

## COMMUNICATION MODEL OF CORRECTIONAL OFFICERS TO RECIDIVIST INMATES IN ENCOURAGING PARTICIPATION IN SELF-RELIANCE DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS AT CLASS I CORRECTIONAL FACILITY MEDAN



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**ABSTRACT**

*This study examines the communication patterns used by correctional officers in engaging recidivist inmates at the Class I Correctional Facility Medan, in response to the high rate of recidivism in Indonesia and the challenges of overcrowding. The research aims to describe how communication is applied in the rehabilitation process and to identify the obstacles faced in encouraging inmate participation in independence development programs. Using a descriptive qualitative approach, data were collected through in-depth interviews, observations, and documentation involving correctional officers and recidivist inmates selected purposively. The findings show that interpersonal communication characterized by empathy, openness, and a persuasive approach plays an important role in increasing inmate participation in rehabilitation activities, particularly vocational skills training programs. However, the implementation of effective communication is still constrained by several factors, including overcrowded conditions, a limited number of officers, lack of communication training, and peer pressure among inmates. These challenges hinder the optimization of rehabilitation programs. Therefore, strengthening communication capacity, increasing the number of officers, and improving institutional support are necessary to enhance the effectiveness of inmate rehabilitation and reduce recidivism rates.*

**Keywords:** *Communication Model; Recidivist Inmates; Independence Development; Correctional Facility; Rehabilitation*

## INTRODUCTION

Correctional institutions in Indonesia have long faced various structural and functional challenges, especially in carrying out their duty to rehabilitate inmates as part of the criminal justice system. One of the main issues that has emerged is the high rate of recidivism the tendency of former inmates to reoffend after release. This phenomenon reflects the suboptimal performance of the correctional system in fulfilling its function as a rehabilitative and reintegrative institution (Ryanto, 2021; Hersyanda & Lubis, 2024).

This problem is exacerbated by the fact that the capacity of correctional institutions is far below the number of inmates they accommodate. According to the Public SDP data from the Directorate General of Corrections as of February 2025, the number of inmates in correctional institutions in Indonesia reached 273,754, while the ideal capacity is only around 145,788. This indicates an overcrowding rate of up to 87.7%. Class I Correctional Facility Medan, as one of the technical implementing units under the Ministry of Law and Human Rights, is no exception, with an overcrowding rate of 190.2% and a total of 354 recidivist inmates (Ditjenpas, 2025).

Recidivism is not only an indicator of weak rehabilitation systems but also reveals a failure in communication between officers and inmates. In the context of modern corrections, communication functions not only as a means of conveying information but also as a bridge to build trust, motivation, and inmate self-awareness to encourage full participation in the rehabilitation process (Gunawan et al., 2024). This aligns with the rehabilitative approach that views inmates as subjects of character development rather than mere objects of punishment.

Effective communication can encourage inmates to actively participate in self-reliance development programs. These programs are designed to equip them with the necessary skills and knowledge to reintegrate into society. Self-reliance development encompasses not only technical aspects such as vocational training and entrepreneurship but also mental and social aspects that are heavily influenced by the communication model employed by officers (Adytaseptyanto & Wibowo, 2022; Fatahilah & Jarodi, 2023).

The communication model used by correctional officers in prisons plays a strategic role in establishing healthy and productive interpersonal relationships. Berlo's SMCR (Source, Message, Channel, Receiver) communication model provides a relevant theoretical framework for explaining the communication dynamics between officers and inmates, as it emphasizes the importance of communication skills, attitudes, knowledge, and the suitability of communication channels to the conditions of the message receiver (Mulyana, 2015; Wijayani, 2022).

Additionally, Cohen and Uphoff's (1979) theory of participation highlights the importance of active inmate involvement in various stages of rehabilitation programs, from planning and implementation to evaluation. Open and two-way communication is key to building a sense of ownership and responsibility toward the rehabilitation process itself (Hadiyanti, 2023).

Based on the discussion, this study raises two main research questions:

1. What communication model is used by correctional officers to encourage the participation of recidivist inmates in self-reliance development programs at Class I Correctional Facility Medan?
2. What are the obstacles encountered in the implementation of this communication model?

Therefore, this study aims to identify and describe the communication patterns used by correctional officers with recidivist inmates in implementing self-reliance development, and to analyze the barriers that hinder the effectiveness of this communication within the context of Class I Correctional Facility Medan.

This research is expected to provide both theoretical and practical contributions to the development of more effective communication strategies in correctional environments, particularly in rehabilitating recidivist inmates so that they may transform into independent and responsible individuals upon release.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

The correctional system in Indonesia has long struggled with high recidivism rates and chronic overcrowding, particularly in facilities like Class I Correctional Facility Medan. These structural issues have undermined the effectiveness of rehabilitation programs aimed at inmate reintegration. Central to this problem is the communication model used by correctional officers, which plays a pivotal role in influencing inmate participation in independence-building activities.

