

## ENHANCING STUDENT COMFORT IN LAMPUNG ISLAMIC BOARDING SCHOOLS: COMMUNICATION AND PSYCHOLOGICAL SUPPORT

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### Abstract

Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) are renowned for providing quality education and fostering character development, but they also face challenges in ensuring student well-being. This study explores how Lampung pesantren address student discomfort, a barrier to both academic and personal growth. Using in-depth interviews with administrators, supervisors, and psychologists from three institutions (Sabilil Muttaqin Tanggamus, Mathla'ul Anwar Lampung Selatan, and Al-Amin Central Lampung), this qualitative field research investigates efforts to improve student comfort. The research identifies two key strategies employed by the boarding schools to improve student comfort. Firstly, extensive verbal communication is prioritized. *Mudabbirs* provide daily support and guidance to students, fostering a sense of trust and openness in communication. Secondly, the schools actively engage with parents and guardians through regular monthly meetings, ensuring a collaborative approach to student development that encompasses both academic and non-academic aspects. Notably, the involvement of external psychologists is emerging as a successful practice. Psychologists conduct student assessments, enabling data-driven guidance tailored to individual needs. This addresses not only behavioral issues but also underlying psychological factors. This study sheds light on the proactive measures taken by Lampung Islamic boarding schools to prioritize student comfort. The findings highlight the importance of effective communication, parental involvement, and professional psychological support in fostering a positive and nurturing learning environment for students.

**Keywords:** *Islamic Boarding School (Pesantren); Communication; Psychological Support.*

### INTRODUCTION

Islamic boarding schools, as the oldest educational institution in Indonesia, play an important role in advancing the nation's education and independence. Pesantren is growing rapidly with various types, but behind its progress, there are issues of santri discomfort that need to be taken seriously because it can hinder their potential and achievement. The transition to Pondok Pesantren marks a significant life

change for many students (Rahayu, 2019). Leaving behind familiar homes and routines, they enter an entirely new environment with strict rules, communal living, and hectic academic schedules.

This sudden shift can be overwhelming and psychologically exhausting for some santri, leading to feelings of discomfort, homesickness, and even anxiety. The initial period of adaptation is especially challenging for santri who may have never experienced such a structured and organized lifestyle. The unfamiliar environment, coupled with the pressure to conform to new rules and expectations, can trigger feelings of isolation and alienation. This emotional distress can manifest in a variety of ways. The students' discomfort can result in students leaving the pesantren, students breaking the rules, students getting sick, and not achieving achievements, both academic and non-academic achievements, even though the students basically have the competence and potential to excel (Jauhar, 2019).

The issue of santri discomfort, a common challenge in Islamic boarding schools, requires innovative and effective solutions. Responding to this problem, this research focuses on the efforts of Pondok Pesantren in Lampung to find out the factors that cause santri discomfort through an integrated approach of communication and psychological support. This approach, which combines effective communication strategies and psychological counseling techniques. By establishing an open and transparent communication process, santri gain a clear understanding of the pesantren's rules, expectations, and support systems. In addition, psychological support plays an important role in addressing underlying emotional and psychological factors through counseling and guidance and coping mechanisms to manage stress, anxiety and various individual discomfort factors.

Some previous studies have similarities with the title of this research, such as: Hasan Baharudin's research (2023) entitled *Wali Asuh Sebagai Technical Assistance Dalam Meningkatkan Mutu Belajar Santri di Pondok Pesantren Nurul Jadid* (Ishomuddin et al., 2021). The research findings show that intensive care and assistance by foster guardians can improve student achievement. Research by Iis Istiqomah (2022) entitled *Pola Komunikasi Efektif Guru Dengan Wali Santri di Pesantren Tahfidz Darul Qur'an I'daad SD Shighor Putri Tangerang* (IIS, 2022). This study found an interactive interpersonal communication pattern between teachers and parents, fostering mutual respect (respect), understanding of situations and conditions (empathy), being heard (audible), openness (clarity), and humility (humble). Gema Syihab Almuji also conducted research on students in Islamic boarding schools with the title *Pengaruh Kenyamanan Ruang Terhadap Aktivitas Santri di Pondok Pesantren* (Almuji et al., 2023). This research was conducted in three Islamic Boarding Schools, namely Al-Multazam Integrated Islamic Boarding School in Kuningan, Tahfidz Al-Hikmah Islamic Boarding School in Cirebon, and Jabal Rahmah Orphanage Islamic Boarding School in Cirebon. The results showed that the spatial design of the Islamic Boarding School greatly

influenced the level of comfort of the students in their activities at the Islamic Boarding School.

