
Health Communication in the Context of Student Organizations: A Qualitative Analysis of Group Communication and Mental Health

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Abstract

Mental health has become a critical concern for university students, particularly those involved in student organizations who balance rigorous academic demands with organizational responsibilities. Grounded in the framework of health communication, this study examines how organizational communication influences the mental well-being of student group members. A qualitative phenomenological approach was employed, utilizing purposive sampling to select six participants with active experience in university student organizations. Data were collected through in-depth interviews and field observations. The findings reveal that communication within these groups is primarily bidirectional, characterized by openness, mutual respect, and active engagement. Effective communication facilitates seamless information sharing, constructive feedback, conflict resolution, and emotional reassurance. Furthermore, student organizations function as vital support networks, providing encouragement, empathy, and practical assistance to members navigating academic stress or personal challenges. While supportive communication fosters a sense of security, belonging, and comfort, poor communication leads to confusion, interpersonal conflict, and emotional distress. In conclusion, organizational communication plays a pivotal role in safeguarding student mental health within academic and extracurricular environments. Cultivating an organizational culture rooted in open dialogue, empathy, and mutual support establishes a positive environment that enhances overall well-being. These insights underscore the necessity of enhancing health communication strategies within student organizations as a proactive measure to prevent psychological distress and promote holistic student well-being..

Keywords– Health Communication, Group Communication, Student Organizations, Mental Health, Social Support.



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1. Introduction

Mental health is a crucial factor that influences the overall quality of life for university students across both academic and social domains. Throughout their higher education journey, students regularly encounter diverse pressures, including managing heavy course loads, striving for high academic performance, adjusting to unfamiliar environments, and fostering peer relationships. If not balanced with proper self-management skills, these multi-faceted demands can generate severe psychological stress.

To complement their academic tracks, a significant number of students actively participate in extracurricular student organizations as a platform for self-development. These organizations offer valuable opportunities to hone leadership skills, expand social networks, improve communication competencies, and cultivate collaborative teamwork dynamics. Involvement in such groups also serves as practical training to prepare students for the professional workforce.

Organizational involvement brings its own set of challenges, such as heavy administrative responsibilities, packed event schedules, internal conflicts, and the difficulty of balancing academic deadlines with organizational duties. Within these organizational environments, group communication functions as a foundational cornerstone, directly driving coordination processes, information sharing, group discussions, and collective decision-making. Well-executed communication fosters positive interpersonal relationships, elevates mutual respect, and builds a supportive organizational atmosphere. Conversely, ineffective communication patterns trigger misunderstandings, interpersonal friction, and emotional discomfort, which can negatively impact members' psychological well-being.

From the specialized paradigm of health communication, communication is understood not merely as a mechanical process of information exchange, but as a vital conduit for delivering social and emotional support that directly enhances individual well-being. Organizational communication structures heavily dictate whether a social environment functions as a supportive network or a psychological stressor (Putra, 2026). Open and supportive communication

environments allow members to freely express their anxieties, share personal challenges, and receive immediate assistance when facing problems. Consequently, the quality of group communication within student organizations stands out as a core factor contributing to members' mental health.

Prior research consistently indicates that social support obtained through group interactions and positive communication can help individuals buffer stress and improve psychological well-being. Organizations that maintain open, participatory, and positive communication loops cultivate a deep sense of psychological safety and comfort for their members. Conversely, closed communication, weak peer support, and unresolved internal friction generate emotional distress that undermines mental health.

While student mental health has attracted significant scholarly interest, the explicit role of group communication within student organizations in shaping mental health remains under-researched. Most existing literature focuses primarily on academic workloads, family environments, or individual traits as the main determinants of student psychological distress. However, the communicative interactions that take place within student groups play an equally critical role in shaping students' psychological experiences throughout their organizational journey.

Driven by this gap, this study explores how group communication within student organizations relates to member mental health. Utilizing a qualitative lens, this research uncovers the lived experiences and perceptions of students regarding the communication dynamics they navigate. The insights gathered are intended to enrich the field of health communication while providing a practical reference for student organizations and universities to design healthier, highly supportive environments that champion student psychological well-being.

2. Method

This study utilizes a qualitative approach with a phenomenological method. The phenomenological method was selected because the primary objective is to capture and understand the subjective, lived experiences of university students

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regarding group communication in student organizations and its direct relationship with their mental health. Through this approach, the researchers closely investigate the internal meanings that students assign to the real-world interactions they experience within organizational settings.

Participants were selected using a purposive sampling technique to ensure the sample aligned with specific criteria relevant to the research goals. The inclusion criteria for participants in this study were:

1. Active university students who have completed at least their second semester.
2. Direct or recent involvement in campus student organizations, such as the Student Executive Board (BEM), Student Legislative Bodies, Student Activity Units (UKM), or other official campus groups.

These criteria ensure that the participants possess sufficient firsthand experience navigating group communication dynamics to provide rich, relevant data regarding the central research focus. Ultimately, six participants were selected based on these benchmarks to provide a diverse and comprehensive dataset.

