

## **Ten Principles of Interactional Communication Skills Implementation in Learning: The Case of Mahad As-salam Qur'anic Boarding School**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Communication skills in building an interactional atmosphere or interactional competence are future research in improving learning quality. The learning process in pesantren was usually one-way from the teacher to the students. This study aims to elaborate on applying ten principles for future research on interactional communication skills in the learning process at Mahad Assalam Qur'anic Boarding School. The analysis used qualitative methods. The data collection techniques were document studies, interviews, and observations. The results indicated that Mahad Assalam Qur'anic Boarding School had not fully implemented the ten interactional skills. The weakness was the management's lack of transparency regarding standard operating procedures, causing this research to be unable to confirm between interview data and the written documents. Non-disclosure regarding formal operating procedures documents can cause obstacles in applying the same standards and replicating learning methods. Interactional communication between teachers and students in the learning process and interpersonal relationships have been established. This finding allowed the continuation of the implementation of interactional communication skills after the learning process.

**Keywords:** communication skills, interactional communication, learning process, *tahfiz* boarding school.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Communication skills were essential in establishing good relationships and supporting capacity building (Syamsudin, Purnomo, & Kusumadinata, 2021; Jatipermata & Purnomo, 2022). Students' communication skills are essential to successful learning (Asmar & Suryadarma, 2021; Haryanti & Suwarma, 2018; Wati et al., 2019). Teacher communication competence is also essential in encouraging student communication skills and learning success (Anwar & Purnomo, 2021; Budiono & Abdurrohman, 2020; Putri & Arsil, 2020; Taufik, 2018). The role of the principal in building communication between teachers, students, and parents was significant (Purnomo & Nurrachmah, 2022). These studies found that

communication skills in teachers, students, and principals support a comfortable, interactive learning atmosphere and ultimately support students to more easily achieve learning goals.

One form of communication competence that has received attention in research on the learning process is interactional communication. Communication competence is skills in using language and choosing messages by paying attention to whom the message is delivered and how to convey the message according to the socio-cultural context of the conversation (Saville-Troike, 2003). In the context of learning, communication skills are related to interactional skills (Abdulrahman & Ayyash, 2019). Interactional skills are abilities and actions that encourage the participation of all parties in communication (Young, 2013, p.17). If communication skills focus on a person's skills to build effective communication, then interactional skills emphasize the ability to build interactions within and through communication. Communication skills can be developed as individual skills, but interactional skills build a shared understanding process (Abdulrahman & Ayyash, 2019).

The critical position of these two skills encourages attention to interactional communication skills. Interactional communication competence was necessary for the learning process (Abdulrahman & Ayyash, 2019; May et al., 2020; Moorhouse, Li, & Walsh, 2021; Sanson-Fisher et al., 2019). These two skills in the classroom context will build classroom interactional skills (Moorhouse, Li, & Walsh, 2021). Communication skills in building an interactional atmosphere or competence are future research in improving learning quality (Sanson-Fisher et al., 2019).

Sanson-Fisher et al. (2019) proposed ten principles for the future of interactional communication skills research. First, justify interactional skills based on accepted principles. Educational institutions have guidelines for determining interactional skills and priority topics in education. Second, methodologically rigorous research demonstrated that interactional skills could be acquired. Educational institutions build procedures to direct the learning process to be more effective so that students can receive the knowledge that is adequately conveyed. Third, describe training programs in sufficient detail to allow replication. Educational institutions build details of educational programs to allow for replication well. Fourth, assess most robustly and reliably. The education program builds an assessment system to determine the program's effectiveness and evaluation. The scoring system can test students' ability to apply skills and motivate students to achieve the goals of the program.

Fifth, evaluate the cost-effectiveness of training programs. Educational institutions provided information on the costs of educational programs and the impact of educational programs on student skills. This information determines how much money should be spent on education and the time that must be spent in educational programs and evaluates the skills achieved by students according to the costs and time spent. Sixth, provide evidence concerning the characteristics of the most successful teachers. Educational institutions consider the selection of teachers referring to disciplines, professionalism, commitment,

communication skills, and the ability to motivate students to learn and adopt the skills taught. Seventh, consider the timing of specific interactional skills training within the undergraduate course. Educational institutions perform time management of the implementation of educational programs and evaluate the effectiveness of educational programs. Eighth, focus on training in both information gathering and information transfer skills. Educational programs have the aim of providing students with specific skills. Ninth, evaluate whether interactional skills generalize over time. Learning outcomes can be generalized into practice in the field, maintained over time, and applied across disciplines. Tenth, evaluate whether taught skills transfer across clinical specialties. Students can apply interactional skills across disciplines.