Existing research has highlighted the importance of creating a comfortable environment for students' well-being and academic success. However, there is a lack of comprehensive studies exploring the integration of communication approaches and psychological support specifically designed to address the discomfort of santri. The findings of this study are expected to provide valuable insights for Pondok Pesantren in developing and implementing effective strategies to improve the comfort of santri, leading to improved well-being, academic performance, and overall success.

## METHOD

This study uses a qualitative research approach, specifically field research, to collect descriptive data. The phenomenological method is used to reveal the actual and as-is efforts made by Islamic Boarding Schools in Lampung to improve the comfort of students. Data collection was carried out with a combination of in-depth interviews, observations, and document analysis at three Islamic Boarding Schools in Lampung, namely: Pondok Pesantren Sabilil Muttaqin Tanggamus, Pondok Pesantren Mathla'ul Anwar South Lampung and Pondok Pesantren Al-Amin Central Lampung. These methods are used to collect rich and comprehensive information about the efforts of Islamic boarding schools in improving the comfort of students. Qualitative data analysis techniques are used to systematically organize, interpret, and extract meaning from the data collected (W Lawrence, 2014).

Using this rigorous research method, this study effectively captures the lived experiences and perspectives of individuals involved in santri comfort initiatives at Pondok Pesantren in Lampung. The research findings provide valuable insights into the factors that contribute to santri well-being and offer practical recommendations to improve comfort levels and encourage a supportive learning environment.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### *Pondok Pesantren (Islamic Boarding School) in Lampung*

The profiles of the Islamic boarding schools that became sample locations in this study were Sabilil Muttaqin Islamic Boarding School in Tanggamus, Mathla'ul Anwar Islamic Boarding School in South Lampung and Al-Amin Islamic Boarding School in Central Lampung. First, Sabilil Muttaqin Islamic Boarding School in Tanggamus carries the vision of "*Kokoh dalam Identitas Muslim, Mandiri dan Berprestasi*". Carrying out the mission to produce students who have a straight belief according to Ahlus Sunnah Wal Jama'ah, are correct in worship, and have good character. In addition, this pesantren also aims to produce students who are fluent in reading the Qur'an with good *tajwid*, making Arabic the language of daily communication in the pesantren environment, and instilling a creative spirit, strong motivation, and good at utilizing time to its students. The leader of Sabilil Muttaqin

Islamic Boarding School in Tanggamus is Bambang Mugiono, S.Kom. The Board of Trustees is led by Chairman Agus Suparno, S.Ag, with Vice Chairman Fadloil Marjuni, S.Pd, Secretary Agus Mardika S.Pd, Treasurer Maryono, S.Ag, and several other members.

Second, Mathla'ul Anwar Cintamulya Islamic Boarding School was established in 1972 in Cintamulya Village, Candipuro District, South Lampung Regency. Pioneered as a place for children to study in the afternoon and evening, this pesantren has now developed into a formal educational institution and Islamic boarding school that accommodates students from various villages around Candipuro District. As it developed, Mathla'ul Anwar Cintamulya Islamic Boarding School established a Formal Education Institution at the RA, MI, MTs, and MA levels with the name Mathla'ul Anwar Cintamulya. This educational institution implements an integrated curriculum that combines the Ministry of Education and Culture curriculum and the pesantren curriculum. Its existence further strengthens the existence of the pesantren as one of the educational institutions in South Lampung Regency that is experiencing rapid progress. Having a vision of "The Formation of Islamic Boarding Schools as *tafaquh fi-addien* and public service that is excellent, innovative, creative, and forward-looking, upholding moral ethics so as to meet the needs of society at local, regional and global levels".

