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# The Principles of Islamic Communication on Reference Services at the Indonesian Trade Training Center Library

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#### Abstract

Communication is a thing that can not be separated from library activities. All library services rely on communication to interact with their users, especially reference services. Communication in reference services is personal, so the application of interpersonal communication skills must be owned by the reference librarian. Interpersonal communication is regulated and exemplified in Islam, with the Qur'an and Hadith. In the library environment, the principles of Islamic communication can certainly be applied by the librarian. This paper discusses using Islamic communication principles for referral services at the Trade Training Center Library, Ministry of Trade of the Republic of Indonesia. The qualitative method with a case study approach is carried out in the research, where the data was collected by interviewing librarians and users in the library. This study shows that the librarian of the reference service to the users at the Library of the Trade Training Center of the Republic of Indonesia applies the principles of Islamic communication in interacting with users, which include: qaulan sadidan (speaking honestly), qaulan baligha (speaking clearly), qaulan ma'rufa (talking with wise), qaulan karma (speaking with noble words), qaulan layyina (speaking gently), and qaulan maysura (speaking politely). In addition, librarians uphold the principles of ukhuwah islamiyah (creating good relations with users) and tabbayun (always cross-checking on developing information).

*Keywords*: interpersonal communication, Islamic communication principles, reference services, information service

#### Abstrak

Komunikasi merupakan hal yang tidak dapat dipisahkan dari kegiatan perpustakaan. Semua layanan perpustakaan mengandalkan komunikasi untuk berinteraksi dengan penggunanya, terutama layanan referensi. Komunikasi dalam layanan referensi bersifat personal, sehingga penerapan keterampilan komunikasi interpersonal harus dimiliki oleh pustakawan referensi. Komunikasi interpersonal diatur dan dicontohkan dalam Islam, dengan Al-Qur'an dan Hadist. Di lingkungan perpustakaan, prinsip-prinsip komunikasi Islami tentunya dapat diterapkan oleh pustakawan. Tulisan ini membahas tentang penerapan prinsip komunikasi Islami pada layanan rujukan di Perpustakaan Pusdiklat Kementerian Perdagangan Republik Indonesia. Metode kualitatif dengan pendekatan dilakukan dalam penelitian, dimana data dikumpulkan dengan studi kasus mewawancarai pustakawan dan pengguna di perpustakaan. Penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa pustakawan layanan referensi kepada pengguna di Perpustakaan Pusat Pelatihan Perdagangan Republik Indonesia menerapkan prinsip-prinsip komunikasi Islam dalam berinteraksi dengan pengguna, yang meliputi: qaulan sadidan (berbicara jujur), qaulan baligha (berbicara dengan jelas), qaulan ma'rufa (berbicara dengan bijak), qaulan karma (berbicara dengan kata-kata mulia), qaulan layyina (berbicara dengan lembut), dan qaulan maysura (berbicara dengan sopan). Selain itu, pustakawan menjunjung tinggi prinsip ukhuwah islamiyah (menciptakan hubungan baik dengan pengguna) dan tabbayun (selalu cross-checking dalam mengembangkan informasi).

Kata Kunci: komunikasi interpersonal, prinsip-prinsip komunikasi Islam, layanan referensi, layanan informasi

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#### **INTRODUCTION**

The study of communication and library science has been intertwined for a long time since the emergence of studies on information-seeking behaviour in the 10940s to studies that focus on the services of libraries and librarianship (Lund, 2021). We cannot deny that communication plays a vital role in all activities in the library, whether communication between librarians and library users, between librarians, or communication between libraries. The daily activities in the library run smoothly because of the exchange of views and information through communication.

Library service activities that need communication in their activities are reference services. Reference services and information exchange between library users and reference librarians. In reference, the library is not only focused on efforts to collect and manage printed or non-printed collections such as those by IFLA (Daryono, 2018). Still, personally provides assistance tailored to the users' needs and acts as a bridge between the library and users (Adeoye, Oladokun, & Opalere, 2021). This reference service starts by providing guidance and directing to the sources of information needed so that these users can make decisions regarding information that can support or help solve the problems they face.

