiveness, and equality. These communication competencies enable individuals to understand others' perspectives, minimize misunderstandings, and resolve interpersonal conflicts constructively. Within student organizations, where members frequently engage in discussions, collaborative decision-making, and conflict resolution, these interpersonal competencies become particularly important. Effective interpersonal communication therefore serves as a relational resource that may prevent interpersonal disagreements from escalating into aggressive behavior.

The findings are also consistent with previous studies conducted by Rose et al. (2021), Garaigordobil and Machimbarrena (2021), and Wang et al. (2023), all of which reported that individuals with stronger interpersonal communication skills tend to demonstrate lower levels of aggressive behavior. The consistency between the present findings and previous empirical evidence strengthens the argument that interpersonal communication functions as a protective factor against aggressive behavior during adolescence and emerging adulthood. Furthermore, the present findings do not contradict the underlying theoretical framework or previous empirical research; instead, they reinforce existing literature highlighting the importance of interpersonal communication in promoting healthy social relationships and reducing interpersonal conflict. Although interpersonal communication explained 27.1% of the variance in aggressive behavior, approximately 72.9% of the variance remained unexplained. This finding indicates that aggressive behavior is a multidimensional phenomenon influenced by numerous psychological and environmental factors beyond interpersonal communication. Previous studies have identified emotional regulation, self-control, emotional intelligence, perceived stress, social support, and organizational climate as important determinants of aggressive behavior. Consequently, future research should employ more comprehensive analytical models incorporating these variables to provide a broader understanding of the mechanisms underlying aggressive behavior among university students.

The findings also have important practical implications for the management of student organizations in higher education institutions. Universities are encouraged to implement interpersonal communication development programs, including effective communication training, conflict management workshops, negotiation skills, assertive communication training, peer mentoring, and leadership development programs. Such initiatives may help foster a more open, collaborative, and respectful organizational culture, thereby reducing the likelihood of aggressive behavior while improving the quality of interpersonal relationships within student organizations. Several limitations of this study should be acknowledged. First, the correlational research design does not permit conclusions regarding causal relationships between interpersonal communication and aggressive behavior. Second, the use of purposive sampling at a single university limits

the generalizability of the findings to broader student populations. Third, the use of self-report measures may have introduced social desirability bias, whereby participants tended to provide socially acceptable responses rather than completely accurate self-reports. In addition, because data were collected through an online survey, response bias cannot be entirely ruled out, as researchers had limited control over participants' response conditions. Future studies are therefore encouraged to recruit more diverse samples from multiple universities, employ longitudinal or experimental research designs, and incorporate alternative assessment methods, such as behavioral observation or peer ratings, to improve the robustness and validity of the findings.

IV. Conclusion

This study examined the relationship between interpersonal communication and aggressive behavior among university students actively involved in student organizations at Universitas Negeri Medan. The findings demonstrated a significant negative relationship between interpersonal communication and aggressive behavior ($r = -0.521, p < .001$), indicating that students with stronger interpersonal communication skills tend to exhibit lower levels of aggressive behavior. Conversely, poorer interpersonal communication was associated with a greater tendency toward aggressive behavior within student organizations. Furthermore, interpersonal communication accounted for 27.1% of the variance in aggressive behavior, suggesting that it represents an important relational factor associated with aggressive behavior, although other psychological and environmental variables also contribute to its occurrence. These findings reinforce the view that openness, empathy, supportiveness, positiveness, and equality in interpersonal communication contribute to healthier interpersonal relationships and help reduce aggressive behavior within student organizations. This study also addresses an important gap in previous research, which has primarily focused on adolescents, secondary school students, or cyber aggression. By examining university students actively involved in student organizations within the Indonesian higher education context, the study provides empirical evidence that interpersonal communication constitutes an important relational resource for maintaining healthy social interactions and minimizing aggressive behavior among students.

Nevertheless, several limitations should be considered when interpreting the findings. The correlational design precludes causal inference, while the use of self-report measures may have introduced common method bias and social desirability bias. Moreover, because the study involved students from only one university, the generalizability of the findings remains limited. Future research is therefore encouraged to employ longitudinal or experimental designs, recruit participants from multiple universities, and investigate additional predictors of aggressive behavior, including emotional regulation, self-control, emotional intelligence, social support, and organizational climate. This study contributes to the fields of social psychology and educational psychology by providing additional empirical evidence regarding the relationship between interpersonal communication and aggressive behavior among university students actively involved in student organizations. The findings suggest that interpersonal communication functions not only as a medium for exchanging information but also as an important relational resource that facilitates adaptive social interactions and reduces aggressive tendencies. Consequently, this study extends the literature by positioning interpersonal communication as a protective factor against aggressive behavior within the context of student organizations, particularly among individuals in the stage of emerging adulthood. Furthermore, the study enriches the limited body of international literature by providing empirical evidence from the Indonesian cultural context. From a practical perspective, the findings provide valuable insights for universities, student affairs administrators, and student organization advisors in designing interventions aimed at reducing aggressive behavior through the development of interpersonal communication skills. Universities are encouraged to integrate interpersonal communication training, assertive communication, conflict management, empathy development, and emotional regulation programs into leadership development and student organization activities. In addition, higher education institutions should establish structured mentoring systems and constructive conflict resolution mechanisms to foster healthier, more collaborative organizational climates that support both students' academic success and psychosocial development.

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