The Effectiveness of The Competence of Islamic Religious Extension Workers in Increasing The Religious Diversity of The Community in North Nias Regency

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Abstract
This study aims to see the effectiveness of Islamic Religious Extension Competence in increasing community religiosity. The method used is qualitative, with the research location in North Nias Regency, from September 2023 to August 2024. Data collection techniques include observation, interviews, and documentation. Research informants comprised the Head of the North Nias Ministry of Religion, the District KUA, the North Nias Pokjapaluh, and representatives from the Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama community organisations. Data analysis was carried out through a coding process and integration of data units at the stage of writing the results. The results of the study show: (1) The competence of Islamic religious extension workers includes mastery of religious knowledge, communication skills, technology, and social and psychological skills. They can also design extension programs that suit the community's needs. (2) The communication messages must be relevant, inspiring, touch people's lives, and contain applicable religious motivation. (3) The effects of communication extension include increased understanding of religion, changes in religious attitudes, and social and economic empowerment. Religious instructors have a strategic role in forming a religious, tolerant, and caring society. They can positively influence people's behaviour and quality of life through communication based on moderate Islamic values.

I. Introduction

Competence can depend on the first (*appropriateness*) and the second (effectiveness). Communication competence is in the form of several abilities that are sourced and possessed by a communicator that can be used in the communication process. Utilising a goal strategy approach to competencies that prioritise knowledge and several abilities (Nurdin, 2015; Turistiati & Andhita, 2021; Utomo, 2019). This definition of communication will succeed in emphasising the two components above: knowledge of communication and the need to achieve a goal.

If we want to assess a communicator or speaker's competence, we will pay attention to both verbal and nonverbal communication movements. A person's communication behaviour prevents us from being deceived by how much insight a communicator has. We know how competent he is, how empathetic he is, and how well he adapts to the communicator.

In determining a person who is called a credible communicator, we will pay attention to when he speaks through the communication of verbal and nonverbal messages conveyed, how the choice of sentences is used, the sentence structure, how the style of delivery or intonation is used, and the message conveyed nonverbally. All of this will be a conclusion made by the assessor on how credible a communicator is.

The role of an extension worker is vital in the broader society, because from various communities, of course, the level of knowledge and character of each other is not the same. From counselling and coaching in the community, an extension worker has a curriculum that aligns with the program's goals (Eriyanti, 2022; Nurkholis et al., 2020).

Generally, extension workers carry out their duties to deliver counselling and coaching materials, depending on the fostered group. Because in counselling, not only one resident or assisted community is at the counselling location, each extension worker and other extension workers have different counselling programs, so that they can conduct counselling in a complex manner.

The task of extension workers is not solely to carry out religious counselling in a narrow sense in the form of recitation. Still, all the information activities are in the form of guidance and information about various development programs. He guides the people with a sense of responsibility, bringing the community to a safe and prosperous life. The position of Islamic religious extension workers is very strategic, both to convey religious missions and development missions (Ilham, 2018; Wahab, 2019). The main task of Islamic Religious Extension Workers is to carry out and develop religious guidance or counselling activities and development through religious language to the community (Andrian, 2019; Aspila & B, 2022; Julina, 2020; Mazid et al., 2021).

According to Lukman Hakim Syaifuddin, extension workers must always carry out three functions that must always be imprinted. First, an extension worker is a supervisor who guides the community regarding religion. Second, religious extension workers are role models and a reference point for people to ask questions about religion. Third, extension workers function as translators for the government's tongue so that government policies related to religion can be conveyed well in the community (Syaefulloh, 2024).

In carrying out his duties as one of the Islamic religious extension workers to the community, especially those in North Nias, professionally and effectively, it is necessary to consider the competencies that an extension worker must possess by the needs desired by the local community, as it is known that people in North Nias Regency have a low level of education.

In addition to the relatively low education, the Muslim community of North Nias is much smaller than the community of adherents of other religions: only 9,317 people out of the total number, which is 178,262 people (Statistik, 2016). This implies that the competence of extension workers/dai must be adequate so that they can carry out their duties optimally.

Based on preliminary data obtained from the Ministry of Religion of North Nias, the non-civil servant PAI Extension Workers who serve only a small part have an S1 and religious education background, even though the people there are in dire need of spiritual watering that can improve their knowledge in Islamic religious science

(DPMPTSP, 2024). The determination of this dai/extension worker has been screened to find prospective participants through selection, but due to the lack of human resources, the committee sets a minimum requirement in the form of the ability to read the Quran, even though the ability to understand religion should not be ignored to answer the problems that occur in the community.