Library users will find it easier to get various information quickly, precisely, and accurately on referral services because there are librarians who can handle user requests and also collect and analyze information sources needed by users. So the library needs the support of qualified human resources (HR) in service referrals. Good communication is the ability to obtain more information about everything related to the information users need, from the subject and media of information to the form that suits the user. In addition, good communication skills allow librarians to interact with library users with different characters and personalities so that nothing happens in delivering information that users need.

If considered objectively, in an interaction in the library, communication positively impacts common problems and can cause or even exacerbate problems. In interaction, communication ethics is needed so that communication is not only carried out as a speaking activity but also as a medium for exchanging information that is full of meaning and taste and brings happiness to every actor (Susanto, 2016). From an Islamic perspective, ethics based on the Qur'an and examples of practitioners of Islamic communication principles are exemplified directly by the Prophet Muhammad as the best communicator in the universe. In Islam, communication is seen as an effort to build a vertical relationship with



Allah SWT (*hablumminallah*) and also to establish horizontal communication, namely relationships with fellow humans (*hablumminanas*) (Susanto, 2016). Communication to Allah SWT is done by carrying out obligatory worship activities and sunnah. Meanwhile, communication with fellow human beings is done by building social relationships (*muamalah*), manifested in the social, political, economic, and so on, which aims to create and develop human welfare.

# **RESEARCH METHODS**

This paper is the result of research conducted in 2021, carried out qualitatively with a case study approach. Data was collected by interviewing librarians and users. This approach and method aim to identify and obtain an overview of the application of Islamic communication principles in reference services at the Commerce Training Center Library of the Ministry of Trade of the Republic of Indonesia. Interviews were conducted using zoom media, whats app, and direct messages on Instagram. In addition, interviews were also conducted with library users through zoom media. This method is done because there are restrictions on direct interaction during the Covid pandemic

# **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

#### **Communication Concept**

Communication has emerged since the presence of humans on this earth. Humans, as social beings, will not be able to live alone. Humans always live together and will constantly interact with other humans. In the interaction, humans will communicate in their way and style. Communication developed into science two thousand years ago, starting with the works of Aristotle and Plato, which taught the science of rhetoric as a tool for communicating and interacting between humans (Hartono, 2016).

Etymologically, communication comes from the Latin word *communicatus*, which means "to make together" or "to share" and is terminology defined as a process of exchanging meaning between individuals through a system of symbols, signs, or the same behaviour (Pearson, Nelson, Titsworth, & Hosek, 2016). In communication, information is exchanged, be it ideas, knowledge, or news. This information exchange is carried out between two or more individuals or organizations, which can be seen as a form of meaning exchange through a system of symbols, signs, or behavior. Cole and Kelly (2011) further explain communication as the process, transmission, and creation of ideas, facts, opinions, and feelings. Communication can channel various media; in the form of circulars or verbally, namely mere verbal communication and actions

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(Owoeye & Dahunsi, 2014). Communication is said to be successful if the recipient can understand the information communicated (Stovall & Hull, 2016).

Communication is an activity that is carried out continuously, and this is done because humans will always interact and relate to other humans. Fernback (2019) explains that communication is something abstract in which there is value and although not in a concrete form. This communication is dynamic, involving different processes, ways, and structures; its nature is complex, and no communication is duplicated in the same form persists in every delivery. Every person or organization has a distinctive style of communication following the circumstances of the environment, time, expertise, status, attitude, experience, and feelings when communication is carried out.

There are several components in communication, among others: (1) People involved in communication, namely the sender of the message (communicator) and also the recipient of the message (communicant); (2) the message that is conveyed or wants to be communicated, both in verbal and non-verbal form of ideas, thoughts, or feelings; (3) The media that is the means of the message is moving; (4) Feedback in the form of verbal or non-verbal responses delivered by the recipient to the message conveyed; (5) Code in the form of systematization of symbols used to create meaning in the mind of another person or persons. This code can be in the form of words, phrases, and sentences into "symbols" that are used to evoke images, thoughts, and ideas in the minds of others; (6) Encoding and decoding, where encoding is translating ideas or thoughts into code, while decoding is the process of giving meaning to those ideas or thoughts.; (7) Noise is any disturbance in the encoding and decoding process that reduces message interference, and this can hinder the communication process; (8) The situation or context of communication, in the form of the dimensions of time and space of delivery, and also the value of the message conveyed (Aw, 2011; Pearson et al., 2016).