Third, Al-Amin Islamic Boarding School, was established in 2005 by the Muhammadiyah Branch Board with H. Rejono, S.Pd as the Branch Chair. Approval from the Muhammadiyah Lampung Regional Board and the Lampung Regional Office of the Ministry of Religion was obtained in 2007. In 2015, the SMP Boarding School was established with 9 students in the first year. A year later, the number of new students soared to 29 children. In 2019, the SMA-level education program was opened, accepting 20 students in the first year. Currently, the total number of resident students is 125 sons and daughters, and 73 TPA students, sons and daughters. Students of Al-Amin Islamic Boarding School come from various regions, including Lampung Tengah Regency, East Lampung Regency, North Lampung Regency, West Tulang Bawang Regency, Tulang Bawang Regency, South Sumatra, Riau, and even West Kalimantan. With a clear and focused vision and mission, Al-Amin Islamic Boarding School is committed to becoming a quality Islamic educational institution and producing a younger generation who are ready to make a positive contribution to the nation and state.

### ***The Boarding School's Approaches to Increasing Santri Comfort***

Islamic Boarding Schools in Lampung are highly committed to improving the comfort of their students. Based on the knowledge and experience of the guardians and leaders, various efforts are made with various models, but with the same goal: to increase the comfort of the students. These efforts include providing adequate

facilities, creating a conducive environment, improving the quality of learning, building student character, and fulfilling students' emotional needs. Through these efforts, it is hoped that students can learn and live comfortably in Islamic boarding schools, so that they can reach their full potential.

Sabilil Muttaqin Islamic Boarding School in Tanggamus is committed to improving the comfort of its students through two main areas: infrastructure and guardianship. Efforts to improve infrastructure are focused on the construction of dormitories and places of worship (mosques). This is based on the belief of the pesantren leaders that students need comfortable, green, and beautiful places to live and worship. The construction of dormitories and mosques is a priority program because it plays an important role in supporting the learning and worship process of students. Comfortable dormitories will provide a conducive place to rest, while green and beautiful mosques will increase students' devotion in worship.

As an effort to improve the comfort of students Sabilil Muttaqin Islamic Boarding School in Tanggamus applies a verbal communication pattern in daily and periodic guidance. This communication pattern is focused on group and individual communication, involving the leaders of the Islamic boarding school, *musrif* (young mentors), and *mudabbir* (assistant guardians).

*"In general, the communication we do is verbal communication in the form of group communication, I do this considering the limited time I have, with this verbal communication I can more easily communicate with the children, even though the forum is a group, but I give time to students to convey anything they need to convey, so that I as a leader can also know what they want and need. Those who communicate more intensively with the students are the mudabbir, alhamdulillah now there are already mudabbir and the number is enough, different from before which was only handled by one Ustadz, only maybe I occasionally gather the mudabbir to invite me to dialogue about the development of the students"* (Interview with Ust. Bambang Mugiono, Mudir Pesantren Sabilil Muttaqin, March 14, 2023).

The boarding school leaders explained that verbal communication was chosen due to time constraints and its effectiveness in reaching the students. In group communication, the boarding school leaders provide opportunities for students to convey their aspirations and needs. This allows leaders to understand the conditions and needs of students better. Meanwhile, individual communication is carried out by *musrif* and other caregivers to provide personal guidance and motivation to students. In addition, the boarding school leaders routinely hold dialogs with the *mudabbir* to discuss the development of the santri and find solutions to the problems faced. The application of this verbal communication pattern has proven effective in building a good relationship between santri and caregivers. Students feel heard, understood, and assisted in their learning process and life at the boarding school. This also increases

the comfort and motivation of santri in learning and doing activities at the boarding school.

Al-Amin Islamic Boarding School in Central Lampung applies psychological assistance as an effort to improve the comfort of students from a psychological perspective and the competence of students, both in the academic and non-academic fields. According to the head of the boarding school, psychological assistance helps identify the potential of students, both those that have been seen and those that have not. Visible potential can be fostered and developed, while hidden potential can be directed and explored. Through psychological tests, the academic potential of students can be mapped, so that caregivers can provide appropriate guidance and in accordance with the talents and abilities of students. This can help students achieve better performance in the academic field.

