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Analysis Of Communication Patterns Between Buddhist And Non-Buddhist Students In Building Relationships At The Sriwijaya State Buddhist Religious College (STABN)

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Abstract

This study examines the communication interactions and patterns that emerge between Buddhist and non-Buddhist students as they build relationships at the Sriwijaya State Buddhist College (STABN). STABN Sriwijaya is a state-run Buddhist college in Indonesia with a unique characteristic: 23% of its total 507 students are non-Buddhists. This study employs a qualitative approach using a descriptive method grounded in the constructivist paradigm. Data were collected through non-participant observation, interviews, documentation, focus group discussions, and literature review. Data analysis utilized an interactive analysis model aligned with George Herbert Mead's symbolic interactionism theory through the concepts of mind, self, and society, as well as a framework of communication patterns.

The results of the study indicate that communicative interactions between Buddhist and non-Buddhist students occur naturally, openly, and harmoniously without any grouping based on religion. Students from diverse religious backgrounds are able to respect each other's religious symbols, position themselves appropriately, and collectively shape inclusive and tolerant classroom norms. Faculty members play an active role in classroom communication both as primary sources of information and as facilitators who encourage equal participation from students of various religious backgrounds.

This study demonstrates that meaningful interfaith communication is highly achievable in a

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religious-based higher education setting when there is openness and a shared commitment to building positive relationships. The communication patterns identified in this study include a wheel-like pattern in both classes with the instructor as the central point, which then evolves into a multidirectional pattern during discussion sessions and group activities. Additionally, linear communication was observed during the material presentation phase, as well as non-linear communication characterized by active two-way feedback among students of different religious backgrounds.

Keywords: Communication Patterns, Interfaith Interaction, Students, Instructors, Symbolic Interactionism.

INTRODUCTION

Communication is a fundamental aspect of human life, including in building social relationships within a diverse society. Indonesia, as a nation with diverse ethnicities, races, and religions encapsulated in the motto "Bhinneka Tunggal Ika" makes interfaith communication an essential need for maintaining social harmony. The various differences in ethnicity, race, and religion are tangible evidence of the richness of Indonesian society (Riyadi, et al., 2024). Although diversity is a strength of the nation, various incidents of religiously motivated violence indicate that interfaith relations in Indonesia remain vulnerable to tension and misunderstanding. This situation can trigger acts of vigilantism and religious sentiment that risk disrupting harmony and dividing religious life in Indonesia (Noor, 2018).

One setting where students of different faiths come together is higher education. The Sriwijaya State Buddhist College (STABN) in Tangerang is the first state-run Buddhist college in Indonesia. One unique aspect of this campus is the presence of non-Buddhist students within an academic environment grounded in Buddhist teachings. According to data from August 2025, of the 507 students at STABN Sriwijaya, approximately 23 percent or 121 students practice religions other than Buddhism. This situation gives rise to distinctive communication dynamics between Buddhist and non-Buddhist students in their daily campus life.

This study focuses on the communicative interactions between Buddhist and non-Buddhist students at STABN Sriwijaya and aims to understand how these two groups of students build meaningful relationships, despite having different backgrounds in terms of beliefs, customs, and values. These differences in background influence how each individual interprets the messages they receive (Yuliasari and Ayuna, 2023). Given that Buddhist and non-Buddhist students have

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different religious understandings and perspectives, this situation requires sensitivity and communication adjustments to ensure interactions remain harmonious. Faculty members do not merely serve as instructors who deliver course material but also play a vital role in the classroom's communication ecosystem. They help shape the atmosphere of interaction through how they facilitate discussions, forming random interfaith study groups, and providing equal opportunities for all students to express their opinions regardless of their religious backgrounds. This relates to several competencies that an educator must possess, including social competence, which is part of communication competence (Yuliasari and Ayuna, 2022).