#### **Communication in the Library**

The library cannot be separated from communication as an information service institution. Libraries must continue communicating with users and other library institutions to understand the needs, wants, and trends of information media services. Furthermore, the library will try to provide information and information service media that are relevant and under the needs of its users. In the library, the librarian acts as a medium or communicator to communicate with other parties. Professionally, librarians communicate on behalf of the library. If we look at communication activities in the library, it can be seen from the interaction



between librarians and librarians and library users.

Interpersonal communication is an interactive process between individuals in a mutually beneficial way; there is a process of building relationships to understand each other (Anyim, 2018). Anyim (2018) explains further that in library services, especially reference services, interpersonal communication relationships are built with a consistent perfect understanding of information needs. In this case, interpersonal communication is personal, in which the communicators (librarians and users) at least know their identity more profoundly and know each person's needs and abilities or expertise.

Interpersonal communication has a social function that is emphasized in the perspective of human relations in organizations, whose goal is to capture the hearts and minds of organizational members to build effective coordination to realize the vision and mission of the organization collectively (Yildiz, 2012). Owoeye and Dahunsi (2014) also state that interpersonal communication is a vital force in the organization for achieving goals and facilitating sharing of information, experience, and knowledge, and the transmission of ideas decision making, coordination, and interpretation of Activities.

Refers to the Buber's poem delivered in 1970, Schweitzer and Wood (2017) reveal seven characteristics of interpersonal communication, namely:

- Selective, this interpersonal communication relationship is personal and intimate so that everyone will choose or select the parties who will relate to him.
- Systemic, interpersonal communication is carried out with certain systems and procedures according to the communication culture of the people who interact
- 3) Unique, in a deeper relationship of interaction and communication related to the social role of people interacting in one's life.
- 4) Continuous, interpersonal communication is always in process, where communication will develop and improve personal from time to time.
- 5) Interactive, interpersonal communication that requires reciprocity between the communicative communicant and the communicant requires a reaction to the message conveyed between the two parties.
- 6) Personal, interpersonal communication fosters personal knowledge and insight. To connect as a unique individual who is different from others, everyone must know other people personally and understand their thoughts and feelings.
- 7) Meaningful, where the practice of interpersonal communication is not just trying to exchange words but creating meaning when understanding the

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meaning of words and the interlocutor's behavior.

If we look at the characteristic points above, interpersonal communication in the library must pay attention to self-image (identity, expression, and behavior), both from the communicator and communicant side. The self-image will affect the way or model of communication between the two. In libraries, especially in reference services, both librarians and users have characteristics attached to each of them that form their image as communicants or communicators. Here, both know each other through verbal communication or by looking at each other's behavior. This way, both parties will get to know each other personally. The more often librarians and users engage in direct interpersonal communication, the deeper their relationship. The interaction can continue outside the library or when users rarely or even no longer come to the library.

#### Interpersonal communication from an Islamic perspective

In the Islamic perspective, interpersonal communication occurs because humans always interact, and Islam is a religion based on communication. Muhammad and Omer (2016) explained that basically, the Qur'an has provided examples of possible forms of communication, namely:

- 1) Verbal communication, namely communication that presents thoughts, emotions, desires, and desires through conversation and speaking directly. This communication model is explained in Surah Al Qasas verse 34 "*And my brother Harun is more eloquent in his tongue than I am, so send him with me as my assistant to justify my (words); Indeed, I fear that they will deny me*" and Surah Ibrahim verse 4 "*We did not send any messenger except (speaking) in the language of his people so that he would convey the message clearly to them*". This communication is the easiest and simplest communication but the most efficient. If the communicator fails to represent thoughts effectively, it can result in effective communication.
- 2) Non-verbal communication, namely communication that displays emotions, feelings, and thoughts without speaking, through gestures and various body movements, for example, head movements, arm movements, eyes, etc. This example of communication is directly exemplified by the Prophet Muhammad. in their interactions with other people. Based on what convey in various hadiths, The companions of the Prophet knew the reluctance and disapproval of the Prophet Muhammad from the cheeks, the eyes, and the colour on his face. Various Taqreeri hadiths justify the Apostle's calm, polite, and positive attitude in interacting with other people.

