

**INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION OF THE SUJANLIE TOTONG LAW OFFICE
WITH CLIENTS IN RESOLVING LEGAL PROBLEMS: A CASE STUDY OF THE
BUSANG DENGEN FARMER GROUP**

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Abstract. This study aims to analyze the interpersonal communication carried out by the Sujanlie Totong Law Office with clients in resolving legal problems, using a case study of the Busang Dengen Farmer Group. This research employs a qualitative approach with a case study design. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with the advocate and supported by relevant literature review. The data in this study were analyzed using an interactive model of qualitative data analysis, which consists of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings indicate that interpersonal communication is implemented through the use of simple and accessible language, transparency in conveying information, empathy toward clients, and active client involvement in legal decision-making processes. Such communication plays a crucial role in building client trust, reducing uncertainty, and enhancing clients' understanding of legal procedures. Furthermore, interpersonal communication functions not only as a means of delivering legal information but also as an instrument of empowerment, enabling clients to actively participate in the process of resolving their legal issues. Therefore, the interpersonal communication practiced by the Sujanlie Totong Law Office is not merely informative in nature but also strategic in supporting the effectiveness of legal problem resolution faced by clients.

Keywords: Interpersonal Communication, Advocate, Client, Agrarian Conflict, Legal Problem Resolution

INTRODUCTION

In legal practice, advocates do not merely function as legal representatives but also as communicators who bridge the gap between the legal system and their clients. The complexity of legal language, judicial procedures, and case dynamics often creates disparities in understanding between advocates and clients. This condition makes interpersonal communication a crucial component in the process of legal assistance.

Interpersonal communication within the advocate–client relationship serves not only as a means of conveying legal information but also as a medium for building trust, reducing uncertainty, and helping clients understand their legal position. Ineffective communication may lead to miscommunication, misunderstandings, and even a decline in client trust toward advocates (Albiston & Sandefur, 2019).

In practice, advocates interact with clients from diverse educational backgrounds, levels of legal literacy, and personal characteristics. This diversity requires adaptive interpersonal communication skills, including the use of simple language, empathy, openness, and the ability to involve clients in legal decision-making processes. Therefore, interpersonal communication becomes a strategic element in determining the effectiveness of legal problem resolution.

This condition is also evident in cases involving the Busang Dengen Farmer Group, where clients face complex legal issues and require intensive legal assistance. In this context, the interpersonal communication carried out by the Sujanlie Totong Law Office becomes important to examine, as it involves not only the delivery of legal information but also the way advocates build relationships with clients throughout the process of resolving legal cases.

Theoretically, effective interpersonal communication is characterized by openness, empathy, supportiveness, positiveness, and equality (DeVito, 2016; Hargie, 2021). These dimensions serve as key indicators in establishing high-quality communication between advocates and clients. Furthermore, interpersonal communication plays a significant role in enhancing trust and strengthening professional relationships (Jiang & Men, 2021).

However, studies on interpersonal communication in legal advocacy remain limited, particularly those that specifically examine advocate-client interactions in the context of resolving legal problems. Most existing studies tend to focus on organizational communication or public service communication more broadly.

Therefore, this study offers novelty by examining the interpersonal communication carried out by the Sujanlie Totong Law Office with clients in resolving legal problems, using a case study of the Busang Dengen Farmer Group. This study aims to analyze how interpersonal communication is implemented and how it contributes to the effectiveness of legal problem resolution

LITERATURE REVIEW

Interpersonal communication refers to the process of exchanging messages between individuals aimed at developing mutual understanding and effective relationships. In a professional context, interpersonal communication extends beyond the mere transmission of information; it also functions as a mechanism for building trust, managing perceptions, and influencing decision-making processes (Hargie, 2021).

Within the advocate–client relationship, interpersonal communication plays a crucial role as it directly affects

clients' understanding of the legal issues they face. The complexity of legal language and judicial procedures requires advocates to simplify legal information in order to make it accessible to clients. Consequently, interpersonal communication in legal advocacy is not only informative but also educational and persuasive in nature (Albiston & Sandefur, 2019).

