



STUDENTS' LIVED EXPERIENCES OF COMMUNICATION AUDITS: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF A UNIVERSITY STUDENT ORGANIZATION

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to understand the experiences and meanings constructed by Communication Science students at UIN Sumatera Utara (UINSU) Medan regarding communication audits within the organization of the Communication Science Student Association (HMJ Ilmu Komunikasi). The study employs a qualitative method with Edmund Husserl's phenomenological approach, which places individuals' conscious experiences as the primary source for understanding reality. Informants were selected purposively from HMJ administrators who were directly involved in organizational activities. Data were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews and observations, and subsequently analyzed using Clark Moustakas' phenomenological analysis, including the stages of horizontalization, textual description, and structural description. Data validity was ensured through source triangulation and technique triangulation. The findings reveal that students perceive communication audits as a process of evaluating the effectiveness of information flow, work-program coordination, and the quality of communication relationships among organizational members. This understanding is not solely derived from academic knowledge but is also shaped by direct experiences in organizational life, including encounters with communication barriers such as inter-divisional miscommunication, delayed responses, and unequal information distribution. This study contributes to the field of organizational communication by positioning communication audits as a phenomenon subjectively interpreted by members of student organizations, rather than merely as a managerial evaluation instrument.

Keywords: Phenomenology, Communication Audit, Organizational Communication, Student Association, Communication Science Student.

1. INTRODUCTION

Student organizations are dynamic communication environments in which members continuously exchange information, coordinate programs, distribute responsibilities, make decisions, and evaluate collective activities (Hidayah et al., 2022; Indainanto et al., 2023). Communication therefore functions not only as a means of transmitting messages but also as a process through which organizational relationships, shared understandings, and collective actions are constructed. In student organizations, communication becomes particularly important because organizational structures are generally characterized by flexible hierarchies, voluntary participation, intensive interpersonal interaction, and different levels of member involvement. Consequently, organizational communication needs to be understood not only in terms of structural effectiveness but also through the experiences and meanings constructed by members who directly participate in organizational activities (Dalimunthe, 2022; Whittle et al., 2023).

This issue is relevant to the Communication Science Student Association (HMJ Ilmu Komunikasi) at Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara (UINSU) Medan. The organization consists of 55 administrators distributed across several divisions, creating an extensive communication network involving meetings, task delegation, information dissemination, program coordination, decision-making, problem-solving, and evaluation. However, the existence of formal communication structures does not necessarily ensure that all members experience communication similarly. Differences may occur in access to information, clarity of instructions, opportunities to express opinions, responsiveness of leaders, and feedback mechanisms. As a result, the same communication process may be perceived as effective by some members but unclear or limited by others.

These conditions make communication audits relevant for examining organizational communication. A communication audit refers to a systematic assessment of communication processes, including information flows, communication channels, feedback, and relationships among organizational members. Previous studies have shown that organizational communication is closely associated with coordination, information distribution, participation, and member relationships (Lee et al., 2022; Suhendar, Syam, et al., 2023). Studies have also indicated that students'

organizational experiences influence their understanding of communication because academic knowledge interacts with practical organizational experiences (Kholil et al., 2024; Muukkonen & Kajamaa, 2024).

Nevertheless, previous studies on communication audits have predominantly emphasized evaluative and managerial perspectives, particularly organizational effectiveness, communication channels, and information flow. Meanwhile, research on student organizations commonly focuses on communication patterns, leadership, coordination, or interpersonal relationships. Limited attention has been given to how students consciously experience, interpret, and assign meaning to communication audits. This gap is particularly significant for Communication Science students because they encounter communication simultaneously as academic knowledge and lived organizational practice.

The novelty of this study lies in positioning communication audits not merely as organizational evaluation instruments but as lived communication phenomena. Using Edmund Husserl's phenomenological perspective, the study explores how communication audits appear in students' consciousness through their direct organizational experiences. Clark Moustakas' phenomenological analysis is employed to identify significant statements, formulate meaning units, develop thematic clusters, and synthesize the essence of participants' experiences. This approach enables the study to reveal the subjective meaning structures underlying organizational communication experiences.