According to Islamic teachings, communication ethics always uses the commands and prohibitions of Allah SWT, which are sourced from the Qur'an and the Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad. The Qur'an also mentions communication as human nature. However, it does not explicitly explain the principles of communicating clearly, but many verses provide instructions on the principles of communication between humans, especially in interpersonal communication (Mubarok & Adnjani, 2014). There are six words in the Quran that can be used as a reference for communication, namely:

- Qaulan Sadidan, speaking honestly as a condition for achieving the truth of charity. It is explained in the Qur'an letter An Nisa verse 9, which means that communication requires honesty and truth. The delivery of the message is based on existing data and facts, and the source of information is clear.
- 2) Qaulan Maysura, speaking politely, not ignoring others, and not bringing up existing improvements to help others. This ethics follows what is explained in the Qur'an QS Al Isra 28, which teaches to teach someone if you want to refuse help from others, whatever the game, then you must say it with good quotes and rational and polite reasons. Here communication must convey a pleasant or relieving message that does not disappoint the interlocutor.
- 3) Qaulan Layyinan, speaking gently, persuasively, understanding the other person, and being able to control emotions even though it doesn't go according to expectations. This aspect is contained in the Qur'an letter Thoha verse 44, where with this communication, it is hoped that the information will be well received by the interlocutor and also be able to be influenced by the information conveyed. The interlocutor is expected to change his views, attitudes, and behavior.
- 4) Qaulan Kariman, speaking with noble words and message content in a good and respectful way. It is explained in the Qur'an that the letter Al Isra 'verse 23 politely chooses that the communicator is happy so that the communicant feels and is glorified.
- 5) Qaulan Ma'rufa speaks wisely and conveys messages with good, not rude, friendly expressions or feelings even when discussing a matter that they dislikes. It is explained in the Qur'an that the letter An Nisa verse 8 mainly applies not only to the spoken language but also to paying attention to body movements when conveying messages. The values that apply in society should be followed in spoken language, and body movement should be adjusted so that communicants and communicators must see who

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and where they interact.

6) Qaulan Baligha, which is speaking with a clear, clear, and precise meaning of the expression. It is explained in the Qur'an that the letter An Nisa verse 63, where communication can be said to be baligha if all messages are accommodated in the sentences conveyed, the delivery is not wordy, uses words that are familiar to the communicant's ears, the delivery style is following the way of communication and communicative attitude, and also use good grammar.

(Hefni, 2017; Mubarok & Adnjani, 2014; N. Muhammad & Omer, 2016; Na'imah & Septiningsih, 2019)

If we look at the principles of Islamic communication above, these principles uphold the values of mutual respect and appreciation; spreading words of love and affection; the value of justice and balance; respect and appreciation; clinging to virtue; the importance of diversity and freedom; prioritizing tolerance and swallowing; help each other and finally the obligation to keep promises (Khalil, 2016). With this principle, it is hoped that communication and its message can be conveyed and received properly. Anything that interferes with the possible lack of messages and things that enable the communication process can be avoided.

# The Trade Training Center Library of the Republic of Indonesia

The Trade Training Center Library is a library under the umbrella of the Ministry of Trade of the Republic of Indonesia. The Trade Training Center Library opens services for Ministry of Trade staff, training participants, education and training alumni, and the general public. The Trade Center for Education and Training Library was first established in 1973, located at the Education and Training Campus/ADIP, Jl. S. Parman Grogol, West Jakarta, with only 2 (two) employees who manage the library and has 150 titles with 400 copies. Several times the location of the Trade Center for Education and Training has moved so that the library has also moved. In 2009, the library finally occupied one of the rooms on the first floor of the new Pusdiklat Commerce building in Depok, West Java. As of December 2020, the number of book collections in the Commerce Training Center Library is 4,500 titles with 7,384 copies, with the two managing librarians.

