Suggesting a Family Adoption Communication Model for Spouses Planning Child Adoption

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Abstract

Background: Child adoption requires communication readiness guidance. For this reason, a suitable adoption communication model must be formulated for couples who will carry out the adoption process.
Objectives: This study formulates guidelines for communication competencies that prospective adoptive parents or parents who are adopting children should master.
Method: This research approach uses qualitative research strategies, using case studies. The sampling technique was purposive sampling with snowball sampling. The results were represented in prose format.
Results: This study found that the child adoption communication model for adoptive parents consists of phases. The model includes the relationship-building phase, the relationship-nurturing phase when the adopted child joins the family structure, the conflict resolution phase related to child adoption, and the post-conflict communication adaptation phase.
Conclusion: This study concludes that a communication model for adoption with communicative resilience is essential for adoptive parents. In realising the adoption of communicative resilience, children not only require communication orientation and conformity orientation but also must involve elements of support, empathy, and mindfulness.
Unique contribution: This study proposes a model that could be useful to parents when planning adoption.
Key recommendation: Effective communication guidelines in child adoption are needed not only for the relationship between parents and children but also for adoptive parents to realise the adoption of communicatively resilient children. Key stakeholders in child adoption also need to study communication models in order to implement appropriate policies.
Keywords: adoptive parents, child adoption, communication guidelines, communicative resilience, family communication

Introduction

The adoption process involves many parties at every stage. The challenge was not only for children but also for adoptive parents. At first, having to come to terms with adopting is a challenge, but then, adoptive parents face reality. This proves that in the adoption process or later in life, adopters may face reality and begin to think less about any inherent differences between having a child through adoption or biological means (Onayemi, 2019).

The communication model is an ideal description of what is needed to adopt communicative resilience. Communicative resilience involves strategies, practices, and processes that enable the continued functioning of communication systems and the adaptation to changing circumstances. Communication is a key concept in fostering and enhancing community resilience. This concept is often discussed in the context of network resilience, crisis communication, and community resilience in the face of environmental disasters or other crises (Chattopadhyay, 2023). To realise a resilient adoption process, a resilient family communication model is needed to support the success of the child adoption process. In these stages, some phases are transcended, and in each phase, some elements strengthen them so that the adopter couple can realise a communicative, resilient adoption. Buzzanel said that to realise communicative resilience, people will strive to realise normalcy, prioritise productive actions while avoiding negative feelings, affirm identity anchors, maintain and use communication networks, and apply alternative logic (Buzzanell, 2017). To create the adoption of children with communicative resilience, this study will involve four stages in the child adoption process. The four stages are the first stage, related to how couples build relationships before adoption; the second is when the adopted child enters the family; the third is when there is conflict; and the fourth is the adaptation stage of post-conflict communication.

This study will formulate guidelines for communication competencies that must be mastered by prospective adoptive parents or parents who are adopting children. To find the best formula for the communication competencies needed, researchers will examine adoptive parents spread across several cities in Indonesia and map their best practices in formulating communication models that are communicative resilience. For this reason, to realise communicative resilience in the adoption process, prospective adoptive parents must possess guidelines related to communication competencies. Wrobel said that communication competencies that must be prepared so that adoptive parents are ready for the adoption process include the ability to provide information to children proactively, the ability to answer children's questions honestly and openly, and the ability to support children in exploring and understanding their adoption background (Wrobel et al., 2004).

However, in the model he found, Wrobel did not address the specifics of the communication formula that should be prepared from the perspective of a married couple or the readiness of adoptive parents. So, this study will formulate guidelines for communication competencies that must be mastered by prospective adoptive parents or parents who are adopting children.

