Assessing Communication Skills Among Third-Semester Students in the Religious Extension Education Program

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ABSTRACT

Communication is a vital component in religious extension education, as it determines the success of delivering religious messages to society. This study aims to evaluate the effectiveness of communication assessment implementation for third-semester students of the Religious Extension Education Program at IAKN Tarutung. A qualitative approach with a descriptive method was employed to gain an in-depth understanding of the communication evaluation process and its impact on students' mastery of communication theory and practice. Data were collected through observation, interviews, and field practice documentation. The findings reveal that communication evaluation—implemented through written assignments, group discussions, presentations, and religious counseling simulations—significantly improved students' communication competencies. Students became more confident, skilled in message structuring, and adaptive to diverse audiences. However, challenges remain, including limited practical facilities and insufficient integration of digital technology in the evaluation process. Therefore, the study recommends strengthening technology-based approaches and providing intensive training in the use of digital media as tools for religious communication. A contextually designed and future-oriented communication evaluation will serve as a strategic foundation in shaping professional, communicative, and socially responsive religious counselors. The findings are also expected to inform curriculum development and teaching methods in similar academic programs.

Keywords: communication evaluation, religious extension education, communication skills

1. INTRODUCTION

Communication serves as a fundamental element in the process of conveying information, particularly in the field of religious counseling. In this context, the success of religious message delivery is not merely dependent on the content of the material but is critically shaped by how that message is communicated to the audience. Therefore, effective communication becomes the cornerstone of successful religious outreach. A

well-executed communication strategy enables meaningful two-way interaction between the religious counselor and the community, ensuring that religious messages are not only heard but also understood, internalized, and appropriately responded to (McQuail, 2010). This dynamic requires religious counselors to possess strong communication skills — both verbal and non-verbal — so that messages can be fully received by audiences from diverse backgrounds (Tubbs & Moss, 2008). Within the sphere of higher education, particularly in the Religious Extension Education Program, mastering communication theory alone is insufficient without the integration of practical communication skills. Students are expected not only to comprehend communication concepts at a theoretical level but also to apply them effectively in real-world contexts, such as delivering sermons, engaging with communities, or facilitating religious discussions (Effendy, 2003). This highlights the need for communication evaluation as an integral part of the learning process. Such evaluations aim not only to measure students' cognitive understanding of lecture content but also to assess the extent to which they can develop and apply the communication skills necessary for their future roles as religious counselors.

The third semester of the Religious Extension Education Program is considered a pivotal phase in shaping students' communication competencies. At this stage, students are gradually introduced to more active engagement in religious communication practices. These include structured assignments such as oral presentations, simulated counseling sessions, and participation in community-based religious development programs. Communication evaluations conducted at this level should be systematically designed, encompassing both verbal aspects — such as clarity of message, tone, and word choice — and non-verbal elements such as facial expressions, body language, and eye contact (DeVito, 2013). Furthermore, a comprehensive evaluation must take into account three essential learning domains: cognitive, affective, and psychomotor (Bloom, 1956). The cognitive domain assesses knowledge and understanding of communication theories; the affective domain evaluates students' attitudes and emotional expressions during communication; and the psychomotor domain measures their ability to physically

perform effective communication techniques. This holistic approach ensures that students' development is well-rounded and aligns with the professional standards expected in religious extension.

Effective communication in religious education not only enhances the learning experience but also contributes significantly to the formation of students' character and spiritual values. Students who demonstrate strong communication skills are generally more confident in delivering religious messages and more capable of adapting their communication styles to suit the characteristics of various audiences (Berlo, 1960). This adaptability is crucial, especially given the increasing complexity of religious outreach in the modern era—characterized by cultural diversity, pluralistic thinking, and vast access to information (Hybels & Weaver, 2012). As such, students' communication abilities must be continuously refined and evaluated to prepare them as agents of spiritual and social transformation within their communities. The purpose of this study is to explore and analyze how communication evaluation can enhance the communication competencies of third-semester students in the Religious Extension Education Program. The central focus of this research includes two key aspects: (1) students' understanding of communication theory and (2) their ability to practice communication effectively. By investigating the effectiveness of communication evaluation methods currently employed, this study aims to identify the most appropriate instructional strategies to improve students' communication quality—both in academic settings and in real-world religious engagement.