Data collection relied on in-depth interviews as the primary source of information. These interviews were semi-structured, allowing participants the freedom to share their stories, personal perspectives, and underlying feelings regarding organizational communication and its psychological impacts. To complement the interview data, field observations were conducted to gather a deeper context regarding interpersonal interaction patterns and communication dynamics within these student groups.

Data analysis followed a phenomenological approach, which involved:

1. Isolating significant statements and meaningful experiences shared by the participants.
2. Clustering these data segments into distinct, unified thematic units.
3. Interpreting the deeper, structural meanings behind these lived experiences.

This analytical process was iterative and continuous, running from the initial data collection phase through to the formulation of final conclusions. To ensure empirical validity and trustworthiness, source triangulation was employed by continuously cross-checking information across different participants and contrasting it with the researchers' recorded field observations.

3. Result and Discussion

Communication Patterns Formed Within Student Organizations

The data gathered from the six informers reveals that communication within student organizations is predominantly characterized by a two-way communication pattern. This interactive exchange takes place across multiple channels, including WhatsApp groups, formal coordination meetings, direct face-to-face discussions, and casual interpersonal dialogues among members. This two-way framework facilitates a mutual exchange of information between organizational leaders and general members, ensuring that every individual has an equal opportunity to voice opinions, share ideas, and respond to organizational challenges.

Informer 4 explained that the communication flow operates bidirectionally, bridging leaders and members as well as peer-to-peer relationships. Corroborating this, Informer 2 noted that daily procedural coordination is handled via WhatsApp groups, whereas deep, complex matters are reserved for in-person meetings or direct face-to-face communication.

These findings indicate that communication in student organizations serves as more than just an administrative tool; it acts as a primary vehicle for building vital social relationships. Two-way communication encourages members to participate actively and cultivates a democratic atmosphere.

This aligns with Tutiasri (2016), who states that group communication is inherently driven by shared goals among its members. A healthy group must provide adequate space for individual self-actualization, meaning that group communication must remain balanced and free from the absolute dominance of any single party (Tutiasri, 2016).

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group communication is essential for maintaining organizational cohesion and sustainability. Through effective communication channels, group members share experiences, pool knowledge, and build a unified sense of togetherness to achieve institutional goals. Therefore, the two-way communication models utilized by student organizations successfully establish a transparent environment, maximize member engagement, and strengthen internal social bonds.

Effective Communication as the Foundation for Harmonious Relationships

All interviewed informers agreed that effective communication is characterized by openness, clarity, mutual respect, and providing equal opportunities for every member to contribute opinions. According to the participants, successful communication is achieved not merely when a message is delivered, but when it receives a constructive response and builds mutual understanding between both parties.

Informer 1 stated that effective communication must be clear, transparent, and respectful of diverse opinions. Meanwhile, Informer 3 and Informer 4 emphasized that true effectiveness relies on a two-way flow that actively encourages feedback from all members of the organization.

This demonstrates that openness and equality in communication are critical elements for maintaining harmony within student groups. When individuals feel they have an equal opportunity to speak and be heard, their sense of validation increases, which strengthens their commitment to the organization.

These outcomes align with Liklikwatil et al. (2025), who found that open, transparent, and respectful communication helps organizational members share innovative ideas, air grievances comfortably, and collaborate smoothly on solutions. Good communication builds institutional trust, stabilizes peer relationships, and improves collaborative efficiency (Liklikwatil et al., 2025).

Table 1. Foundational Elements of Effective Group Communication

Communication Element	Operational Manifestation	Psychological Impact
Openness & Transparency	Free sharing of ideas, grievances, and organizational updates without fear of judgment	Builds deep organizational trust and minimizes feelings of isolation
Active Listening	Giving full cognitive attention to peers during discussions, accompanied by constructive feedback	Validates individual worth and reinforces team collaboration
Two-Way Interaction	Moving away from top-down commands toward interactive dialogues between leaders and members	Cultivates a democratic culture and boosts a sense of belonging

The capacity for active listening and delivering positive feedback stands out as an indispensable component of effective communication. Implementing active listening techniques improves interpersonal relationships and reinforces teamwork. Consequently, effective communication functions as more than a practical messaging tool; it serves as the foundation for a harmonious, respectful environment that actively protects members' mental health.

A Culture of Constructive Criticism and Evaluation to Minimize Conflict

The study shows that organizational members generally choose to deliver criticism, suggestions, or complaints through formal evaluation forums or private, one-on-one communication channels. Most informers highlighted that the feedback given is strictly focused on task performance or operational execution, rather than personal attacks.

Informer 3 stated that criticism is handled professionally and remains focused purely on work outputs, never crossing into personal insults. Similarly, Informer 5 explained that their organization schedules regular monthly evaluation meetings specifically to dissect ongoing issues and map out collective solutions.

Maintaining a healthy evaluative culture shows that student organizations possess structured communication mechanisms capable of de-escalating potential interpersonal conflicts. When criticism is delivered constructively, it

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serves as a tool for institutional improvement while preventing long-term misunderstandings.