Effective interpersonal communication is characterized by several key dimensions, namely openness, empathy, supportiveness, positiveness, and equality (DeVito, 2016). Openness refers to honesty in delivering information, including potential risks and possible outcomes of legal processes. Empathy involves the advocate's ability to understand the psychological condition of clients, who are often under significant stress. Supportiveness and positiveness reflect efforts to create a constructive and reassuring communication climate, while equality positions clients as partners rather than passive recipients of information.

These dimensions serve as essential indicators in evaluating the quality of communication between advocates and clients. Open and empathetic communication can enhance client trust, while participatory communication enables clients to be actively involved in legal decision-making processes (Jiang & Men, 2021).

Furthermore, interpersonal communication plays an important role in reducing uncertainty experienced by clients. In complex legal situations, clients frequently experience confusion and anxiety. Therefore, clear, simple, and repetitive communication becomes a crucial strategy to ensure that clients fully understand the legal processes they undergo (Menkel-Meadow, 2020).

In the context of this study, interpersonal communication between advocates and clients is not merely understood as a process of message delivery

but as a strategic mechanism encompassing informational, psychological, and empowerment dimensions. Through effective communication, advocates not only assist clients in understanding legal issues but also encourage their active participation in the resolution of legal problems

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach with a case study design to analyze the interpersonal communication carried out by advocates with clients in the process of resolving legal problems. This approach is selected to enable an in-depth understanding of communication patterns, strategies, and interaction dynamics within a real-life context (Yin, 2018).

The research was conducted at the Sujanlie Totong Law Office, located in Samarinda, East Kalimantan. This site was chosen because it represents a setting where direct interactions between advocates and clients take place, particularly in handling cases involving the Busang Dengen Farmer Group.

The research subjects were selected using purposive sampling, a technique that involves selecting informants based on specific criteria relevant to the research objectives. The primary informant in this study is Sujanlie Totong, the advocate who directly engages in communication with clients. In addition, clients involved in the case were included as supporting informants to provide insights into how the communication is received and perceived.

Data were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews focusing on key aspects of interpersonal communication, including language use, openness, empathy, client involvement, and communication barriers encountered during the advocacy process. The interviews were conducted directly to explore experiences,

communication strategies, and interaction dynamics between the advocate and clients. A literature review was also conducted to support the theoretical framework of the study.

Data analysis was carried out using an interactive analysis model, which consists of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing (Miles et al., 2014). The analysis process was conducted continuously from data collection to interpretation, with a focus on identifying patterns of interpersonal communication in legal advocacy practice.

To ensure the validity of the data, this study employed triangulation techniques, including source triangulation and method triangulation, as well as member checking, which involves confirming the findings with informants to ensure accuracy and credibility.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Interpersonal Communication as the Foundation of Legal Assistance. The findings of this study indicate that interpersonal communication constitutes a fundamental element in legal advocacy practices carried out by the Sujantie Totong Law Office. Communication is not merely used to deliver legal information but also to build clients' understanding and trust in dealing with complex legal problems.

In this context, interpersonal communication serves as a bridge between the complexity of the legal system and the clients' limited legal literacy. This finding suggests that the effectiveness of legal problem resolution is not solely determined by juridical aspects but is also significantly influenced by the quality of communication between advocates and clients.

The Use of Simple Language as a Communication Strategy. One of the key findings of this study is the advocate's use of

simple and accessible language in explaining legal processes to clients. As stated by the informant:

"I usually use simple and clear language to explain legal processes so that clients can easily understand."

This indicates that the advocate consciously adapts communication strategies to match the client's level of understanding. The use of simple language becomes an essential strategy in reducing the gap in legal literacy. Even complex legal terms are explained using everyday language, as illustrated by the following statement:

"An appeal means that when we lose at the first court level, we proceed to a higher court."

This strategy not only facilitates client comprehension but also encourages clients to actively engage in legal processes. This finding reinforces the concept of effective interpersonal communication, particularly in terms of openness and equality (Hargie, 2021).