This library is a special library where the librarian has the task of not only managing the collection but also being able to act as a reference librarian. Here the librarians of the Trade Training Center of the Ministry of Trade of the Republic of Indonesia have good communication skills. If we refer to quality



based on LibQual's assessment, the library must have a service influence value and information control (Fatmawati, 2016). In that case, communication has a big role in library services, especially reference services. The librarians of the Trade Education and Training Center library of the Ministry of Trade of the Republic of Indonesia master the principles of interpersonal communication so that each librarian can serve the user personally, and the information and user guide can be carried out properly.

# The attitudes of librarians of the Trade Training Center Library: a form of application of Islamic communication principles

The librarian in the reference service section at the Trade Training Center Library shows empathy for the difficulties faced by library users, such as when they have difficulty using OPAC. The librarian explains the effective use of OPAC. Besides that, librarians also guide library users in finding effective reading materials available in the library's OPAC. The librarian explained the library, OPAC, and library's collections in a friendly manner. Friendliness in conveying the information that the author of the message can provide a sense of comfort during the communication.

Trade Training Center Library librarians started good communication with users. They openly accept users' questions and provide fast, friendly, and responsive responses. From library profile questions, collections, and requests to teach Information, including how to use and how to find reading material effectively in the library's OPAC, and so on, were responded to very patiently and used the vocabulary that library users. The answers given by the librarian are also very easy to reach and follow the principles of Islamic communication.

The form of communication carried out by the librarian is not wordy, right on target, and does not once attack the person who asks them. They never once shouted and did not patronize in explaining even though the user did not understand and would repeat the explanation until the user understood and understood the explanation. Librarians can also create a harmonious and comfortable atmosphere when users need guidance from the librarian. So with this, all the information users get becomes easy to accept. The librarians are friendly and ready to serve users' needs anytime, regardless of ethnic background, religion, race, education, age, and economic status. The librarians of the Trade Training Center Library have applied the principles of Islamic communication, including communicating with good, gentle, and targeted language so that it does not cause double meaning (*qaulan sadida, qaulan baligha, qaulan ma'rufa, qaulan karima, qaulan layyina, and qaulan maysura*).

One of the roles of the librarian is being an extending hand for the world of

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information in the libraries they foster, so they must be able to create excellent and harmonious relationships with users or visitors (*ukhuwah islamiyah*). In serving library users who consistently use the Trade Training Center Library services, librarians can remember personal information (name, availability, and information needed and sought by users on previous visits). This performance makes users feel cared for and can eliminate discomfort when interacting with the librarian.

Librarians can interact with various user models by the attitude and gestures of the librarian when interacting, also by choice of words, feelings, and sentences used by the librarian when explaining information to its users. The adage "think before you speak" is applied by librarians so that the delivery of messages is both verbally and non-verbally. The librarian has succeeded in carrying out a style of speech appropriate to the listener's level. The user can accept it, and the message conveyed can be reached by the user.

Trade Training Center Library librarians can also build a discussion atmosphere when communicating with users. Communication can occur in two directions, not one way, so users will not feel that one party dominates the communication. If referred, librarians tend to listen more to the complaints faced by users and provide good service but provide much-needed input and solutions so that users do not lose interest when communicating. God has created man with one tongue that gives messages and two ears that listen equally. According to the narration of Ali bin Abi Talib, the Messenger of Allah advised Hazrat Ali (RA): "When two people come to you asking for judgment, do not judge the first one until you declare the other. Soon you will know how to judge"

The librarians of the Trade Training Center Library have also implemented the principles of non-verbal communication well, where the librarian conveys gestures politely and well. Non-verbal communication can make conversations effective, durable, and easy to understand. The librarian's smile when meeting with the users depicts joy, so users feel well received by the librarian—Hadith history HR. Muslim explained the words of the Prophet, "Never underestimate a good deed, even if (the good deed) you meet your brother (fellow Muslim) with a cheerful face." Therefore, cheerfulness is considered an act of kindness that Allah SWT will reward. The expression on a person's face speaks of his inner feelings. Therefore, a person's facial expression must be pleasant when talking to someone to convey a constructive message of warm emotions. Of course, the conversation will be ineffective if someone feels that the er doesn't have good feelings for them. Similarly, if a person thinks that the other person has sympathy and good feelings for him, he achieves the purpose of the Lins



conversation.

