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Dialogical Communication of Kyai and Santri in Learning at the Darussyifa Al Fithroh Integrated Islamic Boarding School Yaspida Sukabumi

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Abstract

Islamic boarding school education has an important role in shaping the character, spirituality, and learning attitude of students through a distinctive communication approach. One of the prominent forms of communication is dialogical communication between kyai and students which not only facilitates the transfer of knowledge, but also builds interpersonal relationships that are full of religious values. In the modern context, Islamic boarding schools are required to present an adaptive, humanistic, and transformative communication pattern to remain relevant to the challenges of the times. Therefore, this study was conducted to reveal the form, dynamics, and influence of dialogical communication between kyai and students in the learning process at the Darussyifa Al Fithroh Integrated Islamic Boarding School, Sukabumi. This study uses a qualitative method with a case study approach. Data were obtained through in-depth interviews with kyai and students, participatory observation on learning activities, and documentation of Islamic boarding school records and archives. The analysis technique is carried out by data reduction, data presentation, and iterative conclusion drawn. The results of the study show that dialogical communication takes place in various forms, such as example, habituation, advice, motivation based on rewards and punishments, and strengthening amaliyah ubudiyah. Communication patterns are not only verbal, but also non-verbal which is rich in moral and spiritual meaning. Students play an active role as dialogue participants so that a religious, humanist, and transformative learning environment is created. The conclusion of the study emphasizes that dialogical communication is a strategic foundation in pesantren education to form superior character, independence, and responsibility of students. The implication of this study is the need for Islamic boarding schools to develop a more systematic and contextual dialogical communication model with the needs of the times. The next research is suggested to explore the comparison of dialogical communication in various Islamic boarding schools in order to find a more comprehensive pattern that can be adapted in the Islamic education system at large.

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1. Introduction

Islamic boarding schools are traditional Islamic educational institutions that have strong historical roots in Indonesian society. Pesantren not only functions as a place to study knowledge, but also as a vehicle for moral development, spirituality, and character. In the pesantren education system, the role of kyai is very central, not only as a teacher but also as a moral guide and role model in life. The closeness between Kyai and the students is a characteristic in the formation of a religious and civilized

learning environment. The interaction that is established is not just a formal relationship between teacher and student, but an emotional relationship that is thick with the value of sincerity and trust. Therefore, communication between Kyai and students plays an important role in the overall learning process at the pesantren.

In addition, da'wah and education strategies need to be packaged in a way that is relevant to the development of the times and the conditions of a pluralistic society. Da'wah material does indeed remain based on creed, sharia, and morals, but the way of delivery, language, and attitude of da'i must adjust to the needs of mad'u so that the message is conveyed in a cool, peaceful, and moderate manner (Tanjung, 2020) ^[26]. In the context of Islamic boarding schools, the relevance of the da'wah strategy is reflected through the practice of dialogical communication between Kyai and students as the core of the learning process.

One of the dominant forms of communication in the learning process in Islamic boarding schools is dialogical communication. This communication is characterized by an open two-way interaction, where students are given space to ask questions, discuss, and even express their views. In this process, Kyai not only delivered material in one direction, but also built a dialogical atmosphere that encouraged the active participation of students. In the midst of the ever-evolving demands of the times, pesantren are required not only to produce students who are obedient to worship, but also those who are able to think critically, communicate, and play an active role in society. Dialogical communication between Kyai and students is the key in presenting the quality of learning that is in accordance with these challenges. Through healthy, open, and value-filled communication, Kyai is able to instill Islamic teachings effectively and touch the hearts of students.

However, there have not been many studies that specifically review how this form of dialogical communication is applied in the daily learning process in the pesantren environment. In fact, this practice of dialogical communication holds a wealth of Islamic educational methods that are relevant to the current context. There needs to be an in-depth study of the communication patterns used by Kyai, student responses, and dynamics that occur during the learning process. By directly researching this dialogical communication practice, a more complete picture can be obtained about the educational communication strategy in Islamic boarding schools. It can also be an important contribution to the development of a more humanistic, participatory, and transformative model of Islamic education. Therefore, this research is important to do. This research will highlight how dialogical communication plays a role in shaping understanding, emotional closeness, and character of students.

