

Negotiating the Self during Delayed Graduation: An Intrapersonal Communication Perspective

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ABSTRACT

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Delayed graduation among final-year students is not only an academic issue but also an internal experience that shapes how students understand themselves, manage pressure, and respond to their study completion process. This study aims to analyze the intrapersonal communication process of final-year students who experience delayed graduation at UPN Veteran Jawa Timur. This research applies a qualitative descriptive approach by using in-depth interviews with eight final-year students who had exceeded the ideal study period. The data were analyzed through reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing by focusing on the stages of intrapersonal communication, namely sensation, perception, memory, and thinking. The findings show that delayed graduation functions as a stimulus that triggers various emotional responses, including regret, anxiety, pessimism, sadness, and self-blame. These sensations develop into different self-perceptions, ranging from negative self-evaluation to reflective acceptance and stable self-perception when students attribute their delay to external factors. Memory also plays an important role in shaping students' self-interpretation, as they connect current delays with past academic decisions, personal experiences, family responsibilities, psychological conditions, and institutional systems. The thinking process is mainly reflected through self-talk, which functions as a means of calming the self, strengthening motivation, expressing emotions, and directing future actions. This study concludes that intrapersonal communication among delayed final-year students is dynamic, subjective, and recursive. The implication of this study highlights the importance of academic and psychological support systems that consider students' internal meaning-making processes, not only their academic progress.

INTRODUCTION

Delayed graduation among final-year students represents a persistent challenge in higher education because it affects not only students' academic progression but also institutional efficiency, educational costs, and students' transition into employment. Indonesia's higher education system currently serves approximately 9.97 million students across more than 4,400 higher education institutions, indicating that problems related to study completion potentially affect a substantial student population (Ministry of Higher Education, Science, and Technology, 2025). At the institutional level, preliminary data from UPN Veteran Jawa Timur indicate that [insert the number or percentage of students who exceeded the standard study period

during the relevant academic years]. This institutional evidence demonstrates that delayed graduation is not merely an isolated personal experience but an empirical academic problem that requires closer investigation. Final-year students must simultaneously complete their thesis, fulfil administrative requirements, and prepare for employment or further education. These demands are often accompanied by academic expectations, family pressure, financial difficulties, and uncertainty about the future, which may lead to academic stress, emotional exhaustion, declining motivation, and difficulty maintaining consistent academic progress (Purnamasari et al., 2024).

Delayed graduation cannot be explained solely by students' academic ability or performance. Previous findings indicate that thesis completion is affected by

an interaction between internal and external factors. Internal factors include writing anxiety, fear of failure, procrastination, low self-confidence, limited self-control, psychological distress, and difficulties in regulating priorities. External factors include the quality of academic supervision, access to institutional support, administrative procedures, employment responsibilities, financial constraints, and family obligations. Ursia et al. (2013), for example, found that self-control was negatively associated with procrastination in thesis completion among Indonesian students, indicating that difficulties in regulating thoughts and behaviour may impede thesis progress. Similarly, Pravita and Kuswando (2022) showed that students completing their undergraduate theses experienced high writing anxiety, avoidance behaviour, and procrastination, particularly in revising and reviewing their academic work. These findings confirm that delayed thesis completion involves interconnected academic, behavioural, emotional, and institutional problems rather than a single academic deficiency.

Final-year students are also situated within the developmental phase of emerging adulthood, which is characterised by identity exploration, instability, self-focus, and future orientation (Arnett, 2000). During this phase, delayed graduation can become a particularly sensitive experience because students frequently compare their progress with peers who have already graduated, entered the workforce, or achieved other socially expected milestones. Such comparisons may generate feelings of inadequacy, embarrassment, disappointment, and uncertainty regarding personal competence and future prospects. Students may repeatedly question whether they are sufficiently capable, disciplined, successful, or valuable. Therefore, delayed graduation is not simply an extension of the study period but a subjective experience involving identity negotiation, self-evaluation, and the construction of meaning regarding academic failure and personal worth (Armadina, 2024).

From a communication perspective, these internal negotiations can be examined through the concept of intrapersonal communication. Intrapersonal communication refers to the process through which individuals receive, organise, interpret, store, and evaluate information within themselves before responding to a particular situation. According to Rakhmat (2018), intrapersonal communication

comprises four interconnected stages: sensation, perception, memory, and thinking. Through sensation, students receive stimuli associated with their academic situation; through perception, they assign meaning to these stimuli; through memory, they connect current experiences with previous events; and through thinking, they evaluate alternatives, formulate judgments, and determine subsequent actions. Consequently, students experiencing delayed graduation do not merely respond passively to academic obstacles. They actively construct meanings concerning their thesis progress, academic competence, relationships with others, and future identity.