The presence of non-Buddhist students in a Buddhist-based campus environment such as STABN Sriwijaya creates unique and complex communication dynamics. Unlike typical campus environments, which are relatively homogeneous in terms of religious beliefs, this situation requires students to adapt and build interfaith relationships in both their academic and daily social lives. The issues addressed in this study are how communicative interactions between Buddhist and non-Buddhist students unfold from the perspective of symbolic interactionism, as well as the communication patterns of Buddhist and non-Buddhist students in building relationships on the STABN Sriwijaya campus.

The primary objective of this study is to analyze how communicative interactions occur between Buddhist and non-Buddhist students in building relationships at the Sriwijaya State Buddhist College (STABN), as well as to analyze the communication patterns of Buddhist and non-Buddhist students in building relationships within the campus environment. Thus, this study provides insights into the dynamics of interfaith communication within a religion-based higher education setting involving students from both majority and minority religious backgrounds.

Previous studies have explored themes related to cross-cultural and interfaith communication patterns in various contexts. Nadziya and Nugroho (2021) examined intercultural communication patterns in preventing conflicts between local and non-local students, and found that mutual respect, choosing one's words carefully, and maintaining tolerance are key to preventing friction caused by differences in background. Andini et al. (2024) also found that circular communication patterns with two-way feedback can foster interfaith tolerance at the village community level. Another study by Rizak (2018) demonstrated that intercultural communication that respects the other party's background can reduce communication barriers and enhance mutual trust among religious groups. Nevertheless, most previous research has focused on ethnicity-based intercultural communication or interfaith communication in general community settings, while studies specifically examining the communicative interactions of

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interfaith students within Buddhist religious higher education institutions remain very limited. This gap highlights the uniqueness of the present study, which focuses on how communicative interactions unfold between Buddhist and non-Buddhist students in building relationships at the Sriwijaya State Buddhist College (STABN).

This study is limited in scope to a single case study conducted at the Sriwijaya State Buddhist College (STABN), focusing on the communication interactions between Buddhist and non-Buddhist students, and does not include the entire academic community of STABN Sriwijaya. Therefore, the findings of this study may not be generalizable to other religious colleges with different characteristics and student compositions. Furthermore, because this study is qualitative in nature and employs an interpretive paradigm, the results are highly dependent on subjective interpretations that may be influenced by the perspectives of both the researcher and the informants.

SYMBOLIC INTERACTIONISM AND COMMUNICATION PATTERNS IN INTERFAITH INTERACTION

George Herbert Mead's Symbolic Interactionism serves as the primary framework for analyzing how Buddhist and non-Buddhist students interpret and ascribe meaning to symbols in their interactions whether in the form of language, religious terminology, or specific gestures and customs. According to Mead, human actions are shaped by three main concepts mind, self, and society which are interrelated in forming shared meaning through the process of social interaction (Hasbullah & Ahid, 2022). This theory is highly relevant in the context of a religious campus, where non-Buddhist students need to make sense of the distinctive symbols of Buddhist teachings that dominate the academic environment, while Buddhist students are also expected to be open-minded toward peers of different faiths.

Furthermore, the concept of communication patterns proposed by Onong Uchjana Effendy serves as an important framework for understanding how the communication process unfolds between Buddhist and non-Buddhist students. Effendy (2003) explains that a communication pattern is formed when the message conveyed by the communicator aligns with the message received by the recipient, thereby establishing a shared understanding that persists consistently over a specific period of time. Within this framework, two-way communication is viewed as an active, reflective, and creative form of communication, as each individual can play dual roles as both a recipient and a sender. This nature of communication is crucial in interfaith relations, as it enables dialogue, clarification, and the adjustment of meaning when there are differences in religious backgrounds among the interacting parties.