Literature Review

Dialogical Communication in Islamic Education

Dialogical communication is a form of two-way communication that involves the active exchange of ideas and meanings between the sender and receiver of the message. In the world of Islamic boarding schools, this kind of communication pattern plays an important role in shaping the character and understanding of Islamic values in students. The communication that takes place between kyai and santri is not only aimed at conveying information, but also builds

awareness, affective values, and behavior change. Effective interpersonal communication can strengthen relationships between individuals and encourage attitude change (Febrianti *et al.*, 2025) ^[2]. Communication is the main instrument in the process of value transformation and attitude formation (Hidayat *et al.*, 2024) ^[8].

Kyai's Role in Islamic Boarding School Education

The presence of kyai in the pesantren has a strategic role as an educator, spiritual leader, as well as an exemplary figure for students. Kyai is not only respected for his knowledge, but also for his charismatic attitude and emotionally close to students (Hendrayadi, 2023) ^[7]. Apart from being a teacher, Kyai also acts as a guardian of moderate and tolerant Islamic values. Through the pesantren, Kyai conveys Islamic teachings that are full of peace and noble character—an important approach in shaping the character of students so that they can become agents of change that bring da'wah values in social life (Muttaqin, 2020) ^[19]. This approach is in line with Bandura's ideas in social learning theory, which states that the learning process often occurs through observation and imitation of figures who are used as role models (Bandura, 1977: 22) ^[1].

Kyai-Santri Communication in the Learning Process

The communication relationship between Kyai and the students is not limited to the realm of formal teaching, but includes aspects of spiritual guidance and strengthening moral values. Not only taking place in the classroom, this form of communication also occurs in daily activities such as eating together, congregational prayers, and casual discussions that are full of values. This kind of communication model supports a meaningful learning process because it involves strong affective and spiritual aspects (Laksita *et al.*, 2024) ^[11].

Barriers to Learning in Islamic Boarding Schools

Although pesantren are known to excel in the aspects of moral and spiritual development, it is undeniable that there are still various obstacles in the learning process. Some of the problems faced include the limited number of professional educators, the application of technology in learning is not optimal, and the conventional curriculum approach (Jonedu.org, 2023) ^[10]. In addition, some institutions do not have good planning, so the research process does not run optimally and the output produced is not in accordance with expectations (Sunandar & Sa'diyah, 2024) ^[25]. In areas such as Bogor, challenges in mastering Arabic are the main obstacles, accompanied by socio-economic barriers that lead to low educational participation (Narasitoday.com, 2025) ^[20]. All of this is a challenge for kyai in carrying out its communication function to remain effective and impactful.

Islamic Character and Values Education

Character education in Islam emphasizes the development of noble morals through example and habituation based on Qur'anic values. Character formation ideally includes cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects that support each other in its entirety (Wahyuningrum & Azizah, 2020) ^[28]. Islamic teachings also emphasize the importance of role models in the educational process, as stated in QS. Al-Ahzab: 21 and QS. Al-Qalam: 4 which mentions the Prophet PBUH

as a noble person and should be used as a role model in daily life.