Seeing the competence above the educational qualifications, the extension workers are not qualified to answer the community's religious problems. Meanwhile, the community urgently needs good competence to implement religious delivery well, as Aristotle's theory regarding the credibility of sources. Paying attention to the data, the researcher is interested in conducting research in the field related to the effectiveness of the competence of Islamic religious extension workers in improving the spiritual diversity of the community in North Nias Regency.

2. Research Method

This research uses qualitative methods to obtain concrete data in the field (Hasibuan et al., 2022; Hasibuan & Prastowo, 2019). The definition of qualitative methods proposed by Kirk and Miller and followed by Lexy J. Moleong is a particular tradition in the social sciences that fundamentally depends on the observation of humans in their area, and relates to these people, their discussion and their terminology (Moleong, 2013; Yusuf & Burhanuddin, 2023). The research site the researcher researched was North Nias, with the research implementation time from September 2023 to August 2024. Data collection uses observation, interviews and documentation. The research informants were the Head of the Ministry of Religion of North Nias, the District KUA, the Chairman of the North Nias Working Group, and Community Organisations representing Muhammadiyah and Nadlatul Ulama after the selection process, which is followed by compiling it in units that are then integrated in the next step, by coding to the stage of writing the research results.

3. Results And Discussion

The Competence of Islamic Religious Extension Workers in Improving Religious Understanding of the Community in North Nias Regency

Being a communicator or Islamic religious extension worker, especially in North Nias Regency, should have qualified skills in their field so that the target of communication or extension workers can understand what an extension worker conveys. Extension workers need to understand the content related to the implementation of worship well. This includes an in-depth understanding of the religious teachings about the worship being delivered and how the worship is performed in the local social and cultural context. Not only aspects of religious rituals but also their values can affect social life and relationships between individuals in society. For example, how is religious tradition integrated with social life in North Nias?

Relevant general knowledge is crucial for an Islamic religious extension worker in conveying religious messages to the community. This knowledge covers various aspects of life that can relate religious teachings to the social, economic, cultural, and challenging contexts pilgrims face daily. This relevant general knowledge can cover topics such as social issues, health, economics, education, and so on that relate to the needs and lives of Muslims (Nabilah & Darmaningrum, 2023; Pattilauw, 2024; Sukandar et al., 2023). The importance of insight into social and cultural diversity is very relevant in the context of Islamic religious counselling. Indonesia, as a country with a vibrant artistic and religious diversity, needs religious extension workers who can understand and apply religious values sensitively to the social and cultural diversity that exists in society. Islamic religious extension workers need to understand the social dynamics, customs, and traditions in each region so that all circles can receive the message well, without ignoring universal Islamic values.

Understanding the dynamics of pluralistic religion and culture is very important for Islamic religious extension workers in carrying out their duties to guide the community. As a country with a vast cultural and religious diversity, Indonesia needs a sensitive and inclusive approach to spiritual counselling. Islamic religious extension workers who can understand and appreciate the dynamics of existing religion and culture will effectively

convey religious messages without creating tension or misunderstanding.

Religious counsellors should regularly train in communication skills, including public speaking, active listening, and managing sensitive conversations. This kind of training will help extension workers become more effective communicators and respond to pilgrims' needs. For example, attending training on how to speak in public or intercultural communication training can improve the ability of extension workers to interact with diverse communities and deliver messages more effectively.

The above proposition shows that Islamic religious extension workers in North Nias Regency are key in improving people's spiritual understanding. To increase their effectiveness, religious extension workers need competencies that include strong religious knowledge, practical communication skills, technological mastery, psychological and social skills, and the ability to design and implement counselling programs that are relevant to the community's needs. Ongoing training and the use of technology can help religious extension workers better achieve this goal.

Communication Message of Islamic Religious Extension Workers in Increasing Religious Understanding of the Community in North Nias Regency

Good communication skills are essential for Islamic religious extension workers so the congregation can receive and apply the message conveyed daily. Using principles from interpersonal communication theory, such as two-way communication, active listening, empathy, effective body language, precise message delivery, conflict management, and building trust, religious extension workers can create more effective and constructive communication with worshippers. With these skills, extension workers can guide people to stay on the right path, avoid error, and practice religious teachings with full awareness and responsibility.

Religious extension workers need to convey messages that connect Islamic religious teachings with the daily tasks of the community, so that they can see the relevance of spiritual teachings in aspects of their lives, whether in work, family, or social interactions. Thus, religious teachings do not feel separate from real life.

In social dynamics and religious pluralism, religious counsellors need to convey

messages that emphasise moderate and inclusive Islam, avoiding messages that tend to be extreme or limit religious understanding. The message should focus on a balanced experience, teaching people to respect differences and strengthening harmony between religious communities. Religious extension workers need to convey messages emphasising the importance of tolerance between religious communities and harmonious ways of coexistence in a multicultural society.