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METHOD

This study employs a field research design with a qualitative approach and descriptive methods to explore the communicative interactions between Buddhist and non-Buddhist students in building relationships at the Sriwijaya State Buddhist College (STABN). Qualitative research is a process of investigation and understanding based on a methodology that examines social phenomena related to human issues (Creswell, 2016). This study is grounded in the constructivist paradigm, which views social reality not as something objectively present but as something constructed through the experiences, interpretations, and interactions of the actors directly involved in it. As a social constructivist paradigm seeks to interpret diverse meanings, this study aims to understand social events or the characteristics of such events within the constructivist paradigm. A qualitative approach was chosen to gain an in-depth understanding of how communicative interactions naturally occur on campus, both in academic settings and in everyday social contexts. The constructivist paradigm was chosen because this study does not aim to measure cause-and-effect relationships or test hypotheses, but rather to understand the meanings constructed by communication actors through the process of interaction. The communication actors in this study are Buddhist and non-Buddhist students, as well as faculty members, who are part of the classroom communication ecosystem. Through a constructivist lens, the researcher directly observed how each of these actors builds shared understanding, interprets religious differences, and creates communication patterns that emerge naturally in daily interactions within the STABN Sriwijaya environment.

This study was conducted at the Sriwijaya State Buddhist College (STABN), located at Jalan Edutown BSD City, Serpong, Pagedangan, Tangerang Regency, Banten Province. STABN Sriwijaya is the first state-run Buddhist college in Indonesia, with a total of 507 students, of whom approximately 23 percent or 121 students practice religions other than Buddhism. This location was chosen because it serves as a setting for direct interaction between Buddhist and non-Buddhist students in both their daily academic and social lives. The participants in this study were active STABN Sriwijaya students both Buddhist and non-Buddhist from the Buddhist Counseling Psychology Education (PPKB), Elementary School Teacher Education (PGSD), Buddhist Business and Management (BMB), and Buddhist Communication Studies (IKB), with the criteria of being enrolled in their fourth (4th), sixth (6th), and eighth (8th) semesters and actively involved in academic and non-academic activities that bring together students of different faiths. Informants were selected based on the principle of data saturation, which means until the information obtained was deemed sufficient and no new significant data was found. Additional informants

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included faculty members and relevant parties to provide broader contextual insights regarding communication interactions and the dynamics of interfaith relations on campus.

Data were collected using several main techniques. First, the researcher employed non-participant observation, in which the researcher acted as an independent observer without directly participating in the observed activities. Observations were conducted to record the natural communication interactions between Buddhist and non-Buddhist students. Second, interviews were conducted with Buddhist and non-Buddhist students, faculty members, and relevant parties to explore their perceptions, experiences, and communication patterns used in building interfaith relationships. Third, documentation was carried out by taking photographs of student activities during interactions on campus, activity logs, and other supporting documents related to communication patterns and interfaith student relationships. Finally, a Focus Group Discussion (FGD) was conducted with the Student Executive Board (BEM) during an organizational meeting to explore the collective views and social dynamics of students in interfaith communication. The use of multiple data collection techniques in this study necessitated source triangulation. Source triangulation ensures that the data obtained complement one another and enhance the validity and credibility of the research findings regarding communication interactions between Buddhist and non-Buddhist students at STABN Sriwijaya.

Data were analyzed using an interactive analysis model comprising four stages: data collection, data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing or verification. In the initial stage, data obtained through observation, interviews, and documentation were collected. Next, the data were reduced by summarizing and focusing on information relevant to communication interactions between Buddhist and non-Buddhist students. The reduced data is then presented narratively by grouping information into specific patterns of relationships to identify recurring themes. The final stage involves drawing conclusions and verification, which means interpreting the data to address the research questions. Data interpretation is aligned with George Herbert Mead's theoretical framework of symbolic interactionism through the concepts of mind, self, and society. In addition, the validity of the data was examined through source triangulation, which means comparing and cross-checking data obtained from non-Buddhist students with information from faculty members and other university officials ensuring the validity of the research findings. This study ensures compliance with ethical principles by obtaining informed consent from participants and the school administration. Participant confidentiality and anonymity were maintained throughout the research process. This study also followed the research ethics guidelines established by Jayabaya University.