The Urgency of a Dialogical Approach in Islamic Boarding School Learning

The dialogical approach in education in pesantren provides an active and equal space for interaction between kyai and students. This kind of communication allows for a more humane and participatory learning process. Santri is not only a listener, but also an active actor in the process of searching for meaning and character formation. The educational process must be dialogue-based in order to create critical awareness that frees students from dependence on authority (Freire, 2022) ^[3]. In the context of pesantren, this approach helps Kyai to guide students in a more open and in-depth way.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative approach using a case study method. This approach was chosen in order to explore in depth how Kyai's communication strategy in the process of forming the character of students at the Darussyifa Alfithroh Islamic Boarding School Yaspida Sukabumi Islamic Boarding School. Sugiyono (2022) ^[27], also stated that the qualitative method is a scientific research approach where the researcher is the main instrument in data collection with the aim of obtaining a complete understanding of the research problem based on the perspective of the case study subject through the triangulation technique of data sources so that the validity of the results is maintained. The researcher is the main instrument in qualitative research, which combines data collection techniques and uses inductive data analysis. The results of qualitative research emphasize more on meaning than generalization. Qualitative research is generally used to study natural objects (Sugiyono, 2022) ^[27].

Primary data is original data obtained directly from research sources. In this context, primary data was obtained through in-depth interviews with four main informants who were purposively selected based on their strategic roles in the pesantren. The primary data sources include Kyai/Pesantren Elders as a central figure in the process of fostering and forming the character of students, the Head of the Islamic Boarding School who plays a role in planning and supervising the implementation of pesantren activities, the Santarian/Nurturing Section which is responsible for the management of the daily life of students including aspects of discipline and ethics, the Ubudiyah Section which focuses on fostering worship and spirituality of students, Walisantri as a comparator and external parties of the Islamic boarding school, as well as Santri/Students as the object of this research. From these four informants, the researcher obtained primary data in the form of information about the form of communication, methods of conveying values, exemplary strategies, and the dynamics of the relationship between Kyai and students. These four informants were chosen because they have direct involvement in the communication process and character development of students so that they can provide representative and valid information. The interview was conducted in a semi-structured manner so that the researcher could dig up in-depth information while being flexible in adjusting to the context of the source's answer.

Secondary data is obtained from various written and digital sources that support and complement primary data. Secondary data sources include: 1) Official profile of the Darussyifa Alfithroh Integrated Islamic Boarding School and

organizational documents, 2) Islamic boarding school guidebooks and student development curriculum, 3) Scientific articles, journals, books, and literature related to communication strategies, kyai leadership, and character formation in Islamic boarding school education, and 4) Relevant results of previous research.

The object of research is an important part of every research project because the purpose of the research is to find an answer or solution to a problem. The object of this research is the character of the students of the Darussyifa Alfithroh Integrated Islamic Boarding School, YASPIDA Sukabumi Islamic College. The Darussyifa Alfithroh Integrated Islamic Boarding School of YASPIDA Sukabumi is the research location chosen by the researcher. The selection of this location is based on the fact that the Islamic boarding school is organizing and developing its education system, so the researcher wants to evaluate and provide input in order to grow the personalities of students with character. An important part of this research is the researchers themselves because they are the main means of data collection. In qualitative research, researchers often act as the primary data collector from the beginning to the stages of data collection, analysis, and conclusion drawn.

This study uses observation, interview, and documentation procedures to collect data in a natural context, where the three methods are applied so that the data and information generated can complement and support each other. Observation is carried out by directly observing research objects or phenomena in a structured and planned manner so that the data obtained can be trusted in accordance with the research objectives (Sugiyono, 2022) ^[27]. By expanding the scope of observations, researchers can gain a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon being studied. Interviews were conducted through direct interaction between researchers and respondents with question-and-answer methods that can be structured, semi-structured, or unstructured according to the research objectives (Sugiyono, 2022) ^[27].

This method is used to dig up in-depth information about respondents' views, experiences, or attitudes towards a research topic. The resource persons were selected purposively based on criteria relevant to the focus of the research, namely Kyai's communication strategy in shaping the character of superior students, taking into account the position, experience, and capacity of the resource persons as a central figure in student development. During the interview, the researcher systematically notes key points as initial documentation before the complete transcription. Documentation is used by collecting various documents related to research objects such as notes, books, archives, newspapers, and visual documents in the form of photos and videos of student and Kyai activities, including book studies and student mentoring programs (Sugiyono, 2022) ^[27].