In contrast to Sanson-Fisher et al. (2019), who conducted research at health-care institutions, this research was conducted at Islamic educational institutions. Communication occurs in Islamic boarding schools, which are religious-based educational institutions that provide education and teaching as well as develop and disseminate Islamic religious knowledge (Huda & Asiyah, 2020). Communication focuses on the head or *kyai* in Pesantren by relying on the knowledge and charisma of the *kyai* (Hidayat, 2017). Technology and educational discourse development encouraged more open communication between students (*santri*) and *kyai* (Hartono, 2016; Rachman & Ilmaniya, 2020; Wazis, 2020). Interactional communication in the learning process in Islamic boarding schools supports learning effectiveness (Bin-Tahir, Suriaman, & Rinantanti, 2019; Utami, 2018; Zakaria & Syukri, 2016).

Islamic boarding schools have a variety of educational focuses. Special boarding schools for memorizing the Qur'an are called *tahfidz* Qur'an boarding schools. One of the *tahfidz* Qur'an Islamic boarding schools is the Mahad Assalam Qur'anic Boarding School. The educational program required communication between the teacher and the students most of the day. Well-established communication between teaching staff and students will increase motivation and produce a deep understanding of the Qur'an.

This study aims to elaborate on applying ten principles for future research on interactional communication skills in the learning process at Mahad Assalam Qur'anic Boarding School. The research question is how the ten principles application in building learning systems and interactional communication between teachers and students.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research used qualitative methods with data collection techniques, document studies, interviews, and observations. Qualitative research is a study aimed at describing and analyzing people's phenomena, events, social activities, attitudes, beliefs, perceptions, and thoughts individually and in groups (Sukmadinata, 2011). Qualitative research used a constructivist paradigm or theory to guide data collection (Creswell, 2014). Research begins with assumptions, philosophical views, and theoretical lenses and studies research problems to find meaning for

individuals or groups to explain social and human problems (Creswell, 2007).

Interviews were conducted with participants. Participants are sources of information, actors, someone who participates in an activity, and individuals or groups of individuals studied and used as data sources (Creswell, 2003). The number of participants was determined during the research process using the snow-bowling technique (Creswell, 2007). Observations were made by observing the communication process between students (*santri*) and teachers (*ustad*). Observation is a source of data that describes the actual situation (Raco, 2010: 110). Document studies were conducted on documents regarding the Mahad Assalam Qur'anic Boarding School organization, Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) documents, lesson plans, and other related documents.

The research was conducted at Mahad Assalam Qur'anic Boarding School, located in Kranggan Village, Gunung Putri District, Bogor Regency. For six years, this Islamic boarding school has produced 71 students who have succeeded in becoming Al Quran memorize (*tahfidz*). The *tahfidz* Al-Qur'an program in the Assalam Islamic boarding school is a field of study that contains procedures for making students memorizing the Qur'an and can maintain their memorization. The boarding school education system requires students to live in dormitories, making the students spend more time in the boarding school environment. This system causes the interaction between the students (*santri*) and the teacher (*ustadz*) to occur intensively, almost 24 hours a day.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The study found the application of ten principles for the future of interactional communication skills research (Sanson-Fisher et al., 2019) in the learning process at Mahad Assalam Qur'anic Boarding School. The first principle is to justify interactional skills based on accepted principles. Referring to this principle, educational institutions should have guidelines for determining interactional skills and topics that become priorities in education. The results of the document study found that Mahad Assalam Qur'anic Boarding School has written SOPs, but written SOPs were not allowed to be shown to researchers. This problem caused researchers to be unable to conclude the clarity of guidelines for determining interactional skills and topics that were priorities in education. The interview results found that Mahad Assalam Qur'anic Boarding School had a general agreement that was agreed upon by all teachers. This agreement was conveyed orally from the *Pesantren* leader (*mudhir*) to the teacher's coordinator. The verbal message is also sent from the teacher's coordinator to the male teacher (*ustadz*) or female teacher (*ustadzah*).