Moreover, the outcomes of this research are expected to serve as a reference for curriculum development and evaluation methods in similar academic programs. Insights gained from this study can inform educators and curriculum designers on how to design communication modules and assessment tools that better prepare students to become professional, communicative, and ethically grounded religious extension worker. By fostering such competencies, educational institutions can ensure that their graduates are not only knowledgeable in religious matters but are also equipped with the

communication skills necessary to make a meaningful impact in diverse and dynamic societal contexts. The development of communication competence among students in religious counseling education must be approached comprehensively and strategically. Evaluation should not be treated as a one-time assessment tool but as a continuous process that guides students toward excellence in both theory and practice. Through this approach, religious counseling education can fulfill its mission of preparing future leaders who are not only spiritually mature but also skilled communicators capable of addressing the complexities of religious life in the 21st century.

2. RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs a qualitative approach with a descriptive method. This approach was chosen because it aligns with the research objective: to gain a deep understanding of the actual conditions occurring within a specific group, object, or phenomenon. The descriptive method in this context is intended to present a systematic, factual, and accurate depiction of various facts, characteristics, and interrelationships among the phenomena being studied. Descriptive qualitative research allows the researcher to explore and interpret the meanings embedded in particular social situations without relying on statistical measurements or numerical calculations. According to Kirk and Miller (1986), the qualitative approach originates from quantitative observation, which emphasizes the measurement of the degree or level of a characteristic. However, in the qualitative context, the primary focus is on understanding the meaning behind the phenomenon, rather than the frequency of its occurrence. Observations are conducted intensively and in-depth so that the researcher can fully comprehend the context and background of the subject under study. This approach also allows for flexibility in exploring complex social dynamics and provides room for broader interpretation of emerging phenomena. Referring to the views of Strauss and Corbin (1990), qualitative research is a process aimed at understanding the meaning, structure, and patterns of

social interaction based on empirical data obtained directly from the field, without the use of statistical or quantitative procedures. Therefore, this approach is considered most appropriate for providing a deep and holistic description of how a phenomenon unfolds in real-life settings, particularly within the context of education and religious communication.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results and discussion of this study focus on the implementation of communication evaluation among third-semester students in the Religious Extension Education Program, aimed at enhancing both theoretical understanding and practical skills in delivering religious messages. Communication evaluation itself is understood as a systematic process that includes collecting, analyzing, and presenting information regarding the effectiveness of communication activities (Cutlip, Center, & Broom, 2006). The primary purpose of this evaluation is to identify the extent to which communication messages have achieved their objectives and how the process can be improved in both academic and practical contexts. In the context of higher education, communication evaluation plays a central role as it not only relates to conceptual understanding but also to students' practical ability to convey messages effectively. Based on the research findings, the communication evaluation components for third-semester students include mastery of communication theory, speaking skills, and listening skills. Students demonstrated significant improvement following the application of evaluation methods based on group discussions and religious extension simulations (Miles & Huberman, 1994). During group discussions, students were encouraged to engage with concepts such as communication models, communication barriers, interpersonal techniques, and contextual differences in delivering religious messages. Religious extension simulations also proved effective in fostering deeper practical understanding.

The benefits of communication evaluation were evident in three main aspects. First, students showed increased understanding of communication theories. They became more sensitive to concepts such as two-way communication, persuasive communication, and cross-cultural communication (Littlejohn & Foss, 2009). Second, direct simulation practices enhanced students' skills in dealing with heterogeneous audiences. In these exercises, students not only learned to organize religious content but also how to respond to their audience with appropriate approaches. Third, communication evaluation boosted students' confidence. They felt more prepared and comfortable speaking publicly because they were accustomed to receiving feedback from lecturers and peers during the evaluation process. Nevertheless, the process of implementing communication evaluation faced several challenges. One common obstacle was students' discomfort when practicing direct communication. Some experienced difficulties in naturally using body language or adjusting voice intonation to fit the message context (DeVito, 2013). Another barrier was related to inadequate facilities and infrastructure. The lack of practice spaces, visual aids, or communication support media hindered the optimization of the evaluation process. Moreover, limited time in the classroom setting also posed constraints on conducting a thorough and in-depth evaluation.