According to Liklikwatil et al. (2025), conflict management and effective communication are vital competencies for organizational members. Poorly managed conflict can destroy peer relationships, lower productivity, and erode internal trust. Conversely, open and respectful communication helps members resolve disagreements constructively, creating a more cohesive atmosphere. Thus, the evaluation cultures used by student organizations represent a form of healthy communication that supports positive interpersonal relationships and reduces the psychological strain associated with internal conflict (Liklikwatil et al., 2025).

Student Organizations as a Support System for Member Mental Health

The findings demonstrate that mental health discussions occur within student organizations through both formal and informal channels. These discussions typically arise when a member is visibly struggling with academic stress, personal hardships, or burnout caused by heavy organizational workloads.

Informer 6 revealed that mental health check-ins are usually conducted in a casual, highly supportive manner whenever a member shows signs of distress. Informer 1 noted that these discussions naturally happen when members express exhaustion or appear overwhelmed by multiple responsibilities.

When a member experiences stress, the majority of informers stated that peers step in to offer social support by listening to their problems, offering encouragement, providing companionship, and helping resolve the source of distress. This shows that student organizations serve a dual purpose: they are platforms for leadership development and vital sources of social support for their members. This social support creates a safe space where individuals realize they do not have to navigate pressures alone.

This is consistent with Wardasari and Destrity (2023), who explain that peer support groups can reduce psychological discomfort and assist individuals

in recovering from mental strain. Support groups encourage members to exchange personal narratives and coping strategies, which lowers individual stress levels.

Communication functions as a critical component of social support, helping individuals manage psychological stress across various environments. Through supportive communication and mutual empathy, student organizations operate as effective support systems that protect member mental health (Wardasari & Destrity, 2023).

The Impact of Interpersonal Communication on Students' Psychological States

Every informer stated that peer communication within the organization directly influences their psychological condition. Positive communication creates a sense of comfort, increases motivation, and makes members feel valued and accepted. Conversely, poor communication patterns lead to misunderstandings, recurring conflicts, and elevated stress levels.

Informer 2 explicitly stated that positive communication makes members feel safe and appreciated, whereas negative communication causes stress and deters members from participating in organizational events. Informer 5 emphasized that using polite, appreciative language is essential for protecting members' mental well-being.

These insights underscore the close link between communication practices and individual mental health. Positive communication provides psychological safety, builds self-confidence, and fosters a healthy internal atmosphere.

Table 2. Comparison of Positive vs. Negative Communication Dynamics

Communication Dynamic	Typical Indicators	Resulting Psychological State
Positive Dynamics	Two-way feedback, active listening, polite and appreciative language, task-focused evaluation	High motivation, psychological comfort, strong institutional validation
Negative Dynamics	One-way dominance, unresolved conflicts, closed information, personal attacks	Emotional exhaustion, organizational burnout, high situational anxiety

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Rosmalina (2018) explains that interpersonal communication is a highly effective tool for modifying human attitudes, perspectives, and behaviors because it is inherently dialogic and allows for immediate feedback loops. Furthermore, interpersonal communication plays an essential role in maintaining mental health because it actively engages both parties, allowing individuals to co-create healthy communication patterns (Rosmalina, 2018).

This is complemented by Rahmadiana (2012), who states that health communication focuses on how individuals navigate health dilemmas and implement strategies to maintain overall well-being. Health communication aims to raise awareness of health risks, individual well-being, and accessible solutions, influencing human behavior in a positive direction (Rahmadiana, 2012).

Based on these empirical findings and theoretical frameworks, healthy communication within student organizations clearly contributes to positive mental health outcomes. Interpersonal dynamics rooted in openness, mutual respect, and social support create a psychologically secure environment for all involved.

4. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that health communication within student organizations plays a critical role in supporting and improving members' mental health. Based on data collected from active student leaders and members, group communication within these organizations typically follows a two-way pattern. This interactive structure allows for transparent information exchange, open expression of ideas, and constructive feedback loops. This communication model improves operational coordination and helps members build closer relationships, foster peer solidarity, and access social support networks.

The empirical findings show that effective communication is built on openness, mutual respect, equal opportunities for expression, and positive responsiveness among peers. Maintaining these elements reduces organizational anxiety and creates a comfortable working atmosphere. Additionally, a culture of

constructive evaluation that focuses on performance improvements rather than personal critiques helps minimize internal friction and reduces the psychological strain associated with organizational duties.

Student organizations function as effective informal peer support systems. When members experience academic stress, personal challenges, or organizational burnout, supportive actions—such as empathetic listening, encouragement, and collaborative problem-solving—provide psychological comfort and alleviate emotional distress. This highlights that health communication extends beyond disseminating mental health information; it encompasses interpersonal interactions that offer emotional and social support.

Group communication is a vital component of broader health communication strategies within student organizations. The quality of everyday peer interactions shapes the psychological climate of the group, helping students feel validated and accepted while protecting their mental well-being. Cultivating an open, empathetic, and supportive communication culture within campus organizations serves as a practical, preventive approach to mitigate student mental health challenges. Ultimately, these dynamics enrich the field of health communication by demonstrating how organizational social climates directly influence the psychological well-being of university students.

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