The second principle is that rigorous research was used to demonstrate that interactional skills can be acquired. Educational institutions developed procedures to manage the learning process to be more effective to enable students (*santri*) to receive the knowledge adequately. In general, the *tahfidz* acceleration implementation used the *talaqqi* method by directly memorizing *ustadz/ustadzah*, that have scientific competence and knowledge referred to as the prophet Muhammad thought (Susianti, 2016). The companion in this method

must be teaching staff who have memorized the Al Quran well. The application of the method required the *ustadz/ustadzah* to accompany the students daily. *Ustadz/ustadzah* must also always reflect the attitude required in the Qur'an, or the mentoring process is not limited to memorization but in everyday life. Mahad Assalam, Qur'anic Boarding School, has a plan for learning outcomes in the form of students' memorization targets for a certain period. The *ustadz/ustadzah* has to encourage students to memorize 1-3 pages per week for the average student or called the *sugrho* acceleration program. Mahad Assalam Qur'anic Boarding School has a program for potential students called *halaqoh taqosus*. Students participating in the *halaqoh taqosus* program must memorize 1-3 *juz* of the Quran in one month.

The third principle is to describe training programs sufficiently to allow replication. This principle emphasizes that educational institutions develop educational programs in detail. The teacher's coordinator received verbal instructions from the head of the Pesantren. *Ustadz/ustadzah* did not receive written instructions but in the form of oral. The teacher's coordinator conveyed the learning method verbally to the *ustadz/ustadzah*. Before *ustadz/ustadzah* accompanied the students, the teacher's coordinator conveyed the aims and objectives of the program. Each *ustadz/ustadzah* got twelve to fifteen students during the activity with different abilities. The clearest guide for *ustadz/ustadzah* was in the form of a rote target. The way of teaching can be done based on the choice of the *ustadz/ustadzah*. This method made it challenging to replicate teaching methods between *ustadz/ustadzah*.

An interview with an *ustadz* denoted that learning methods are still developing and allow for change.

"During my time as Pesantren's deputy, I conveyed to the *ustadz* that Mahad Assalam Qur'anic Boarding School has learning principles and learning targets. Each class has a rote target. To support this target, the institution has a *tahfidz* acceleration program. We conveyed to the companions that in the third week of every month a *tahfidz* acceleration program is held. The third week was chosen because it was an effective week for the students. The target for the three *tahfiz* acceleration programs is three to five pages per week. Students who do not reach the target will receive a quarantine program until the target is reached. Institutions have SOPs for communication techniques in the learning process. Learning methods are still developing to find the best methods that have been carried out in other schools to be observed, imitated and modified, in order to build the best methods." (Interview with Participant 1, 27, May 2022).

The fourth principle is to assess most robustly and reliably. This principle emphasizes the assessment system to determine the effectiveness and evaluate the program. The scoring system at Mahad Assalam, Qur'anic Boarding School, refers to the target achievement of students' memorization. The general target is that students can memorize 15 *juz* of the Quran in three years of study. The minimum target is five *juz* of Al Quran in three years of study. This target is lowered to the weekly target. If the student cannot achieve the target, the student will be admitted to a *tahfizh* clinic for a more intensive process. The



teacher considered this assessment system to test students' abilities in applying memorization skills and motivate students to achieve the goals of the program. Evaluation of the *ustadz/ustadzah* is carried out through monitoring and evaluation by the coordinator of the memorization field.

"The teacher's coordinator was monitoring the presence of *ustadz/ustadzah* with finger prints and manual attendance. The institution provided teaching systems and methods to ensure every *ustadz/ustadzah* taught the same way. The monitoring process also included the focus of the *ustadz/ustadzah* in guiding the students. The students have different abilities, the *ustadz/ustadzah* have to focus on the systems and methods that we provide." (Interview with Participant 2, 28, May 2022).