The concrete steps include the collection of written documents such as the history of the establishment of the Islamic boarding school, the vision and mission of the institution, as well as the rules and guidelines for students, then continued with the archiving of visual documents relevant to the research. Data analysis is carried out by identifying and organizing data obtained from interviews, field notes, and documentation in a structured manner, which includes grouping data, drafting patterns, and determining relevant information to be studied so that it is easy to understand. Sugiyono (2019) explained that data analysis

involves three activities, namely data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion/verification. Data reduction is done by summarizing, selecting important things, looking for patterns and themes, and providing code to make the data easier to process. Data presentation can be in the form of short summaries, graphs, flowcharts, or narratives that facilitate analysis. Drawing conclusions is the last stage that is carried out after the initial findings are supported by strong and consistent evidence so that it can answer the formulation of the research problem.

Results and Discussion

Forms of Dialogical Communication between Kyai and Santri in Learning

The results of the research through in-depth observation and interviews at the Darussyifa Alfithroh Integrated Islamic Boarding School show that the communication carried out by kyai is dialogical and two-way, taking place in the form of book recitation, halaqah discussions, deliberations, and daily advice. Kyai creates a learning atmosphere that is not rigid, where students can express their opinions, ask questions, and respond to the content of the lesson freely but still in the corridor of manners. This communication prioritizes an affective approach, namely by paying attention to the background, psychological, and spiritual needs of the students. Kyai is not only a source of information, but also a learning facilitator that encourages students to be intellectually and emotionally active. In accordance with the views of Ismanto *et al.* (2024) ^[9], dialogical communication is able to create mutual understanding between communicators and communicators, as well as encourage the creation of meaningful relationships in learning. Dialogical communication occurs in communicative spaces between Kyai and students, namely exemplary/uswatun hasanah, habituation/ta'widiyah, mauidzoh hasanah, gifts and punishments/iqab, and amaliyah ubudiyah/enthusiasm of worship. Reflect on the Prophet PBUH who succeeded in da'wah by giving examples, examples, or Uswatun Hasanah. This is as stated by Ustadz S as the head of the Islamic boarding school in his interview, namely:

"If we talk about dialogue communication, one of the things that is certain is that Mr. Kyai has proven to be a great example for the students here, even to the asatidz and administrators. Because he always warns that if he can be asatidz and the administrators, they must always improve themselves, so that they become an example of the students, if so, they will be more respected and authoritative" (S, 2024)

This is also conveyed by one of the S students in his interview, namely:

"For me, who is also his student, Pak Kyai is a figure who is not only respected for his knowledge, but also for his attitude and daily habits. He didn't give much direct orders, but we knew which ones were good because we saw the way he lived his life. For example, he always maintains time discipline, is simple in his lifestyle, and continues to serve students even though he has a position. This indirectly made me think that a leader or knowledgeable person should be an example, not just give direction. And most noticeably, he is consistent which makes us easy to trust and reluctant. For me, it's a real and logical form of example: because it can be seen, felt,

and imitated." (S, 2024)

Every good thing needs to be formed with habituation. No matter how good something is, if it is not habited, it is impossible to form into a good habit. Likewise with students, they can be seen to be used to doing good things, from compulsion to over time becoming a habit. It is also corroborated by the expression from the Pondok/Kyai EM Elder, namely:

"All forms of istiqomah of the daily activities of the students here do not just happen, everything needs a patient process and a very long habit, so it must be really diligent and consistent, especially the teacher must be uswah. Especially here, in addition to being accustomed to ubudiyah activities, students are also educated to be able to live independently, take care of themselves, carry out daily activities, even in terms of work. That's why here there are many business units built by Elders, indeed in order to educate students as well, so that they have skills, so they don't get confused if they graduate from the boarding school." (EM, 2024)