Accordingly, this study aims to explore students' lived experiences within HMJ Ilmu Komunikasi UINSU Medan, examine how these experiences shape their understanding of communication audits, and identify the meanings they construct from organizational communication practices. The central research question is: How do Communication Science students experience, understand, and derive meaning from communication audits based on their involvement in HMJ Ilmu Komunikasi UINSU Medan?

2. RESEARCH METHODE

This study employs a qualitative method with a phenomenological approach to explore students' lived experiences and understandings of communication audits within the Communication Science Student Association (HMJ Ilmu Komunikasi) at

UINSU Medan. Edmund Husserl's phenomenology provides the philosophical foundation for examining how phenomena appear in individual consciousness and acquire meaning through direct experience (Cudjoe, 2023). This approach enables an in-depth exploration of students' perceptions, experiences, and meanings related to organizational communication practices (Creswell, 2021; Tracy & Gist-Mackey, 2024).

The study uses primary and secondary data. Primary data were obtained through semi-structured in-depth interviews with Communication Science students actively involved in HMJ and experienced in its communication practices. Informants were selected purposively based on their organizational involvement, relevant experience, and ability to provide information aligned with the research focus (Kim & Backonja, 2024). Secondary data were derived from organizational documents, activity archives, administrative reports, and scholarly literature related to phenomenology, organizational communication, and communication audits (Scogin, 2025).

Data were collected through in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation. Interviews allowed informants to describe their experiences and interpretations openly, while observation was used to identify communication situations, interactions, and practices occurring within the organizational environment (Fleming et al., 2022; Suhendar et al., 2023).

Data analysis followed Moustakas' (1994) phenomenological procedure, beginning with horizontalization to identify significant statements, followed by clustering these statements into thematic meaning units. Textural and structural descriptions were then developed to explain what participants experienced and how those experiences occurred, culminating in the formulation of the essence of the phenomenon (Abraham & Padmakumari, 2026). Data credibility was strengthened through source and technique triangulation by comparing information across informants and cross-checking interview findings with observations and supporting documents.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Students' understanding of communication audits within the HMJ Ilmu Komunikasi UINSU Medan organization is the result of their direct involvement and interaction in organizational life (Nasution & Deni, 2022; Purba et al., 2025). This understanding is formed through various communicative activities such as meetings, work-program coordination, information dissemination, feedback provision, and activity evaluation processes occurring within the organization. Students' involvement in these activities produces diverse understandings of communication audits, both as efforts to evaluate information flow and as a means to assess the effectiveness of communication within the organization (Suhendar et al., 2024; Thornhill-Miller et al., 2023). The findings indicate that students' understanding of communication audits is not solely influenced by academic knowledge acquired during coursework, but also by real experiences encountered during their membership in HMJ. These findings provide the basis for further elaborating how students interpret communication audits based on their experiences and the organizational communication realities they face in daily life (Ritonga et al., 2023; Syam et al., 2024).

Table 1. Interview Results

Informant	Communication Experience in HMJ	Communication Experienced	Barriers
Informant 1	During their tenure as an HMJ administrator, this informant actively participated in meetings and work program coordination. Communication among members generally ran well, as information was frequently disseminated through WhatsApp groups and direct meetings.	Occasionally, information shared in the group was missed by some members, thus leading to differences in understanding regarding assigned tasks.	
Informant 2	This informant regularly communicated with other members and administrators while preparing organizational activities. They perceived communication within HMJ as fairly open, as members could express their opinions during meetings.	Not all members responded promptly to shared information, which sometimes slowed down coordination.	
Informant 3	This informant gained extensive communication experience through meetings, discussions, and the implementation of work programs.	Instances of inter-divisional miscommunication occurred because information was not	

	Intensive interaction deepened their understanding of how the organization operates.	received uniformly across different parties.
Informant 4	This informant found that communication within HMJ was helpful in carrying out activities due to regular coordination between administrators and members.	Some important information was occasionally limited to certain parties, leaving some members feeling inadequately informed.
Informant 5	This informant observed that communication within HMJ was active, especially when the organization was implementing work programs or preparing for an event.	Differences in the interpretation of shared information frequently became an obstacle, particularly when instructions were not explained in sufficient detail.