The fifth principle is to evaluate the cost-effectiveness of training programs. Educational institutions provide information on the costs of educational programs and the impact of educational programs on student skills. The head of the Pesantren conveyed the overall cost for the whole program when the student was accepted. This fee included the cost of food, housing, and education costs. However, it did not cover laundry costs and pocket money. If students can complete 30 *juz*, all fees will be free. The entrance test still allows prospective students who cannot read the Quran to become students, usually because they go through non-academic achievements or religious knowledge. Information from the head of the pesantren was sufficient to convey how much it costs to pay for education, the time it took in the education program, and evaluate the skills achieved by students according to the costs and time spent.

The sixth principle is to provide evidence concerning the characteristics of the most successful teachers. Educational institutions consider the selection of *ustadz/ustadzah* to refer to disciplines, professionalism, commitment, communication skills, and the ability to motivate students to learn and adopt the skills taught. *Ustadz/ustadzah* at Mahad Assalam, Qur'anic Boarding School, is specially selected based on a unique selection of applicants. Mahad Assalam Qur'anic Boarding School analyzed the capacity of *ustadz/ustadzah* from the level of memorization and experience so that there were no differences between teaching staff. The selection is a minimum of five chapters of memorization, meeting the criteria of maturity, communication skills, and problem-solving. *Ustadz/ustadzah* obtained an educational program so that there was no difference in the delivery of learning methods to students. Mahad Assalam Qur'anic Boarding School also considered the level of maturity, communication skills, problem-solving and emotional control by conducting interviews to determine placements according to their capacities. These characteristics indicate that Mahad Assalam applies interactional skills, namely, placing teachers according to expertise (Sanson-Fisher et al., 2019).

"The ability of the companion is adjusted to the ability, psychic, level of maturity and experience. The institution carries out quality control for assistants by conducting evaluation and supervision." (Interview with Participant 3, 28, May 2022).

The seventh principle considers the timing of specific interactional skills training within the undergraduate course. Educational institutions perform time management of the implementation of educational programs and evaluate the effectiveness of educational programs. The duration of education for three years is divided into three classes (grades 7, 8, and 9). Each class is divided into two semesters. The semester program is reduced to a weekly program, and the weekly program is replicated into a daily program. The following is a schedule of daily activities for students at Mahad Assalam Qur'anic Boarding School.

**Table 1.** The student's daily activities schedule

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Time	Description
03.45 – 05.00	<i>Qiyamul lail, Fajr praying and dhikr</i>
05.00 – 06.00	<i>Halaqoh tahfidz morning</i>
06.00 – 07.00	Take a bath, breakfast, school preparation
07.00 – 07.30	<i>Duha</i> prayer and reading selected Al Quran letters
07.30 – 11.30	Learning time 1 (Department of Education and Islamic Boarding School)
11.30 – 12.50	Eat and <i>dzuhur</i> praying
12.50 – 14.00	Learning time 2 (Islamic boarding school lesson)
14.00 – 15.00	Rest/talent interest
15.00 – 15.45	<i>Ashar</i> praying and dhikr
15.45 – 16.30	<i>Halaqoh tahfidz</i> afternoon
16.30 – 17.30	Rest, take a bath, have dinner
17.30 – 18.00	Afternoon <i>dhikr</i> and <i>Asmaul Husna</i>
18.00 – 18.30	<i>Maghrib</i> praying
18.30 – 19.00	<i>Halaqoh tahfidz</i> evening
19.00 – 19.30	<i>Isha</i> praying
19.45 – 20.30	Conversation
20.30 – 21.30	Independent study and school assignments
21.30 – 03.45	Rest, sleep at night

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The eighth principle focuses on training in information gathering and information transfer skills. Educational programs have the aim of imparting specific skills to students. The program at Mahad Assalam, Qur'anic Boarding School, is straightforward, namely the Quran memorization program. The students received well the learning method applied by the *ustadz/ustadzah*.

"Communication from *ustadz/ustadz* is rather suitable. Santri feels comfortable in learning and daily interactions. Santri can talk about learning or personal problems to the *ustadz/ustadzah*. The process of memorizing the Qur'an is complicated, so students often feel pressured, and *ustadz/ustadzah* is pleased when the students convey their problems to the *ustadz/ustadzah*." (Interview with Participant 4, June 1, 2022).