Existing research has provided important explanations of the psychological and behavioural factors associated with thesis completion. Studies of academic stress have primarily examined the emotional pressure arising from thesis demands, whereas procrastination research has focused on students' tendencies to postpone writing, consultation, revision, and other thesis-related activities. Other studies have investigated self-control, self-regulation, academic self-efficacy, social support, and writing anxiety as predictors of students' thesis progress (Ursia et al., 2013; Pravita & Kuswando, 2022). Meanwhile, studies involving self-talk have generally positioned internal dialogue as a counselling technique or psychological intervention intended to reduce procrastination, manage negative emotions, or improve motivation. Although these studies explain why students experience difficulties and identify factors that may facilitate thesis completion, they predominantly treat internal processes as measurable psychological variables, predictors, or intervention outcomes. They have not sufficiently explored how students who have already exceeded the expected study period communicate with themselves continuously while interpreting their delayed graduation experiences.

This limitation establishes the specific research gap addressed in the present study. Limited attention has been given to the complete intrapersonal communication process—encompassing sensation, perception, memory, and thinking—through which delayed-graduation students interpret academic pressure, social comparison, past experiences, self-evaluations, and decisions about continuing their studies. Previous research has generally examined final-year students as a broad category, even though

students experiencing delayed graduation may encounter more prolonged and repetitive pressure than students who remain within the standard study period. Their internal dialogue is not limited to managing temporary thesis-related stress but may also involve accumulated disappointment, perceived social judgment, changing self-concepts, and repeated negotiations between continuing, postponing, or abandoning academic responsibilities. Therefore, examining delayed graduation through intrapersonal communication offers a perspective that cannot be fully captured by studies focusing only on academic stress, procrastination levels, or self-talk interventions (Nazira, 2022).

Accordingly, this study focuses on final-year students at UPN Veteran Jawa Timur who have experienced delayed graduation. The novelty of this study lies in conceptualising intrapersonal communication not merely as a coping mechanism or self-talk technique but as a dynamic meaning-making process through which students sense, perceive, remember, and think about their prolonged academic experience. Rather than testing whether a particular psychological factor predicts thesis completion, this study investigates how delayed-graduation students internally interpret academic obstacles, social expectations, personal competence, and their future. This study therefore contributes to communication scholarship by extending the application of intrapersonal communication theory to the context of delayed graduation and by providing an in-depth understanding of how students construct, maintain, and potentially reconstruct meanings about themselves during prolonged thesis completion.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Final-Year Students and Delayed Graduation

Final-year students are students who have reached the final stage of undergraduate study and are generally required to complete a thesis or final project as a graduation requirement. Ideally, undergraduate students complete their study within four years or eight semesters. However, in reality, some students require a longer period due to academic, personal, social, economic, and institutional barriers (Nafi & Kristanti Tri Febriana, 2025).

Delayed graduation may affect students' psychological condition because the final stage of study is often associated with expectations of achievement and transition into adulthood. Students

who are unable to graduate on time may experience anxiety, shame, regret, self-doubt, and social comparison. This condition becomes more complex when students compare themselves with peers who have graduated earlier, entered the workforce, or achieved other life progress (Nafi & Kristanti Tri Febriana, 2025).

In the context of emerging adulthood, delayed graduation can become part of identity negotiation. Students may question their academic ability, future direction, and self-worth. Therefore, delayed graduation should be understood as an experience that involves both academic and psychological dimensions (Arnett, 2000).

Intrapersonal Communication

Intrapersonal communication is communication that occurs within the individual. It includes self-talk, self-reflection, internal evaluation, decision-making, imagination, and emotional processing. In this process, the individual acts both as the sender and receiver of messages. Before responding to external situations, individuals first interpret the stimulus internally (DeVito, 2016).

According to Rakhmat, intrapersonal communication consists of four interconnected stages: sensation, perception, memory, and thinking. Sensation is the initial stage when individuals receive stimuli from their environment or become aware of a certain condition. Perception refers to the process of giving meaning to the stimulus. Memory involves storing and recalling previous experiences that are relevant to the current situation. Thinking is the process of evaluating, reflecting, and deciding how to respond to the situation (Rakhmat, 2018).

In delayed graduation, these stages become visible when students first realize that they are not graduating on time, interpret what the delay means for themselves, connect the situation with past experiences, and engage in internal dialogue to determine their next steps.

Self-Talk as Part of Intrapersonal Communication

Self-talk is one of the most visible forms of intrapersonal communication. It refers to the internal dialogue that individuals use to interpret situations, regulate emotions, and motivate themselves. Self-talk can be positive, negative, reflective, or neutral. Positive self-talk may help students strengthen motivation, calm themselves, and develop adaptive responses. Negative self-talk may increase self-blame, anxiety, and feelings of failure (Kustiawan et al., n.d.).