The statement is in line with the confession of one of Mrs. NI's trustees who said:

"Since I was a child, I have seen quite real changes in children. He became more organized, more time-honored, and more responsible. In the past, if you were told to delay often, now the initiative is high. I believe it is because of consistent habits in Islamic boarding schools such as waking up at dawn, praying in congregation, studying scheduled, and living independently" (NI, 2024)

This is also conveyed by one of the Y students in his interview, namely:

"The most noticeable thing is time discipline. Our schedule is busy, but organized. From waking up tahajud to sleeping, everyone is used to it. It was hard at first, but it soon became a habit. Even if I'm on vacation at home, I still wake up at 3 a.m. for night prayers, even though sometimes it's still late in the day" (Y, 2024)

One of the roles of a Kyai wherever he is, both inside the Islamic boarding school and outside the Islamic boarding school (community environment) will automatically always be a figure who is awaited by his mauidzah (kindness lecture) and also asked for advice. This is in line with the statement of Ustadz YK as the Student and Parenting Section, that:

"In this boarding school, the students in terms of violations are not immediately punished, but are advised first and given a warning, if the violation is considered severe, they will be called by their parents, then if they still repeat it again, they will be punished according to the existing provisions." (YK, 2024)

This statement was strengthened by the statement of the trustee that Mrs. IN in her interview, namely:

"I was once called to the cottage because my son violated the rules several times. But what I admire is that my son is not scolded hard. Instead, he was well advised. Even after returning home, my son said that the ustadz said: "You are a good child, but sometimes it is not right to

choose an attitude." It made him aware and didn't feel totally blamed." (IN, 2024)

In the world of education, motivating students to carry out activities in accordance with the rules of the institution, or more than that, motivating students to improve the quality to obtain an achievement requires a strategy, namely punishment for those who violate the rules and rewards as an appreciation for achievements. This is also corroborated by Ustadz YK's statement stating that:

"Usually we control and order the daily activities of the students by punishing students who are naughty because they often violate the rules, as well as giving appreciation to the students who are diligent in obeying the rules. Because we are always reminded by Mr. Kyai Es Mubarak that not only those who are naughty are punished, but those who are diligent are also given gifts so that enthusiasm and motivation for everyone are given." (YK, 2024)

In line with that, one of the Y students also said in his interview, namely:

Ever. At that time I was caught not attending the night recitation. I was told to pray the dawn call to prayer for a week in a row. At first it was forced, but over time I felt that it formed courage and responsibility. The punishment here is not traumatic, but rather educational. With the cultivation of Amaliyah ubudiyah from an early age, students are expected to grow into individuals who are not only spiritually strong, but also have superior character who is able to face the challenges of the times while still being grounded in Islamic values. (Y, 2024)

This is in accordance with the expression of KH. EM/Leadership Elder in the interview, namely:

"The students here are indeed number one in terms of being educated in religious activities since the beginning of entering the boarding school. Not without purpose, the habit of worship in this hut is not just a routine, but part of the process of soul formation. Starting from waking up before dawn, congregational prayers, dhikr, wirid, to sunnah worships, all of them are taken care of so that they become characters. Starting from waking up before dawn, congregational prayers, dhikr, wirid, to sunnah worships, all of them are taken care of so that they become characters. But more than that, we also instill the spirit of this worship with love. Not by force, but by example. Students are invited to feel that worship is not a burden, but a source of tranquility. When they begin to feel the pleasure of being close to Allah, that is where a superior character grows who is gentle, patient, respectful of teachers, and cares for others. (EM, 2024)

It was strengthened by the confession of one of the students named S in his interview, namely:

"It is most effective during Ramadan. We fasted sunnah, qiyamul lail, and itikaf together. Pak Kyai sometimes joined us as well, sitting in front of us while dhikr. We became motivated. It feels like worship is not an obligation, but a necessity. That's where I feel like I'm a true hero." (S, 2024)