In today's digital era, communication evaluation still requires enhancement to align with technological advancements. Students as future religious extension agents need to be trained to use digital media as effective communication tools. The study found that media such as short videos, podcasts, or social media platforms could serve as relevant alternatives for conveying religious messages to digital-native audiences (Castells, 2010). Unfortunately, such approaches have not yet been fully integrated into the communication evaluation process. Curriculum renewal and evaluation strategies are needed to promote the use of information technology in religious extension practices. Functionally, communication evaluation serves as a tool to measure the effectiveness of students' responses during learning activities. Through evaluation, it becomes possible to determine whether messages have been well received and understood by the audience.

Evaluation also functions as a reflective tool to improve future communication plans and strategies. Additionally, evaluation supports the academic reputation of the study program by demonstrating that students genuinely experience quality improvement (Patton, 2002). In the long term, evaluation results serve as the basis for developing more comprehensive and adaptive communication strategies.

The communication evaluation stages applied in this study involved several key steps. First, a review of the initial communication objectives was conducted to ensure alignment with achieved outcomes. Second, measurement indicators were specifically determined, such as changes in understanding, attitudes, and communication skills among students (Rossi, Lipsey, & Freeman, 2004). Third, data collection was carried out through classroom observations, student interviews, and documentation of simulation practices. Fourth, the collected data were qualitatively analyzed to identify communication effectiveness patterns throughout the learning process. Lastly, the analysis results were used to formulate strategic recommendations, such as integrating digital communication technologies, enhancing non-verbal communication training, and developing contextual religious extension media. In an interview with the first respondent, Abdy Ray Hutahaean, a third-semester student of the Religious Extension Education Program, it was revealed that communication evaluation significantly contributed to learning quality. He stated that the evaluation practices not only broadened his knowledge but also strengthened his presentation skills and audience interaction. Evaluation opened opportunities to receive direct feedback from lecturers and peers, which he considered essential for personal growth as a prospective religious extensionist. He emphasized the need for continuous evaluation to develop competent graduates who are prepared to face societal challenges.

Meanwhile, the second respondent, Narti Debora, also a third-semester student in the same program, explained that communication evaluation was implemented through various methods such as written assignments, group presentations, discussions, and practical exercises. According to her, the evaluation process encouraged students to think

critically, construct appropriate arguments, and organize strategic message delivery. She viewed direct religious extension practices as the most effective evaluation method because they provide real-world experiences in dealing with complex audience dynamics. Additionally, she recommended that digital technology be more intensively integrated into the evaluation process, as future communication increasingly relies on digital platforms. Based on the research findings and interviews, it can be concluded that communication evaluation plays a significant role in improving the quality of learning, particularly in the third semester of the Religious Extension Education Program. This evaluation is not only academic but also contextual and practical, encompassing the cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains of students. Evaluation allows students to merge theory with practice, build confidence, and enhance readiness to serve as religious extensionists in real-world settings. However, to achieve optimal results, communication evaluation must be continuously developed in terms of methods, facilities, and technological approaches. The integration of digital-based communication evaluation, provision of adequate practice facilities, and training in non-verbal communication skills are essential steps to ensure the sustainability and effectiveness of evaluation in shaping professional, relevant, and responsive religious extension practitioners.

4. CONCLUSION

The findings of this study affirm that the implementation of communication evaluation for third-semester students of the Religious Extension Education Program at IAKN Tarutung significantly contributes to enhancing their communication competencies, both in theoretical understanding and practical application. The evaluation methods—ranging from written assignments, presentations, group discussions, to field practice—have proven effective in refining students' verbal and non-verbal communication skills. Students are not only required to comprehend key communication concepts within the context of religious extension but are also placed in real-life situations that demand the

use of contextual and adaptive communication strategies. This has a positive impact on their readiness to serve as future religious extension workers who are capable of conveying religious messages clearly, convincingly, and in ways that meet the needs of diverse communities. Amid the rapid advancement of technology and the digitalization of information, communication evaluation also requires continual adaptation. One of the key findings of this research highlights the need to integrate digital technology into the communication evaluation process. Students should be equipped with training on how to use digital media—such as educational videos, podcasts, and social media platforms—as relevant tools for religious extension that resonate with today's generation. Consequently, the study recommends the enhancement of technology-based evaluation approaches and the provision of regular supplementary training programs to ensure students remain in step with contemporary developments. An effective, contextual, and adaptive communication evaluation strategy can thus serve as a crucial means for shaping communicative, responsive, and well-prepared religious extension agents, capable of ministering in an increasingly digital and complex society.

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