For final-year students experiencing delayed graduation, self-talk may appear in various forms. Some students use self-talk to remind themselves to continue working on their thesis. Others use it to express frustration, regulate emotions, or accept their condition. Thus, self-talk is not only a motivational tool but also a space where students negotiate meaning with themselves (Purnamasari et al., n.d.).

METHOD

Research Design

This study uses a qualitative descriptive approach. This approach was chosen because the research aims to understand the subjective experiences of final-year students who experience delayed graduation. The qualitative approach allows the researcher to explore how students interpret their delayed graduation, how they evaluate themselves, and how intrapersonal communication occurs within them (Moleong, 2019).

The object of this study is the intrapersonal communication process of final-year students who experience delayed graduation. The research was conducted at UPN Veteran Jawa Timur because the institution provides a relevant context for understanding the experiences of students from various departments who have exceeded the ideal study period.

Informants

The informants in this study were selected through purposive sampling. The criteria for informants were:

1. final-year students of UPN Veteran Jawa Timur;
2. students who had exceeded the ideal study period of four years or eight semesters;
3. students who were still in the process of completing their thesis or final project;
4. students who were willing to participate in in-depth interviews.

RESULT

The findings show that delayed graduation among the informants was caused by different factors. Some informants experienced delay due to internal factors such as fear, lack of assertiveness, procrastination, psychological distress, low motivation, and difficulty managing priorities. Other informants experienced delay due to external factors such as institutional policy changes, administrative systems, supervisors, financial issues, family responsibilities, work demands, and health conditions.

Although the causes varied, all informants showed internal processes in understanding and responding to their delayed graduation. This indicates that delayed graduation was not only experienced as an academic condition but also as an internal experience that shaped how students felt, interpreted, remembered, and thought about themselves.

Sensation: Initial Emotional Responses to Delayed Graduation

The first stage of intrapersonal communication appeared through sensation. In this study, sensation refers to the initial emotional response experienced by students when they realized that they were not graduating on time. The findings show that the informants experienced different sensations, including regret, sadness, pessimism, disappointment, discomfort, and emotional pressure (Goldstein, 2014).

Some informants felt regret because they believed they had made ineffective academic decisions in the past. Others felt sadness because delayed graduation created additional financial burdens for their families.

Some informants felt pessimistic and wanted to give up because the thesis process seemed difficult and uncertain. Meanwhile, several informants experienced more neutral sensations because they perceived their delay as being caused mainly by external systems rather than personal failure.

These findings indicate that sensation becomes the starting point of intrapersonal communication. The emotional response experienced by students does not stop as a feeling, but develops into self-evaluation and meaning-making.

Perception: Self-Evaluation and Meaning-Making

The second stage is perception. After experiencing initial emotional responses, the informants began to interpret the meaning of delayed graduation. The findings show three major forms of self-perception.

First, some students developed self-blaming perceptions. They interpreted delayed graduation as evidence that they were not disciplined, not capable enough, not diligent, or not successful. In this pattern, delayed graduation was not only understood as an academic delay but also as a sign of personal deficiency.

Second, some students developed reflective acceptance. They acknowledged that they were delayed, but they did not interpret it as total failure. Instead, they saw delayed graduation as part of a broader life process. For example, students who had family responsibilities or personal life transitions

tended to interpret the delay as a consequence of complex life circumstances.

Third, some students maintained stable self-perception. This pattern appeared among informants who attributed their delay to external factors such as administrative systems, policy changes, or unclear academic procedures. These students experienced frustration, but they did not direct negative judgment toward themselves.

These findings show that the same academic experience may produce different meanings depending on how students interpret the source of the problem.

Memory: Past Experiences as the Basis of Self-Interpretation

The third stage is memory. The findings show that students' perceptions of delayed graduation were strongly influenced by past experiences. Informants connected their current condition with previous academic decisions, personal experiences, social experiences, family responsibilities, psychological conditions, and institutional experiences.

Three forms of memory appeared in the findings. First, memory functioned as a source of regret. Some students remembered past decisions that they considered wrong, such as not taking internship and fieldwork at the same time, delaying thesis consultation, or choosing other activities over academic responsibilities. These memories strengthened self-blaming perceptions.

Second, memory functioned as a source of learning and acceptance. Some students used past experiences to understand that their delay was part of a broader life process. In this pattern, memory helped students accept their condition and focus on continuing their study rather than being trapped in regret.

Third, memory functioned as the basis of external attribution. Some students remembered institutional barriers such as unclear information, administrative procedures, policy changes, or academic systems. These memories helped them understand that delayed graduation was not caused entirely by personal weakness.

Thus, memory is not a passive storage of past events. It actively shapes how students interpret their current condition.