Several studies emphasize the importance of empathetic, interpersonal communication that fosters trust and openness, especially for recidivist inmates who often harbor trauma and skepticism toward institutional systems (Gunawan et al., 2024; Fatahilah & Jarodi, 2023). The SMCR model by David Berlo has been identified as a relevant framework, stressing the importance of message clarity, appropriate channels, and sensitivity to the receiver's condition (Mulyana, 2015; Wijayani, 2022). A two-way dialogic approach, supported by participatory frameworks like Cohen and Uphoff's theory, helps transform inmates from passive recipients to active participants in their rehabilitation journey (Hadiyanti, 2023).

Despite these theoretical strengths, the practical implementation of effective communication faces numerous barriers. Overcrowding reported at 190.2% of capacity limits personal engagement between officers and inmates, while limited staffing resources make individualized communication difficult (Ditjenpas, 2025). Additionally, some officers lack specialized training in rehabilitative or psychosocial communication, often defaulting to authoritative and formal interactions that alienate inmates (Gunawan et al., 2024). Social pressures within prisons, such as stigma from fellow inmates, further discourage participation in independence programs. Moreover, bureaucratic hurdles and inadequate facilities undermine the perceived value of such programs, leading many inmates to see them as ineffective formalities (Meliarsyah et al., 2024). Thus, while human-centered communication models have shown promise in improving inmate engagement, systemic reforms are needed to overcome structural and institutional limitations.

## **METHOD**

This study uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive research design. This approach was chosen because it allows the researcher to gain an in-depth understanding of the communication process between correctional officers and recidivist inmates in the context of self-reliance development. The qualitative method focuses on interpreting complex social phenomena that cannot be measured statistically, but are crucial to comprehend through direct interaction and deep interpretation of the behavior, perspectives, and experiences of the research subjects.

The design of this qualitative descriptive research aims to provide a systematic, factual, and accurate depiction of the communication model implemented by

correctional officers at Class I Correctional Facility Medan. This study does not attempt to test hypotheses or identify causal relationships, but rather to describe the communication patterns and barriers encountered based on data obtained from informants. The emphasis of this research lies in the exploration of social reality as it is, without manipulating variables.

The data sources in this study consist of both primary and secondary data. Primary data were obtained directly through in-depth interviews with correctional officers and recidivist inmates who served as key informants. In addition, observations of self-reliance development activities at the correctional facility were conducted to gain a direct contextual understanding. Secondary data were obtained from documentation, reports on rehabilitation activities, and relevant regulations from the correctional institution and the Ministry of Law and Human Rights. Informants were selected purposively, based on who was most knowledgeable about the context of recidivist inmate rehabilitation and the communication involved.

The data analysis technique was carried out through the processes of data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. Data obtained from interviews and observations were recorded, coded, and categorized based on themes relevant to the research questions. Thematic analysis was conducted to uncover emerging communication patterns and the obstacles faced. Using this method, the researcher was able to interpret the communication reality in the field comprehensively and thoroughly, thus providing a meaningful contribution to the development of communication models within the correctional environment.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Based on the results of data collection and analysis, the implementation of self-reliance development programs at Class I Correctional Facility Medan demonstrates a complex dynamic, both in terms of success and the challenges encountered. These programs function as a strategic tool to support the rehabilitation of recidivist inmates—not only by providing practical and vocational training, but also by fostering moral, social, and psychological development. This study reveals that the communication strategies employed by correctional officers have had a significant impact on improving the attitudes, behavior, and motivation of recidivist inmates to engage in productive activities. Nevertheless, the full potential of these programs has not yet been realized due to various structural and individual-level barriers that hinder optimal participation. Therefore, this section will explore in greater depth how the communication model is applied, its influence on inmate engagement, and the specific obstacles faced in its implementation.

### **Communication Model of Correctional Officers to recidivist inmate in encouraging participation in self reliance development programs at Class I Correctional Facility Medan**

Class I Correctional Facility Medan implements a communication model that emphasizes an interpersonal approach as the foundation for building interactions between correctional officers and inmates, especially those with recidivist status. Communication serves as a key element in fostering inmate engagement in self-reliance development activities, considering their complex backgrounds and tendency to be apathetic toward the rehabilitation system. Through appropriate communication, constructive relationships between officers and inmates can be established as an initial step in building trust.

This communication model is not limited to formal interactions such as briefings before activities or the delivery of administrative information. Officers also actively engage in informal communication, such as speaking directly with inmates outside official activity schedules. These personal interactions create emotional closeness, enhancing the inmates' trust in the officers. Informal communication also allows inmates to feel more relaxed and open in expressing their opinions (Gunawan et al., 2024).