One crucial aspect of religious understanding is improving morals (Hasan et al., 2024; Nurishlah et al., 2023). Islamic religious extension workers need to emphasise messages that invite people to have good morals, such as speaking honestly, keeping promises, respecting parents, and maintaining good relationships with neighbours. Religious counsellors should provide real examples and daily life practices that show the noble moral values of Islam.

Islamic religious extension workers' communication messages must be relevant, inspiring, and touch aspects of people's lives. With a clear, motivating message and in accordance with the community's needs, Islamic religious extension workers can improve the community's religious understanding in North Nias Regency. Religious extension workers also need to use methods that prioritise empathetic, inclusive, and context-based communication so that the messages conveyed can be well received and practised daily.

The Effect of Communication of Islamic Religious Extension Workers in Improving Community Religion in North Nias Regency.

Religious extension workers need to conduct initial mapping to understand the community's level of ability to read the Qur'an and Arabic script. This can be done through observation, interviews, or surveys of the local community. With this understanding, extension workers can determine target groups and design appropriate extension methods. Religious extension workers in North Nias can make observations to find out who is still illiterate in Arabic and needs guidance in reading the Qur'an. With this data, extension workers can design more focused training programs.

Identifying community needs is essential in designing and implementing effective counselling or interpersonal communication programs. In the context of interpersonal

communication theory, identifying society's needs requires a deep understanding of the backgrounds, values, cultures, and issues faced by a particular individual or group.

Identifying the needs of a community through effective interpersonal communication requires a sensitive approach to the social norms, values, and dynamics that prevail in that society. By using various theories of interpersonal communication, such as Openness Theory, Social Exchange Theory, Social Adjustment Theory, and Interpersonal Dependency Theory, extension workers or community leaders can obtain more in-depth and comprehensive information about existing needs. This allows them to design programs or counselling that are more relevant and provide direct benefits to the community.

Developing counselling methods appropriate to local needs requires a sensitive approach to social, cultural, and societal contexts. By using various theories of interpersonal communication, such as Openness Theory, Social Exchange Theory, Social Adjustment Theory, and Social Identity Theory, extension workers can design more relevant and effective methods in conveying messages to the community. The right approach will ensure that counselling can be accepted, understood, and implemented properly by the community and increase the positive impact of counselling activities.

Religious extension workers must actively involve the community in the counselling process. This approach allows people to feel ownership and responsibility for their learning process. Religious counsellors in North Nias can hold a participatory Qur'an reading class, where each congregation can talk or ask questions about their difficulties. This can be done in small groups to make it easier to understand and encourage participants to teach each other.

Building trust and strong relationships with worshippers is essential in religious counselling or activities. This belief creates an emotional bond that allows worshippers to be more open to receiving the message conveyed and actively participating in spiritual or social activities. In interpersonal communication theory, several theories can be used to build and maintain a strong relationship with the congregation.

Integrating technology in outreach can expand reach and increase the effectiveness of communication with audiences, especially in communities that may have limited access to traditional resources. In the context of interpersonal communication theory, technology

can be a tool to enrich the interaction between extension workers and audiences, allowing for more dynamic, responsive, and participatory communication.

The communication effects of Islamic religious extension workers in improving the community's religious diversity in North Nias Regency are very diverse, including increasing the understanding of religious teachings, changing religious attitudes and behaviours, and social and economic empowerment of the community. Effective communication can form a society that is more religious, tolerant, social, and caring for others. Religious extension workers influence people's behaviour and quality of life through good communication, based on moderate and applicable Islamic values.

4. Conclusion

The conclusions of the research on the Effectiveness of the Competence of Islamic Religious Extension Workers in Improving Community Religious Diversity in North Nias Regency, namely: First, the competence of Islamic religious extension workers in improving the religious diversity of the community in North Nias Regency, namely competencies that include strong religious knowledge, effective communication skills, mastery of technology, psychological and social skills, and the ability to design and implement programs counseling that is relevant to the needs of the community. Second, the communication message of Islamic religious extension workers in improving the religious diversity of the community in North Nias Regency must be relevant, inspiring, and touching aspects of people's lives. With a clear, motivating message, and in accordance with the needs of the people in North Nias Regency. Third, the effect of communication by Islamic religious extension workers in improving the religious life of the community in North Nias Regency, which is very diverse, includes increasing the understanding of religious teachings, changing religious attitudes and behaviors, and social and economic empowerment of the community. Effective communication can form a society that is more religious, tolerant, social, and caring for others. Religious extension workers play an important role in influencing people's behavior and quality of life through good communication, based on moderate and applicable Islamic values.

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