The role of the eyes in non-verbal communication can interpret feelings. There is a common saying that "the eyes speak too" because our inner feelings are very easily conveyed through the eyes. In communicating, we should not constantly stare at someone because this gives a bad and wrong impression. Librarians at the Trade Training Center Library wisely do this. They will stare at the user, the interlocutor, if needed. This way, users do not feel intimidated but still feel cared for when needed.

Appropriate hand gestures during conversation add to the effectiveness; therefore, when greeting people, proper hand gestures should be made by the librarians according to the situation's needs. Librarians at the Trade Training Center Library do not use hand gestures too much in communicating; they use hand gestures according to their needs so that library users do not feel disturbed and can avoid messages that are considered unpleasant.

Librarians can build an atmosphere that supports library users to be able to solve the problems they face. They also act as backup management who must be willing to accept all comments and complaints from library users. For example, the negative perspective of the community toward the library considers the library an old and shabby place. On the other hand, the librarians of the Trade Training Center Library provide positive services, which make users want to continue to use their library facilities and also uphold the value of equality, looking at all who visit the library the same, without distinguishing from any aspect so that users are more comfortable and more valued; able to identify if there is a negative opinion on the Commerce Training Center Library, then hold a consolidation or discussion together with the head of the trade education and training center and related parties to cross-check its veracity and after that explain and straighten out the opinions or information that develops in the broader community, this is in line with the principle of *tabayyun* in Islamic communication.

The Pusdiklat Library librarian possesses excellent communication skills to help users understand the explanations conveyed effectively. The librarians can display their empathy for the difficulties faced by library users through the communication they make. The librarians provide good and patient answers, where they will direct users who are very understanding and able to solve their problems. In addition, these librarians can also build an atmosphere that supports library users in solving problems by providing explicit directions and examples so that users get an accurate and detailed picture of how to solve the problem.

Library services in the reference section are activities directly related to

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library users. Service is the spearhead of the overall organization in the library, so there must be an effort to utilize the entire collection of library materials and infrastructure to make the most of the library users. Effective communication skills by internalizing the principles of Islamic communication to librarians who work in the reference service department directly serve the needs of library visitors. The services provided by the librarians of the Trade Training Center Library in the library services section include: providing information, providing certain information, assisting in tracing documents, assisting in using catalogs, assisting with reference books, and others.

The library is a service provider institution; then, the service is the main task of the officers in this institution. The quality of service to users is an aspect or indicator that significantly affects the overall quality of the library. The quality of human resources, in this case, the reference service librarian, guides the users' needs as information seekers. The quality of library staff (librarians) can be seen from their educational background, personality, and, most importantly, communication ability. Why is this important? Because librarians will deal directly with library users, therefore librarians must have effective communication skills per Islamic communication principles exemplified by the Prophet Muhammad.

# CONCLUSION

At the reference service of the Trade Training Center Library, librarians have applied Islamic communication principles, namely: *qaulan sadidan* (speaking the truth), *qaulan baligha* (speaking clearly), *qaulan ma'rufa* (speaking wisely), *qaulan karma* (speaking with noble words), *qaulan layyina* (speaking gently), and *qaulan maysura* (speaking politely). In addition, they also have effective communication skills, using verbal and nonverbal communication according to Islamic principles so that the explanations given by the librarian can be understood well by users. Of course, this is a plus for the librarian because the quality of the librarian and the services provided are optimal so that it can improve the image of the librarian directly or indirectly in the eyes of library visitors.

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