One of the key characteristics of this communication approach is the principle of openness and equality. Recidivist inmates are given the space to express their views, provide input, and even offer criticism regarding the implementation of rehabilitation programs. The existence of a two-way dialogue fosters a sense of inclusion, where inmates do not merely receive policies but feel involved as part of the rehabilitation process. This has a positive impact on their motivation and participation.

The theoretical framework for the communication used by officers refers to David K. Berlo's SMCR model, which highlights the importance of four core components in communication: the source (sender), the message, the channel, and the receiver. In the prison context, each of these elements presents specific challenges that must be addressed for communication to function effectively (Mulyana, 2015; Wijayani, 2022).

In terms of the source, correctional officers act as the senders of the message who must possess communication skills, contextual understanding, and an empathetic attitude toward inmates' conditions. Officers who understand the psychological and social circumstances of inmates are more capable of delivering messages accurately and effectively. This is especially important because recidivist inmates often carry traumatic experiences or distrust toward the system.

Regarding the message, the communication conveyed is not only instructive but also persuasive. Messages often contain moral encouragement, motivation, and insights on the importance of becoming self-reliant after incarceration. Officers also integrate character-building messages into daily conversations, aimed at shaping a positive outlook among inmates regarding their future outside the prison.

For the channel, officers utilize various forms of interaction, both verbal and non-verbal. Face-to-face communication is considered the most effective method, as it allows for emotional expression, empathy, and body language that reinforces the message. Additionally, group briefings and regular meetings provide forums for broader information exchange and dialogue between inmates and officers.

From the receiver perspective, recidivist inmates respond differently depending on their educational background, prior criminal experiences, and psychological conditions. However, in general, they respond more positively when communication is conducted with empathy and a non-patronizing tone.

The success of this communication is reflected in the inmates' participation in various self-reliance programs such as sewing, screen printing, horticulture, aquaculture, and other creative industries. Inmates who feel included from the beginning and understand the benefits of the programs tend to show higher enthusiasm (Fatahilah & Jarodi, 2023; Adytaseptyanto & Wibowo, 2022).

In addition to serving as a tool for rehabilitation, communication also functions as an instrument of social control that encourages inmate discipline. Rather than using coercive methods, officers prefer persuasive approaches to regulate inmate behavior. This aligns with the spirit of correctional principles that emphasize rehabilitation and humanity, rather than mere punishment.

In practice, officers do not position themselves as unilateral authorities, but rather as mentors and guides. This role enables them to build deeper trust-based relationships and change inmates' perceptions of correctional facilities—from places of punishment to environments for growth and transformation.

Ultimately, the communication model implemented illustrates a paradigm shift in modern correctional practices. Officers are expected not only to master administrative procedures but also to possess strong communication competencies. Communication is no longer just a tool for delivering information; it becomes a vital bridge for building new values, improving social relationships, and creating opportunities for personal transformation among recidivist inmates.

### **Obstacle in Communication Model between officers and recidivist inmate in encouraging participation in self reliance development activities at Class I Correctional Facility Medan**

The most fundamental issue that hinders the effectiveness of communication between correctional officers and recidivist inmates at Class I Correctional Facility Medan is the extremely high level of overcrowding. With an occupancy rate reaching 190.2% of its ideal capacity, the institution faces tremendous operational pressure. The density of the population limits interaction space and makes it difficult for officers to establish personal and intensive communication, especially with recidivist inmates who require a specialized approach (Ditjenpas, 2025).

The imbalance in the ratio between officers and inmates becomes an additional problem that further worsens communication barriers. With a limited number of officers, efforts to build deep and individualized communication must be compromised. As a result, the communication that occurs tends to be one-way and normative, focusing more on administrative instructions rather than on psychosocial and rehabilitative development.

One common characteristic of recidivist inmates is the tendency to carry past trauma, especially related to their experiences with law enforcement or previous time spent in correctional institutions. This trauma directly affects their attitudes, making them defensive or even rejecting involvement in rehabilitation programs. Their lack of trust in the rehabilitation system makes communication with officers a particular challenge that requires a more careful and empathetic approach.

In addition to psychological factors, barriers also arise from communication styles used by officers, which are not always compatible with the mental and emotional state of the inmates. Some officers, especially those who have not received specific training in rehabilitative communication, tend to use authoritative and formalistic approaches. This kind of communication pattern only strengthens inmate resistance and reduces their interest in participating in development programs (Gunawan et al., 2024).

Social pressure within the prison environment is also a significant obstacle. In many cases, inmates who wish to change or participate in rehabilitation programs experience pressure from certain groups or fellow inmates. This pressure may come in the form of ridicule, intimidation, or even social rejection, as rehabilitation activities are often perceived as unimportant or lacking practical benefits in prison life.