Openness and Honesty in Building Trust. Interpersonal communication between the advocate and clients is also characterized by openness and honesty in conveying legal information. The informant emphasized:

"Clients must be told the truth and should not be misled. Lawyers are not allowed to promise victory."

This statement demonstrates that interpersonal communication is not only oriented toward information delivery but also toward trust-building. Transparency becomes a crucial factor in maintaining professional relationships and managing client expectations.

In the context of legal problem resolution, trust serves as a fundamental foundation that enables clients to follow the advocate's guidance effectively. This finding aligns with the argument that transparency in communication plays a significant role in building trust in professional relationships (Albiston & Sandefur, 2019).

Empathy as an Approach in Client Interaction. Empathy emerges as an important dimension in interpersonal communication within legal advocacy. The advocate recognizes that each client has different backgrounds, levels of education, and capacities of understanding, which influence how communication should be delivered:

"We need to consider the client's background, education, and level of understanding because it affects how we explain things."

This finding indicates that communication is not conducted uniformly but is adapted to the client's condition. Empathy functions not only as an attitude but also as a strategic communication approach that contributes to more effective interactions.

In this context, empathy also plays a role in maintaining clients' psychological stability, particularly when they are facing stressful legal situations. This finding is consistent with the view that empathetic communication enhances the quality of professional relationships (Menkel-Meadow, 2020).

Client Involvement in Legal Decision-Making. The study also finds that interpersonal communication in legal advocacy is participatory in nature, where clients are actively involved in decision-making processes. The informant stated:

"We involve clients because they know their documents better. We only explain the legal pathways."

This indicates that communication is based on the principle of equality, positioning clients as active participants rather than passive recipients. Participatory communication enables clients to understand legal processes and contribute to decision-making. However, the advocate maintains professional boundaries:

"When it comes to legal aspects that clients do not understand, it can be dangerous."

This demonstrates that while participation is encouraged, professional control is still necessary to ensure the effectiveness of legal processes.

Communication Barriers and Strategies for Overcoming Them. Despite the effectiveness of interpersonal communication, several barriers were identified. One of the main challenges is the difference in clients' levels of understanding. As stated by the informant:

"Sometimes clients do not understand but think they already know."

Additionally, variations in client characteristics and backgrounds pose further communication challenges. To address these issues, the advocate employs adaptive communication strategies, such as simplifying explanations and providing repeated clarification:

"If clients do not understand, we explain it again in a simpler way."

This finding highlights that effective communication is not solely dependent on

message delivery but also on ensuring that the message is truly understood by the client.

The Role of Interpersonal Communication in Resolving Legal Problems. Overall, the findings demonstrate that interpersonal communication plays a strategic role in resolving legal problems. Communication functions not only as a means of delivering legal information but also as a mechanism for building trust, enhancing understanding, and encouraging client participation.

Thus, interpersonal communication carried out by the Sujanlie Totong Law Office can be understood as a strategic mechanism that integrates legal, psychological, and empowerment aspects in the process of resolving legal cases.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that interpersonal communication carried out by the Sujanlie Totong Law Office plays a strategic role in resolving legal problems faced by clients. Interpersonal communication is not merely a means of conveying legal information but also serves as a mechanism for building understanding, trust, and active client involvement in the advocacy process.

Effective interpersonal communication is reflected in the use of simple and accessible language, transparency in delivering information, empathy toward clients, and participatory communication practices. These elements enable clients to better understand legal procedures, reduce uncertainty, and strengthen their trust in the advocate.

Furthermore, interpersonal communication contributes to the effectiveness of legal problem resolution by facilitating accurate information exchange and ensuring that clients are actively engaged in decision-making processes. Through effective communication, advocates are able

to align legal strategies with clients' needs and conditions.

Therefore, interpersonal communication should not be regarded as a complementary aspect in legal advocacy but as a core element that determines the quality of the advocate–client relationship and the effectiveness of legal problem resolution.

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