Thinking and Self-Talk: Internal Dialogue in Facing Delayed Graduation

The fourth stage is thinking. In this study, thinking was mainly reflected through self-talk. The findings

show that self-talk functioned as a way for students to manage emotions, strengthen motivation, express frustration, and direct future action.

Some informants used self-talk as self-reinforcement. They reminded themselves that graduating late did not mean they had failed completely. They also used journaling, mirror talk, and internal reflection to build acceptance.

Other informants used self-talk to calm themselves. Although their internal dialogue often began with negative thoughts, they gradually redirected themselves to continue working on their thesis. Some informants used phrases such as "it is okay," "just continue," or "I can do this" as internal encouragement.

There were also informants who used self-talk as emotional release. In this form, self-talk became a space to express frustration toward the situation. However, this did not always lead to negative self-perception, especially when the student attributed the delay to external factors.

The findings also show that not all students relied on verbal self-talk. One informant tended to respond directly to the situation without engaging in much internal verbal dialogue. This indicates that the manifestation of intrapersonal communication may differ among individuals.

DISCUSSION

The findings show that delayed graduation functions as a stimulus that activates intrapersonal communication. When students realize that they are not graduating on time, they begin to face themselves internally. This process begins with emotional sensation, develops into perception, is strengthened by memory, and is processed through thinking and self-talk.

This finding supports the concept of intrapersonal communication as an internal process involving sensation, perception, memory, and thinking. However, this study also shows that these stages do not always occur in a rigid or linear sequence. Instead, they are dynamic and recursive. A student's self-talk may reshape perception, while memory may intensify emotional sensation. Therefore, intrapersonal communication should be understood as an ongoing internal process.

The findings indicate that students' initial sensations strongly influence their self-perception. Students who felt regret, sadness, or pessimism tended

to develop more negative self-evaluations. They questioned their discipline, intelligence, responsibility, or academic ability. On the other hand, students who perceived the cause of delay as external tended to maintain more stable self-perception.

This shows that emotional responses are not separate from meaning-making. Feelings become the starting point for how students judge themselves. In delayed graduation, emotional sensation may either lead to self-blame or become an entry point for reflection and acceptance.

Memory plays an important role in shaping students' interpretation of delayed graduation. Students do not only respond to the present situation; they also recall and reinterpret past experiences. Past academic decisions, personal life events, social experiences, and institutional barriers become materials for internal reflection.

For some students, memory strengthens regret. They repeatedly think about what they should have done differently. For others, memory becomes a source of learning that helps them accept their condition. Meanwhile, for students who experienced institutional barriers, memory helps them place the cause of delay outside themselves. This finding shows that memory is subjective and interpretive. The same act of remembering can produce different meanings depending on the student's self-positioning.

Self-talk appeared as an important manifestation of thinking. The findings show that self-talk is not always positive. Some students initially engaged in negative self-talk, such as blaming themselves or questioning their ability. However, over time, several students developed more reflective and constructive self-talk.

Self-talk helped students regulate emotions, maintain motivation, and redirect their focus toward study completion. It also became a space where students negotiated meaning with themselves. Through self-talk, students tried to convince themselves that delayed graduation did not necessarily mean failure. Therefore, self-talk functions not only as a coping mechanism but also as a process of meaning reconstruction.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the intrapersonal communication process of final-year students experiencing delayed graduation at UPN Veteran Jawa Timur occurs dynamically through the stages of sensation, perception, memory, and thinking. Delayed

graduation first appears as an academic condition, but it develops into an internal experience that shapes how students feel, evaluate themselves, recall past experiences, and determine future actions.

The sensation stage is reflected in various emotional responses such as regret, sadness, pessimism, disappointment, and frustration. These emotional responses then develop into perception, where students interpret delayed graduation either as personal failure, part of a reflective life process, or the result of external barriers. Memory strengthens this perception by connecting current delay with past academic decisions, personal experiences, family responsibilities, psychological conditions, and institutional systems. The thinking stage is mainly manifested through self-talk, which functions as emotional regulation, self-reinforcement, reflection, and motivation.

The study also finds that intrapersonal communication does not occur in a strictly linear pattern. The stages influence one another and may repeat over time. Self-talk may reshape perception, memory may intensify emotion, and perception may determine how students interpret their past experiences. Therefore, intrapersonal communication among delayed final-year students is subjective, contextual, and continuously developing.

This study suggests that students should develop more constructive internal dialogue to reduce excessive self-blame and maintain motivation in completing their studies. Universities are also encouraged to provide academic and psychological support for delayed final-year students, especially through mentoring, counseling, and clearer academic information systems. The limitation of this study lies in its focus on one university and a limited number of informants. Future research may compare students from different universities, examine gender or departmental differences, or explore the role of social media comparison in shaping intrapersonal communication among delayed students.

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