Literature Review

In previous research, there is a communication model for adoptive parent and adopted child relationships. According to this model, there are three phases of adoption communication. The Family Adoption Communication (FAC) model is a framework for conceptualising family communication about adoption as an evolving process. The model records the different information needs of children at various stages of development and describes how adoptive parents should decide how to act on their knowledge and make decisions about how to respond to their children's curiosity (Wrobel et al., 2004). This model shows that families typically start with the original adoption story, move on to the adoption child's questioning process, and end with the adopted child engaging in targeted information gathering. The study centred on the

first stage of the model—the initial communicative task of parents telling children adoption stories (Harrigan, 2010). Wrobel et al. (2003) explain that adoption stories, which typically contain information regarding the biological parents and circumstances surrounding the adoption, are told during infancy or preschool to ensure adoption revelations come from the parents rather than other sources and set the tone for future adoption-related talks. While the child often guides the adoption talks that follow the adoption storytelling process, the adoption storytelling process has been described as directed and controlled by the parents (Freeark et al., 2008; Wrobel et al., 2004). This FAC model describes adoption-related communication as consisting primarily of adopted children seeking information about their biological parents or the circumstances surrounding their birth and adoption and adoptive parents making decisions about whether or not and how much information to share with children (Wrobel et al., 2004).

On the other hand, especially in Indonesia, child adoption is a condition that is not easy for prospective adoptive parents. The problem of adoption is not only related to the relationship between parents and children, as explained in The Family Adoption Communication model earlier. Amber Lewis, a licensed counsellor in Oklahoma who works with families during the home study process and post-adoption, says that it is vital that couples go into adoption with a relationship characterised by strong communication, cooperation, respect, and love. The challenges of adoption often exacerbate weaknesses in marriages, and it can be devastating for the whole family if those weaknesses grow. But, if a couple is firmly committed to each other with a firm grounding in their love, roles, and mutual respect, the family is much better prepared to successfully weather the stress of building a family by adoption (Caldwell, 2024)

Several studies (Molano et al., 2021; Tucker, 2020) have shown that parental commitment is vital in adoption decisions (Helland, 2020). Research emphasises that adoption communication is more than just an exchange of information. The problem of adoption is how to find the right communication model in terms of child adoption to be a guide for prospective adoptive parents. Communication about adoption is a process of family interaction that is more than just a simple exchange of information (Barbosa-Ducharne & Soares, 2016). In order to achieve a communicatively resilient adoption process, it is necessary to implement a resilient family communication model that facilitates the successful completion of the child adoption procedure.

Methodology

Research Design

This study employs a qualitative methodology and uses a case study strategy. Case studies offer detailed insights into adoption experiences, including the viewpoints of adoptive parents, adopted children, and biological parents (McSherry & McAnee, 2022)

Sampling and Requirement

The informants amounted to nine adoptive parents couples or 18 participants who adopted children. All informants were selected based on the criteria of being a married couple who adopted a child and selected using purposive sampling techniques combined with snowball sampling. The reason for using purposive sampling is to better match the sample with the intent and purpose of the study, thereby increasing the thoroughness of the study and the trustworthiness of the data and results (Campbell et al., 2020).

Data Collection

In-depth interviews and observations were conducted for research data collection. As an instrument for this research, the researcher shared informed consent with all participants and started semi-structured interviews with all couples based on a question list.

Data Analysis

Data is analysed by data condensation, data presentation, and data verification. In the work by Miles and Huberman, the aim is to build a qualitative description of the data using matrices and causal networks, which pull together independent and dependent variables and their relationships into a coherent picture. In their analysis model, there are three concurrent flows of activity. Data reduction, display, and conclusion drawing/verification flows are active when the data is collected and continued post-collection. Several methods are suggested for data collection, reduction, visualisation, and conclusion drawing (Lensu, 2002)

Result

Based on the objective of this research, this study will formulate guidelines for communication competencies that prospective adoptive parents must master. The results found that the child adoption communication model for adoptive parents consists of phases. The adoption communication model includes the relationship-building phase, the relationship-nurturing phase when the adopted child joins the family structure, and the conflict resolution phase related to child adoption and the post-conflict communication adaptation phase. These informants had different social backgrounds and adoption cases (*multiple cases*). In the process of child adoption, adoptive parents will initially build relationships both with their partners and with parties outside their partners.