Psychological counseling also helps identify students' non-academic potential, such as artistic, athletic, or leadership talents. This potential can then be developed through extracurricular activities and other programs at the Islamic boarding school. Psychological counseling also helps students deal with various psychological problems, such as stress, anxiety, and depression. This can help students feel more comfortable and at ease in learning and living at the Islamic boarding school. Psychological counseling is an effective effort to improve the comfort of students at Al-Amin Islamic Boarding School, Central Lampung. This counseling helps students develop academic and non-academic potential, as well as helps them deal with various psychological problems.

*"Psychological counseling for students here is carried out by involving psychologists, so all new students who enter here are required to take psychological tests. From the results of these tests, we can find out the character, strengths, weaknesses and even the potential of students, both academic and non-academic potential. After becoming students, in addition to being mentored by the ustadz and ustadzah, we sometimes involve psychologists or psychiatrists again to help us solve student problems. We do this as an effort to create comfort for students and to improve student achievement"* (Interview with Ust. Abu Hamid, Leader of Al-Amin Islamic Boarding School, May 17, 2023).

Outside the academic field, psychological assistance at Al-Amin Islamic Boarding School in Central Lampung is proven to help caregivers and santri in solving various problems faced by santri, including delinquency, rule violations, quiet, angry, or sensitive children, even to the handling of children who are different from their daily lives. Mudir Pondok Pesantren Al-Amin explained that the psychological assistance of students is carried out by involving psychologists. Every new santri must take a psychological test to find out their character, strengths, weaknesses, and potential, both academic and non-academic. In addition to assistance by ustadz and

ustadzah, psychologists or psychiatrists are also involved to help solve santri problems. This is done as an effort to create comfort and improve santri achievement.

Based on interviews with the students, it was revealed that they felt comfortable living in the boarding school because of several main factors. First, the presence of many friends in the boarding school is a source of happiness and eliminates loneliness. Students can do activities and share stories together, building close friendships. Second, regular caregiver assistance provides a sense of security and direction. Although the mentoring model is different, students still feel support and guidance from the caregivers. Third, the existence of counseling guidance services in one of the boarding schools is an effective solution for students in overcoming various problems faced. Fourth, good communication between caregivers and santri through various forms, such as forums, casual chats, and individual conversations, builds a positive and supportive relationship. Students feel more comfortable with caregivers who are easy to talk to and confide in. Fifth, advice and direction from the boarding school leaders regularly provide guidance and motivation for santri in the learning process and life at the boarding school.

From the results of interviews with students, these factors, namely friendship, caregiver assistance, counseling guidance services, good communication, and advice from the leadership, contribute to creating a sense of comfort for students at the boarding school. The support and guidance provided by various parties in the boarding school is the main key in realizing the comfort and smoothness of the learning and life process for the students.

Based on the information above, it is revealed that the level of comfort of students in boarding schools is closely related to the communication patterns applied. The role of ustadz/ah or caregivers as daily assistants at the boarding school is very important, because they are like second parents for the students. Boarding schools with caregivers who are dexterous and good at communicating with students will create a sense of comfort for students to stay at the boarding school, although not all boarding schools have caregivers who are adept at communicating well.

### ***Challenges and Solutions to Improving Santri Comfort in Modern Islamic Boarding Schools***

Islamic boarding schools have made various efforts to improve the comfort of santri (students), taking into account the priority scale and the ability of available resources. One of the main efforts is through a good communication approach between caregivers and students. The verbal communication approach, both individually and in groups, is widely applied to build a sense of openness, a sense of being cared for, and a sense of comfort for santri (Sundler et al., 2020). Another effort made is psychological assistance for santri to help them overcome various problems faced, both academic, social, and personal (Sa'diyah & Hidayati, 2020).