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DISCUSSION

This study was conducted at the Sriwijaya State Buddhist College (STABN), located on Edutown Street in BSD City, Serpong, Pagedangan, Tangerang Regency, Banten Province. STABN Sriwijaya is the first state-run Buddhist college in Indonesia that not only admits Buddhist students but is also open to students from other religious backgrounds. Based on data collected by the researcher in August 2025, out of a total of 507 enrolled students, 121 students or approximately 23 percent practice religions other than Buddhism. This situation creates a religiously diverse academic environment, resulting in communication between Buddhist and non-Buddhist students occurs naturally during daily classroom activities. The study focused on two classes serving as observation sites: the 4th-semester Buddhist Business and Management (BMB) class taking the course "Economic Principles in the Tripitaka," and the 2nd-semester Elementary School Teacher Education (PGSD) class taking the course "Music Education."

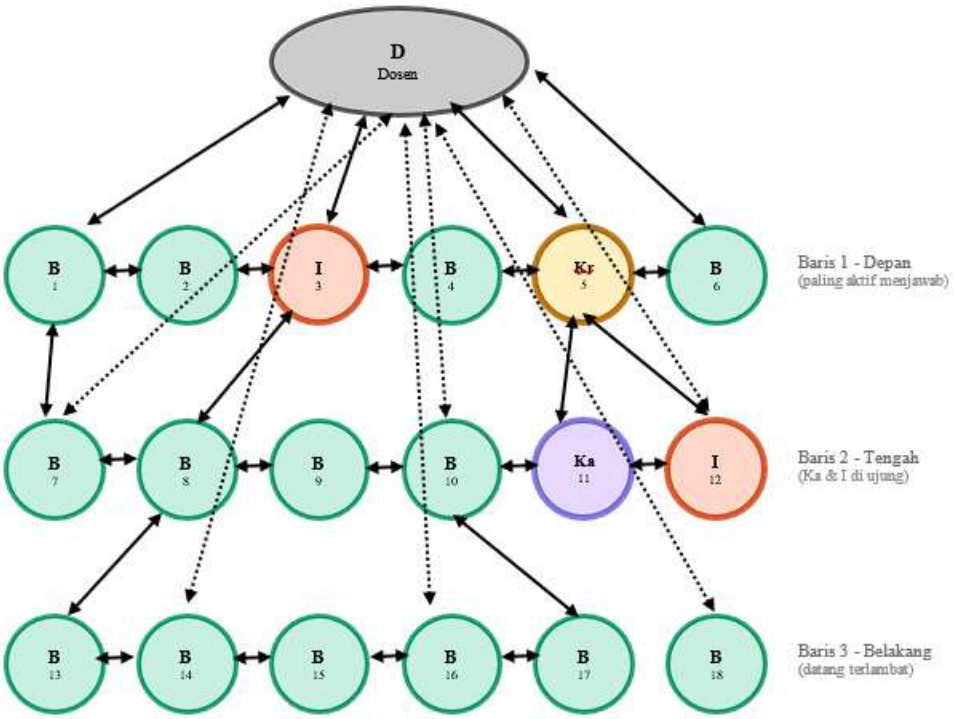


Figure 1. Communication Patterns in BMB 4B Classs

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As shown in Figure 1, the communication pattern in BMB 4B class resembles a wheel with the instructor positioned at the very front as the center of communication. The instructor teaching the BMB 4B class used both verbal and nonverbal language during instruction. This pattern resembles a wheel, with the instructor serving as the central point reaching out to all participants in the classroom. In the first row, the students most actively responding to the instructor are visible, particularly the Muslim student (I3) and the Christian student (Kr5), who are seated next to a Buddhist student. The two-way horizontal arrows visible among the students in this row indicate that communication occurs not only between the instructor and the students but also directly among the students themselves. During the presentation, the Muslim student actively made statements, while the Buddhist student sitting next to him spontaneously responded to and commented on those statements. Occasionally, the Christian student was also seen chatting with the Buddhist student nearby, creating a naturally flowing conversation in the midst of the learning process.