The ninth principle is to evaluate whether interactional skills generalize over time. This principle emphasizes that learning outcomes can be generalized into practice in the field, maintained over time, and applied across disciplines. The learning method at Mahad Assalam Qur'anic Boarding School can be practiced by students when they become *ustadz/ustadzah* in the same place or another. In addition, learning did not only include memorizing the Quran but also implementing the values of the the Quran in everyday life. Implementing the Qur'an's values in students' daily lives after graduating from Mahad Assalam Qur'anic Boarding School has not been evaluated quantitatively. However, until the research was conducted, no negative cases were committed by students who graduated from Mahad Assalam Qur'anic Boarding School. This finding indicated that students could apply the values of the Quran in their daily lives after graduation.

The tenth principle, evaluate whether taught skills transfer across clinical specialties. This principle emphasized interactional competence application in all disciplines. The interview found that *ustadz/ustadzah* asked the students to share with other students during the learning process. *Santri* must share knowledge with other students who are less able to follow the learning process. The *Halaqoh taqosus* students must teach other students and motivate those lacking students. *Ustadz/ustadzah* also told students not to submit criticism or input to other students in public forums but through interpersonal communication outside the forum. This finding indicated a process of applying interactional skills in the learning process.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The results indicated that Mahad Assalam Qur'anic Boarding School has not fully implemented the ten interactional skills described by Sanson-Fisher et al. (2019). Mahad Assalam Qur'anic Boarding School already has SOPs in implementing learning activities. The manager's closeness to SOP documents causes it difficult for researchers to assess the suitability of information from interviews with the written documents. The process of delivering SOPs and verbal learning techniques has shortcomings in ensuring a common understanding due to differences in the ability to send and capture messages (Kiat & Belli, 2018; Karim,



Nawawi, & Copy, 2018). The interviews did not show any complaints from the *ustadz/ustadzah*, the leader of the pesantren, or the teacher's coordinator against the oral delivery system. The study also found no complaints from students. This finding denoted that the oral delivery system is adequate for delivering learning methods and targets. However, it is necessary to consider the obstacles to replicating the method with the same standard if the Mahad Assalam Qur'anic Boarding School maintains the method of delivering the SOP orally.

The manager's improvement process complements this weakness by observing, imitating, and modifying methods. The management of Mahad Assalam Qur'anic Boarding School made improvements, trained how to speed up the memorization of the Qur'an from other pesantren methods, and received input from *ustadz/ustadzah*. Mahad Assalam, Qur'anic Boarding School manager, evaluated the tahfidz sheet control *ustadz/ustadzah*, which includes the students' attendance and memorization level achievement. Evaluating and improving learning methods allowed the development and improvement of learning systems.

Interactional communication occurs when the *ustadz/ustadzah* conducts a dialogue when the students cannot fill out the evaluation sheet or do not achieve the learning targets. This finding denoted that teachers apply interactional skills, namely assessment of educational programs (Sanson-Fisher et al., 2019). Interactional communication that prioritizes two-way communication between teaching staff is sufficient in the *tahfidz* program to be seen in the achievements of the students and the increase in the number of hafidz in Islamic boarding schools, which has reached 71 students. Interactional communication is also found in the closeness between students and *ustadz/ustadzah* in the learning process and students' problems.

Referring to the study results, Mahad Assalam Qur'anic Boarding School is an Islamic educational institution thick with a balanced relationship between santri and *ustadz/ustadzah* applied to the ten interactional skills described by Sanson-Fisher et al. (2019). The most prominent weakness is the non-disclosure of written SOPs, not the interactions between students and *ustadz/ustadzah*. This research suggested that the Mahad Assalam Qur'anic Boarding School manager has to publish a written SOP. The manager's concern about disclosing information about SOPs is contrary to the principles of developing a learning system, namely observing, imitating, and modifying. Disclosing information about the SOP will allow other parties to learn the learning methods at Mahad Assalam Qur'anic Boarding School. In addition, written SOPs reduce barriers to misinterpretation and allow for replication within the Mahad Assalam Qur'anic Boarding School and by the students while developing education with the same system after graduation.

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