Phase 1. Prospective adoptive parents build relationships before adopting children

Building relationships is the first stage before the adoption process. In this process, adoptive parents do in the initial adoption process when planning adoption and the adopted child has not yet entered the family.

Child Adoption initiator. Both husband and wife have a role as initiators in this adoption process. Adoption plans are generally initiated by parties who feel unable to be the cause of pregnancy. However, the initiator of adoption is not only the husband or wife but can also come from *significant others*. The absence of children is the reason for the initiator of adoption to initiate child adoption. The wife can be the dominant party to be the initiator of the adoption plan.

> "...... I had my own idea of adoption. I have PCOS, and hormones are problematic..." (Interview with Subject 3, a wife, 1/7/2023).

The initiator of the adoption plan also comes from significant others. These significant others can come from friends/colleagues of adoptive parents or family of adoptive parents. Being an adoption initiator will be influenced by the initiator's belief or adherence to the value believed (high conformity).

How to deliver messages related to adoption plans. The process of delivering messages is also an important part of building relationships. All informants said they conveyed their plans to adopt children directly to their spouses.

Verbal communication is considered more effective and has minimal noise, so it is expected to minimise message misunderstandings. This direct delivery shows that couples have a high conversation orientation in conveying the desire for adoption. In delivering this

message, the initiators package the message straightforwardly by providing suppositions or visualisations in the explanation process.

Message visualisation is carried out by wives and husbands, who initiate adoption by strengthening empathy. Empathy is an effective tool to promote pro-social attitudes. Some academics describe prosocial behaviour as actions that tend to benefit other individuals (Robinson & Curry, 2005)

Phase 2. Maintain relationships when adopted children enter the family structure

The second stage in the Family Communication Adoption Model for Spouses is the stage that adoptive parents must prepare for when adopted children enter their family. Role changes may result in relationship changes.

The adoptive parent adaptation process when the adopted child enters the family. The adaptation process takes place through various strategies. The first thing informants feel is that they feel a change in responsibility and must learn to adjust to the change. The presence of a small baby in the middle of the family causes a change in the roles and responsibilities they must carry. They also tried to adjust to the change in roles. Subject 4 admitted that the adopted son's inclusion in their family structure made them feel like they had a complete life. The inclusion of children in the family structure has the consequence of *adoptive parent* couples learning to understand the couple better.

Strengthening relationships after role change. The change in role from just husband and wife to father and mother involves conversation orientation to realise the adoption of children who have communication competence. Here are some forms of efforts that involve conversation orientation in strengthening husband and wife relationships after the role change. In parenting adopted children, sometimes one of the adoptive parents experiences a decrease in enthusiasm or is suddenly saddened by the condition or status of the adoption. Undeniably, when parenting fatigue hits, one partner can feel down. The husband or wife will try to provide support to raise the spirit. This support effort is a strategy to maintain relationships between adoptive parents. In the adoption process makes couples seek support and requires high reciprocal communication support from their partners.

Phase 3. Resolve conflicts that occur in the adoption process.

Conflicts that occur in the adoption process can be intrapersonal, interpersonal, and intragroup conflicts; however, the possibility of intergroup conflicts is not ruled out.

Types of conflicts. The first type of conflict experienced is intrapersonal conflict. This intrapersonal conflict can occur when the adopted child has not entered the family structure or when the adopted child has joined the family structure. Adoptive parents fear the adopted child will be taken or returned to the family. When adopted children join the family structure, adoptive parents also feel anxiety and worry if one day the adopted child will be taken or returned to his biological parents. Differences in parenting methods can also grow into conflicts after adoptive parents have different views on adoptive parenting methods. This type of conflict belongs to interpersonal conflicts. The next type of conflict is intergroup conflict. Intergroup conflict is a conflict that occurs between groups in the adoption process; for example, conflicts between adoptive parents and other family groups can be in the form of adoptive parent family groups or family groups of biological parents. Subject 2's biological father still cannot accept the presence of the adopted son. This refusal is because the adopted son should actually be the first grandchild of Subject 2's family, but he does not have a biological grandson.