The findings reveal that Communication Science students at UINSU Medan understand communication audits as a process related to the evaluation and assessment of communicative effectiveness within the HMJ organization. This understanding was formed through their participation in various organizational activities, including meetings, work-program coordination, information dissemination, guidance, and activity evaluation. Some informants interpreted communication audits as an effort to determine whether the information conveyed had been received and understood by all members of the organization. Others regarded communication audits as a means of identifying communication barriers that could affect organizational performance. These findings indicate that students' understanding of communication audits draws not only from academic knowledge acquired in classrooms but also from communicative experiences directly encountered in organizational life (Dalimunthe et al., 2024; Musa et al., 2023).

These findings can be understood through Edmund Husserl's phenomenological perspective, which emphasizes that the meaning of a phenomenon is formed through an individual's conscious experience. Husserl argued that reality is not merely present as an objective fact but is also something lived and given meaning by the experiencing subject (Marosan, 2022; Saraan et al., 2024). In the context of this study, students understand communication audits based on their interactions within the HMJ organization. Experiences related to information transparency, coordination effectiveness, message clarity, and communication relationships among members form students' awareness of the importance of communication evaluation within the organization. The understanding that emerges from each informant demonstrates that communication audits are present as a phenomenon that acquires meaning through their lived experiences as organizational members.

Clark Moustakas's (1994) phenomenological analysis was used to identify the essence of students' experiences regarding communication audits within the HMJ organization. Through

the process of horizontalization, the researcher identified significant statements describing informants' experiences related to information flow, coordination, feedback, and organizational communication evaluation. These statements were subsequently clustered into thematically coherent meaning groups, yielding a textual description of what informants experienced and a structural description of how those experiences occurred. The analytical process revealed that the essence of students' experiences lies in their interpretation of communication audits as a means of ensuring organizational communication effectiveness while simultaneously serving as a medium for reflecting on the quality of communicative relationships within HMJ.

The credibility of the research findings was strengthened through source triangulation and technique triangulation. Source triangulation was conducted by comparing information obtained from several informants occupying different positions and backgrounds within the HMJ organization. The comparison revealed a shared view that communication audits relate to the process of organizational communication evaluation, although variations existed in how informants attributed meaning to the concept (Sarapaivanich et al., 2024). Technique Triangulation This was done by comparing data from in-depth interviews with the results of observations and relevant organizational documents. The correspondence between the data obtained from various sources and techniques shows that the research findings have a good level of credibility and are able to describe the phenomenon studied more comprehensively.

The novelty of this study lies in its effort to understand communication audits from the perspective of students' experiences and interpretations as organizational practitioners, rather than merely as objects of organizational evaluation. Prior research has generally addressed communication audits as instruments for measuring the effectiveness of organizational communication systems through evaluative and managerial approaches. This study offers a different perspective by positioning communication audits as a phenomenon given meaning through the lived experiences of student organizational members. The application of Edmund Husserl's phenomenological approach, combined with Moustakas's phenomenological analysis, enables this study to uncover the essence of students' understanding of communication audits in greater depth. These findings offer a new contribution to the field of organizational communication, particularly within the context of student organizations, which remain relatively underexplored through a phenomenological lens.

4. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that Communication Science students' understanding of communication audits within the HMJ organization is shaped by a combination of academic knowledge and communicative experiences directly encountered in organizational life. Students interpret communication audits as an effort to evaluate organizational communication effectiveness, encompassing the smoothness of information flow, the quality of work-program coordination, the openness of opinion expression, and the organization's capacity to identify and address communication barriers.

From the perspective of Edmund Husserl's phenomenology, the meaning constructed by each informant is subjective and contextual, influenced by their position, level of involvement, and real experiences during their membership in HMJ. The most commonly encountered communication barriers include unequal distribution of information, inter-divisional miscommunication, and delayed member responses to messages conveyed through digital media or direct meetings.

Through Clark Moustakas's phenomenological analysis, it was found that the essence of students' experiences of communication audits lies in their interpretation of audits as a medium for reflecting on the quality of organizational communication and as an instrument for ensuring that all members receive and comprehend information comprehensively. These findings affirm that communication audits in student organizations are not merely formal evaluative procedures, but rather lived and meaningful experiences for every organizational member.

This study recommends that HMJ organizations pay greater attention to the quality of information flow and feedback mechanisms among members, and that communication evaluation be incorporated as a routine component of organizational management. Future studies of a similar nature should be extended to other student organizational contexts using phenomenological perspectives, in order to generate a more comprehensive understanding of communication dynamics within higher education environments.

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