Although not all boarding schools involve professional psychological practitioners, efforts to provide psychological assistance independently with self-taught knowledge are still carried out. However, in the modern era that emphasizes the scientific side, the role of psychology practitioners in assisting students is becoming increasingly important. This is because today's santri are more likely to use reason than sense, and believe in something scientific and logical. The tradition of "*santri manut pada kyai* (santri obeying the kyai)" is not enough to answer the needs of modern santri in facing various complex problems.

Therefore, boarding schools need to continue to adapt to the times and improve the quality of their services to students. The development and fulfilment of infrastructure facilities, quality education/teaching services, and assistance to the daily activities of students are the main things that must be done seriously. In addition, it is important to involve practitioners or professionals in various fields, including psychology, to provide maximum services to students. Increasing the comfort of students in boarding schools is an important aspect in realizing a conducive learning and living process. However, based on the data collected, there are several critical points that need to be considered in this effort:

Challenge 1: diversity of guardianship styles and communication approaches. The varied approaches to guardianship and communication employed by different Islamic boarding schools can lead to varying levels of effectiveness in efforts to improve student comfort (Shobirun, 2022). This highlights the need for a deeper understanding of the unique characteristics and needs of students in each Islamic boarding school. A one-size-fits-all approach may not be effective in addressing the diverse needs of students across different institutions. Challenge 2: limited involvement of professional psychologists. Many Islamic boarding schools continue to conduct psychological counseling independently, without the involvement of qualified professionals (Shobah, 2022). This practice carries the risk of non-compliance with established counseling standards and potential ineffectiveness, potentially depriving students of the appropriate and adequate support they need. The involvement of professional psychologists is crucial to ensure the quality of psychological counseling services provided to students.

Challenge 3: limitations of traditional guidance practices. The traditional practice of "*santri manut pada Kyai*" (students obeying the Kyai) may not be sufficient to address the complex needs of modern students. While obedience and respect for the Kyai are important values, modern students require more comprehensive and evidence-based guidance to effectively navigate the challenges they face. Challenge 4: need for multidisciplinary approach. In addition to psychology, Islamic boarding schools should involve professional practitioners from various fields, such as education, health, and social work, to provide holistic support for their students (Royani & Noviani, 2023). This multidisciplinary approach is essential to address the



diverse needs of students and create a conducive environment for their learning, growth, and potential fulfillment.

In summary, enhancing student comfort in modern Islamic boarding schools is a multifaceted endeavor that demands continuous attention and effort. Islamic boarding schools must embrace the changing times by adapting their approaches and elevating the quality of their services. This necessitates the involvement of professional practitioners from diverse fields, including psychology, education, health, and social work. By adopting a holistic and multidisciplinary approach, Islamic boarding schools can transform into safe, comfortable, and supportive havens where students can flourish academically, emotionally, socially, and spiritually.

## CONCLUSION

This research highlights the crucial role of communicative caregivers and educators in shaping an ideal Islamic boarding school experience. These individuals serve as surrogate parents, fostering a sense of comfort and care among students. Regular and persuasive verbal communication is paramount in establishing a connection and openness between students and respected adults.

Furthermore, Islamic boarding schools must prioritize and strengthen their guidance and counselling services. Ideally, these services should be provided by professionals with expertise in counselling, either through trained educators with counselling backgrounds or by establishing collaborations with psychologists. The involvement of professionals in counselling is essential due to the complexities of mental health that cannot be fully grasped by laypeople. Students' untapped potential may remain buried and undeveloped if not unearthed through appropriate and scientific methods. In light of these findings, future research should explore the prevalence of mental health issues among students and their associated risk factors, particularly in response to the evolving landscape of Islamic boarding schools in the modern era.

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## AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

As the first author, I, Muhajir, state that this article is the result of my work with two colleagues, Nur Kholis and Akhmad Syahid. As the first author, I prepared the article's conceptual framework, wrote a half-finished article, and contacted the relevant parties, especially the research location. The second author, Nur Kholis, contributed to the refinement of the article, collected research data, and processed it.

The third author, Akhmad Syahid, contributed to the editing of the manuscript and plagiarism checking.

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