> *"Yes, the point is that my father is disappointed, still can't understand when my adopted son first came here. I'm not happy to carry it. The one who refuses is not only my father"* (Interview with subject 2, a wife)

Strategies for overcoming conflicts in the adoption process. In this third phase, adoptive parents carry out several strategies to resolve adoption conflicts. Support from a partner is a powerful way to overcome intrapersonal conflicts experienced by one partner when an adopted child joins the family structure. In managing interpersonal conflict, adoptive-parent couples involve conformity orientation by making the values believed to be components that influence communication patterns. In resolving interpersonal conflicts, attraction is part of a compromising strategy.

Accommodating is one of the efforts to resolve the conflict by collecting opinions from parties involved in the conflict. Adoptive parents actively communicate conflict resolution by asking for opinions from parties involved in the conflict (high conversation). Separation is also become a part of a compromising strategy. The act of separation is to temporarily separate oneself from the conflict. This strategy of isolating oneself from the conflict.

Phase 4. Post-conflict communication adaptation.

Post-conflict, adoptive parent couples carry out several strategies to normalise the situation and restore conditions to the ideal as before the conflict.

The process of recovery from conflicts. Post-conflict, whether intrapersonal, interpersonal, or intergroup conflict, couples try to adjust to post-conflict conditions. They are especially adapting to the resolution of the conflict that occurs. The conflict has a positive impact on adoptive parents. After experiencing adoptive conflict, parents admit that they increasingly recognise the character of their partner. Conflict also has a positive impact by making the relationship of adoptive parent couples more harmonious. After experiencing conflicts following the inclusion of adopted children in the family structure, some adoptive parents feel that the relationship is getting stronger.

Initiate post-conflict communication. After a conflict, both the husband's and the wife's adoptive parents have an equal role in starting a conversation. The husband proactively initiates communication through direct visits and devices to improve post-conflict relations.

Post-conflict intermingling. At this stage, several behaviours manifest conversational orientation in the communication carried out by adoptive parents.

Discussion

From the results of the study, it is known that there are four stages in the adoption communication model that occur in adoptive parents in the process of adopting children. This study succeeded in finding a communicative, resilient adoption communication model for couples who want to adopt children. In each phase, there are several strategies carried out by adoptive parents in each phase so that they can maintain good interpersonal relationships between husband and wife, with adopted children, and with significant others involved in the child's adoption process.

The instrument of this theory assumes that communication patterns develop from interacting experiences, not personality characteristics. The initial model of Family Communication Patterns theory illustrates the tendency of families to develop ways of communicating that are quite stable and predictable by each family member (Chaffee & Mc Leod, 1972). The main focus is on the unique associations and combinations between conversational orientation and conformity orientation, as well as different forms of information processing, behaviour, and psychosocial outcomes (Runtiko, 2021).

Two dimensions are used as a benchmark for family categorisation in family communication pattern theory: social-orientation and concept-orientation dimensions. Decades later, both dimensions were changed through a series of studies conducted by Ritchie and Fitzpatrick (Ritchie & Fitzpatrick, 1990). The social-orientation dimension is transformed into the conformity-orientation, while the concept-orientation dimension is transformed into the conversation-orientation dimension. This change also marked the era of the second generation theory (Chaffee & Mc Leod, 1972)