During the Q&A session following the presentation, a Muslim student asked a question regarding the food MSME material from the perspective of his religion, and students in other rows listened attentively and offered warm, open responses. Catholic students in the middle row were also active, making light-hearted remarks that kept the classroom atmosphere lively. Meanwhile, in the third row or the back row, which was entirely filled with Buddhist students who had arrived late, the pattern of communication was relatively more limited. This situation is understandable because their late arrival meant it took them longer to adjust to the flow of the lesson. Overall, the communication pattern that emerged in the BMB 4B class was a wheel-like pattern that developed into a multi-directional one, especially during presentation and group discussion sessions. The instructor remained the central figure in communication, but students from various religious backgrounds actively built their own communication networks within the class, without barriers or grouping based on religious identity. The diagram of the PGSD 2 class communication pattern, as shown in Figure 2, reveals a visually different arrangement compared to the BMB 4B class. In this class, students are arranged in a circle around the instructor, so the resulting structural pattern more closely resembles a wheel. The instructor remains the center of communication, with two-way arrows pointing to all students spread around the circle. The PGSD 2 class has a more diverse student composition, consisting of 7 Buddhist students and 8 non-Buddhist students, including 5 Muslim students, 2 Catholic students, and 1 Protestant student.

The Muslim student (I4) on the upper right is connected by a line to I12 on the opposite side, indicating that communication occurs when the Muslim student demonstrates the hand

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signals for playing the angklung to a Buddhist student who asked a question. Another interesting feature visible in the image is the curved arrow extending from the bottom of the circle back toward the instructor, illustrating how communication does not merely flow from the instructor to the students but also actively flows back from the students to the instructor. Overall, the circular formation in PGSD 2 class fosters conditions that support the development of a more balanced, multi-directional communication pattern.

During the learning process for the course "Principles of Economics in the Tripitaka" in Class BMB 4B, the researcher observed two forms of communication interaction occurring alternately: linear and non-linear communication interactions. Linear communication interaction was evident when the instructor delivered the material directly to all students. At that time, students tended to remain silent and take notes without immediately providing verbal responses. The flow of information moved in one direction from the instructor to the students, and students positioned themselves as recipients of the message. A similar situation also occurred when presentation groups delivered their material in front of the class. While the group speaks and explains the content of the presentation, other students in their seats choose to listen first before responding. Meanwhile, in PGSD 2 class for the Music Education course, linear communication is evident when the instructor gives instructions to all students before the practical activity begins. The instructor explains angklung playing techniques, the sequence of notes, and the division of roles within the group, while the students listen attentively.

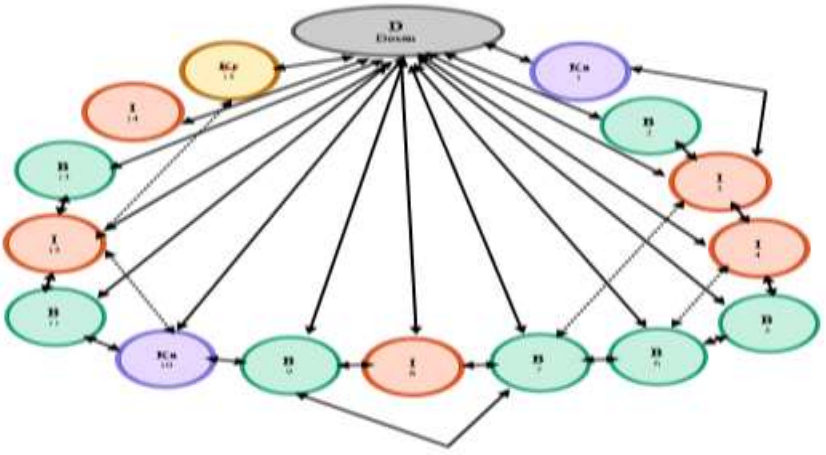


Figure 2. Communication Patterns in PGSD 2 Class

Non-linear communication in the BMB 4B class became apparent when the Q&A session following the presentation began. It was at this moment that the classroom atmosphere became