The limited availability of infrastructure and facilities for rehabilitation activities further exacerbates the situation. The tools, materials, and spaces provided are often inadequate, which fosters the perception that the rehabilitation programs are merely formalities and do not offer real benefits for their future. As a result,

inmates tend to view these programs with skepticism and are reluctant to participate (Meliarsyah et al., 2024).

The amount of time officers have to communicate with inmates is also extremely limited, as they must divide their time among administrative duties, security tasks, and rehabilitation activities. As a consequence, the communication approach tends to be rushed and overly formal. This leads inmates to feel that officers do not truly understand or care about their personal conditions.

The lengthy and complicated bureaucratic procedures involved in registering or including inmates in rehabilitation programs also become a technical obstacle that affects their willingness to participate. Many inmates find the administrative process confusing and burdensome, prompting them to withdraw from participation rather than deal with the complex procedures.

The communication skills of officers also represent a critical weakness that directly affects the effectiveness of interaction. Not all officers are equipped with training in rehabilitative communication or psychosocial approaches. This lack of training results in some officers being unable to build emotional closeness or understand the psychological needs of recidivist inmates in depth.

In addition, the absence of a regular evaluation system for assessing the patterns and effectiveness of communication used is also a structural barrier. Without measurable and systematic evaluation, existing communication strategies tend to become stagnant and fail to adapt to the changing needs of inmates or social dynamics within the correctional facility.

Factors such as age and past recidivism experience also influence inmates' responses to invitations to participate in rehabilitation activities. Inmates who have been incarcerated multiple times generally have low confidence in the success of such programs. They tend to be pessimistic and view rehabilitation as a mere formality with no real impact on their lives after release.

Overall, these obstacles indicate that the communication model implemented by correctional officers is still not fully supported by a responsive and adaptive system. Systemic intervention is required through the enhancement of officer capacity, the provision of adequate facilities, and the simplification of bureaucratic procedures to ensure that communication can function effectively as a tool for social transformation for recidivist inmates.

## **CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION**

As a rehabilitation institution, the correctional facility holds a strategic role in preparing inmates to reintegrate into society with a sense of independence and legal awareness. Within this context, communication between correctional officers and inmates becomes a fundamental aspect that determines the effectiveness of the rehabilitation process. Communication is not merely seen as a tool for delivering information, but as a means to build social relationships, foster trust, and cultivate inmate motivation to actively participate in development programs.

This study shows that the communication model applied by officers at Class I Correctional Facility Medan plays a crucial role in encouraging the involvement of recidivist inmates in self-reliance development activities. Officers employ an interpersonal approach that emphasizes empathy, openness, and equality in communication. Communication is conducted in two forms formally through briefings and informally through direct conversations both of which have proven effective in establishing emotional connections. The use of the SMCR communication model also

helps explain how messages are conveyed by considering the context, channels, and characteristics of the inmates as message receivers.

The involvement of recidivist inmates in rehabilitation activities increases along with the quality of communication that is established. Inmates who feel appreciated, trusted, and heard tend to have a higher commitment to participating in skills training such as sewing, screen printing, farming, and handicrafts. This demonstrates that a humanistic communication approach can transform passive and apathetic attitudes into active participation.

However, the effectiveness of this communication model is not yet fully optimal, as various obstacles are still encountered in the field. One major issue is the significant overcrowding reaching 190.2% of the ideal capacity which negatively impacts the quality of individual interactions between officers and inmates. In addition, the limited number of officers causes communication to become more instructive and general, rather than personal and in-depth rehabilitation.

Other obstacles stem from the recidivist inmates themselves, who often carry past trauma, distrust of the system, and experience social pressure within the prison environment. The communication styles of officers, which are not yet fully adaptive to the psychological conditions of inmates, also serve as a barrier. The lack of training in rehabilitative communication means that some officers are still unable to build supportive and empowering relationships.

Beyond psychosocial challenges, structural and systemic factors also undermine communication effectiveness. Lengthy bureaucratic procedures, limited rehabilitation facilities, and the absence of a structured communication evaluation system result in communication-based rehabilitation efforts being far from optimal. Consequently, some inmates choose not to participate, viewing rehabilitation programs as mere formalities.

In conclusion, officer communication serves as a critical foundation in encouraging the participation of recidivist inmates in self-reliance development programs. When communication is carried out with the appropriate approach, inmate responses become more positive and productive. However, to ensure the communication model functions effectively on a broader scale, systemic improvements are needed across policy, management, and human resource capacity.

This study recommends regular training for correctional officers on rehabilitative communication techniques and psychosocial approaches. In addition, the provision of more representative rehabilitation facilities and the implementation of a communication monitoring and evaluation system are highly necessary. With these measures in place, communication can evolve from being merely a control tool to a bridge of social transformation that helps inmates reintegrate more successfully into society.

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