Conversation orientation in *family communication pattern* theory is a pattern of family members engaging in extensive interactions or topics of conversation. In this dimension, family members are free and open to interact with each other without any time restrictions or topics discussed. They share opinions, ideas, experiences, and feelings. Conformity orientation focuses on how family members apply ideological values, attitudes, and views that conform to their beliefs. Families that instil traditional values usually uphold the hierarchical structure of the family. Parents expect uniformity in attitudes, values, and behaviour from each family member. So, parents tend to make decisions for each family member (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2002). In the initial adoption process, couples must pay attention to why people adopt and how the adoption plan is delivered, including selecting adoption initiators, managing uncertainty in the initial adoption process, and preparing the adoption plan message. All adoptive parents always discuss their adoption plan intensely with their partners. When delivering messages related to this adoption plan, *adoptive parents* not only discuss adoption messages actively with couples (*high conversation*) but also with their closest people.

At the stage of maintaining relationships when adopted children enter the family structure, adoptive couples need to pay attention to the adaptation process that occurs, build self-awareness as adoptive parents, and strengthen relationships after role changes occur. The linear communication model described by West and Turner states four types of interference in the communication process. First, semantic disorders related to jargon or specialised languages are used individually and in groups. Second, physical/external disorders are disorders outside the recipient or the influence of the body in receiving messages. Third, psychological disorders refer to communicators' prejudices, biases, and tendencies toward each other or the message itself. The fourth physiological disorder is a biological disorder of the communication process (Rahim, 2009).

In the phase of managing conflict in the adoption process, adopter couples need to pay attention to the causes and how to manage the conflict. When conflict occurs, relationships are not linear. Non-linear is meant here is the fluctuation that occurs along with contradictory desires. Communication life is characterised by change (Turner & West, 2008). Contradiction is a fundamental fact in the life of communicating. People try to manage tension and opposition through different procedures, but these two things always appear in a relationship (Baxter, 2008). According to West and Turner, communication is essential in managing and offering relationship contradictions. The role of communication is to provide solutions to problems in relationships. Selection refers to giving priority in intervals of varying tensions. Integration syntheses two or more opposing relationships (Turner & West, 2008). Support from spouses and significant others is a beneficial factor in conflict resolution.

In the fourth phase, to realise the adoption of children with communicative resilience, adoptive couples must be able to adapt to post-conflict communication. Several things must be strengthened in forming this communicative resilience principle, namely, in addition to communication orientation and conformity orientation, which must also strengthen elements of support, empathy, and mindfulness. The requirement factor is a basic biological need of the individual related to survival and security. The expectation factor is related to sociological aspects derived from social norms, culture, communication goals, and general knowledge

about the behaviour of interaction partners. In the expectation factor, communication behaviour is determined by context and includes predicted expectations, which are influenced by the social environment. Then, the desire factor, which is a person's specific goals in interaction, combines personality, preferences, moods, and other individual difference variables (Rubiyanto & Clara, 2019). To be able to adapt post-conflict, couples try to increase conversation *(high conversation)* to renew adoption commitments. Adoption commitment is built on their understanding of the values believed when adopting *(high conformity),* especially related to their adherence to religious and human values. In adapting this communication, spouses must prioritise empathy towards their partners and their adopted children. In renewing adoption commitments, mindfulness is also a reinforcing factor for adoptive parents. Adoptive parents who have reached the stage of mindfulness will be more adaptable to post-conflict communication. In contrast, adoptive parents who lack mindfulness will make conflict an inhibiting factor in the success of the adoption process.

Conclusion and Limitations

This study found that a communication model for adoption with communicative resilience is intended for adoptive parents. The communication model has some phases that must be undertaken, namely the phase of building relationships, the phase of maintaining relationships when adopted children enter the family structure, the phase of managing conflicts, and the phase of post-conflict communication adaptation. In realising the adoption of communicative resilience, children not only require communication orientation and conformity orientation but also must involve elements of support, empathy, and mindfulness. This research contributes to the communication model needed by adoptive parents. This research is limited to examining adoption cases in general, and there needs to be a more specific perspective to be more varied, for example, adoption from the perspective of cultural differences or other cases.

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