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more lively and dynamic. One example of such communication occurred when a Muslim student asked the presenting group a question regarding the material on food-related MSMEs specifically, the separation of cooking utensils between halal and non-halal ingredients. The presenting group answered the question thoroughly and openly, without any tension. Other students also listened in and occasionally chimed in. The flow of communication at this moment was no longer one-way but moved back and forth between the questioner, the responder, and other students involved in the discussion. Additionally, non-linear communication occurred when a Catholic student struggled to pronounce a Pali term during the presentation, and a Buddhist student in the class helped correct the pronunciation. Meanwhile, non-linear communication in the PGSD 2 class was evident when students began holding angklungs and practicing together. The Muslim student serving as the group leader gave signals and cues to the group members. When Buddhist students appeared confused by a particular signal, the Muslim student helped correct the movement. The Buddhist students' response was immediately evident: they nodded, tried the movement, and occasionally shared a small laugh together when someone made a mistake. Communication at this moment was two-way, even multi-directional, as it involved several students simultaneously.

The results of this study indicate that the three concepts of George Herbert Mead's symbolic interactionism are tangibly present and mutually reinforcing in the communicative interactions between Buddhist and non-Buddhist students at STABN Sriwijaya. From the perspective of the "mind," non-Buddhist students demonstrated the ability to understand Buddhist religious symbols within the academic process. This process of interpretation does not occur instantly but develops through gradual adaptation. Over time, non-Buddhist students were able to recognize and adapt to various symbols, such as the Namakara Gatha prayer, meditation activities, and Pali terms used in coursework. Nevertheless, understanding the Pali language remains an academic challenge for non-Buddhist students; however, this is viewed as a difficulty in the learning process rather than an obstacle to building social relationships.

From the perspective of self or self-concept, non-Buddhist students at STABN Sriwijaya demonstrated strong role-taking abilities, which means the ability to view themselves from another person's perspective and adapting their communicative behavior appropriately. One of the most consistent findings is the linguistic shift from using the pronouns "gua-lu" to "aku-kamu." This adjustment occurs organically in response to the dominance of a more refined linguistic culture on campus. Non-Buddhist students view their minority status not as a weakness or a burden, but rather as a unique characteristic within a campus environment dominated by Buddhist students.

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Meanwhile, regarding the "society" or social life aspect, the research findings show that the environment at STABN Sriwijaya has fostered an inclusive communication culture for students from diverse religious backgrounds. All informants expressed similar views that the campus provides equal opportunities for every student, does not encourage the formation of groups based on religion, and cultivates a culture of mutual respect as part of communal life. These values are evident in various daily practices, such as conducting prayers tailored to each student's religion when opening organizational activities, faculty members randomly forming study groups so that students become accustomed to interacting with peers of different faiths, and changes to the policy regarding the selection of Campus Ambassadors, which is now open to all students regardless of religion.

The findings of this study indicate that the communication patterns formed between Buddhist and non-Buddhist students at STABN Sriwijaya cannot be identified as a single, standalone pattern. The communication patterns that emerge are an integration of several patterns that alternate depending on the ongoing interaction. One-way communication patterns occur during specific instructional phases, such as when a professor delivers lecture material or when a presentation group explains the content in front of the class. During these moments, the flow of information moves from a single source to all recipients without immediate response. Two-way communication is characterized by direct feedback between the communicator and the recipient. Findings from field observations confirm that two-way communication patterns dominate the interfaith relationships formed, ranging from informal conversations before class, academic discussions, to personal interactions such as sharing personal concerns and offering mutual advice. Multi-directional communication patterns occur during group discussion sessions, Q&A sessions following presentations, and angklung practice activities in the PGSD 2 class. In these situations, messages no longer move between just two parties but flow in various directions simultaneously, involving the instructor, the presenting group, the questioners, and all students in the class as a unified whole that responds to one another.

Despite these successes, this study revealed several challenges. In the BMB 4B class, the most noticeable obstacle was the difficulty Catholic students had in pronouncing Pali terms during presentations. Pali is the language used in Buddhist sacred texts and is unfamiliar to non-Buddhist students. This obstacle demonstrates that differences in religious backgrounds still have the potential to create gaps in understanding of terms and symbols specific to Buddhism, particularly in courses closely related to Buddhist teachings. Overall, the findings from these two classes confirm that communicative interactions between Buddhist and non-Buddhist students at STABN

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Sriwijaya take place in an open, mutually respectful, and productive atmosphere. These communication patterns serve not only as a mechanism for conveying academic information but also as a means of building meaningful social relationships among students from different religious backgrounds.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the communication interactions between Buddhist and non-Buddhist students in building relationships at the Sriwijaya State Buddhist College (STABN). Based on the results of observations in BMB 4B and PGSD 2 classes, as well as in-depth interviews with all informants, the findings show that communication interactions between Buddhist and non-Buddhist students at STABN Sriwijaya occur naturally, openly, and harmoniously. Students from diverse religious backgrounds are able to interact without being grouped by religion, both in academic activities such as presentations, discussions, and Q&A sessions, as well as in everyday informal interactions. Faculty members play an active role as part of the classroom communication ecosystem not merely as content deliverers, but also as facilitators who encourage equal engagement among stud

ents of different faiths through the formation of randomly assigned study groups and by providing equal opportunities for all students to express their opinions. Non-Buddhist students are able to position themselves appropriately within a majority Buddhist environment and build relationships with Buddhist students. The only obstacle identified was academic in nature, namely difficulty understanding Pali terms in courses based on Buddhist teachings, but this did not affect the quality of social relationships formed among students. The communication patterns that emerged were an integration of several patterns that alternated and complemented one another throughout the interaction process: one-way communication during lectures and presentations, two-way communication as the most dominant pattern characterized by direct feedback between students of different faiths, and multi-directional communication during group discussions, Q&A sessions, and practical activities. The integration of these three patterns reflects dynamic and equal communication relationships, in which every student has equal space to act as both a source and a recipient of messages, unrestricted by religious background. These findings align with George Herbert Mead's theoretical framework of symbolic interactionism through the three concepts of mind, self, and society. Students demonstrated an active understanding of each other's religious symbols, were able to position themselves appropriately in interfaith interactions, and collectively shaped inclusive and tolerant campus social norms. Overall, this

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study shows that meaningful interfaith communication is highly possible in a faith-based higher education setting through openness, mutual respect, and a shared awareness of the need to build positive relationships.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Based on the findings and conclusions of this study, several directions for future research are recommended. For students at STABN Sriwijaya, whether Buddhist or non-Buddhist, it is recommended that they continue to maintain and develop the attitude of openness that has been well-established thus far. The ability to communicate across religions sincerely and without prejudice is a highly valuable social asset, not only for campus life but also for life in the broader community. For faculty members at STABN Sriwijaya, it is recommended to maintain an inclusive learning environment as this has proven effective in fostering productive interfaith interactions. Additionally, faculty should be more explicit in facilitating opportunities for non-Buddhist students to share perspectives from their respective religious backgrounds, as this actually enriches the entire class's understanding of the material being studied. For the STABN Sriwijaya administration, it is recommended to continue supporting the creation of an inclusive campus environment through policies and programs that actively celebrate diversity. A new student orientation program specifically designed to introduce the values of tolerance and interfaith communication could serve as a good first step. For future researchers, it is recommended to expand the scope of research by involving more classes, academic programs, and non-academic activities such as student organizations and other campus activities. Further research could also employ a comparative approach with other religious universities to examine how the dynamics of interfaith communication take shape in different institutional contexts.

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