The Dominant Element of Interpersonal Communication in the Relationship between Kyai and Santri

In the relationship between kyai and students, it is clear that the dominance of elements of interpersonal communication includes:

Communicator (Kyai): A Charismatic, Knowledgeable, and Exemplary Figure

Kyai in the pesantren environment plays the role of the main communicator who has charisma, scientific authority, and spiritual power (Masruroh *et al.*, 2025; Spiritual, 2024). Kyai's charisma arises from his authority in speaking, calmness of attitude, and ability to lead and foster. The students respect Kyai not because of coercion, but because of the example shown in daily life.

Message: Blending Cognitive, Moral, and Spiritual Aspects
The message conveyed by Kyai to students is not only limited to the content of lessons or religious understanding, but also loaded with moral, ethical, and spiritual values (Maulana, 2024; Mediawati, 2023). In every lecture or recitation, Kyai always inserts the message of morality, sincerity, manners towards knowledge, and the importance of social responsibility. These messages form the awareness of students that seeking knowledge is not only for intellectual intelligence, but also for the formation of a noble person and responsibility to Allah and society

Channels: Meaningful Verbal and Non-verbal

The communication channels used by kyai include verbal forms, such as lectures, questions and answers, discussions, and deliberations, as well as non-verbal, such as exemplary in worship, courtesy, simplicity, and affective expressions that show affection and concern (Pagaraji, 2024). Oral communication takes place formally in recitation and informally in daily life.

Communicator (Santri): Active and Participatory Recipient
Students as communicators are not passive, but active and participatory (Nasirin, 2025; Ramdan & Usman, 2021). They were given space to ask questions, discuss, and even express personal views in the forum guided by Kyai. This process allows the internalization of values to run naturally, because students experience, understand, and absorb the message conveyed themselves.

Effects: Behavior Change and Character Formation

The effects of this dialogical communication can be seen in changes in student behavior, such as increased motivation to learn, discipline in worship, politeness in speaking, and enthusiasm to be a person who is useful to others (Hafid, 2023; Harahap, 2024; Mugiono, 2023) ^[4, 6, 18]. The values instilled by Kyai through moral and spiritual messages shape students into religious individuals, with noble character, and high social concern (Harahap & Arsyad, 2024; Mahmudah, 2023) ^[5, 12]. The long-term effect is that students become cadres of the people who are ready to become agents of change in society. The strength of this interpersonal relationship is strengthened

by kyai's non-verbal communication, such as facial expressions, body movements, and role models in daily life (Minalloh, 2020) ^[17]. In line with Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1977) ^[1], the learning of students is greatly influenced by the process of modeling students to imitate the attitudes and behaviors of Kyai that they respect and admire.

The Influence of Kyai Communication on the Formation of Character and Learning Attitudes of Students

The communication built by Kyai in the Darussyifa Al-Fithroh Integrated Islamic Boarding School has a very fundamental role in shaping character and building students' learning attitudes. Kyai not only functions as a presenter of religious material, but also as a character educator through a dialogical, intense, and exemplary communication pattern. Concretely, students experienced improvements in a number of key character aspects such as discipline, responsibility, the ability to work together, and enthusiasm for learning. This change does not happen instantly, but through a systematic and consistent process. Kyai instills noble values through habituation and repetition in various forms of communication, both directly in learning activities and in daily life at the pesantren.

One example of a coaching program that has a big impact is the night supervision after the Isha prayer, where Kyai directly monitors the activities and behavior of students. In this conducive and religious atmosphere, Kyai gave light but touching advice, as well as evaluated the daily activities of the students. This process of character formation is in line with the stages in Albert Bandura's (1977)^[1] theory of social learning, which includes four main components:

1. Attention: Students pay attention to Kyai's behavior, both in speech and actions.
2. Retention: Students store information and values that are exemplified in long-term memory.
3. Reproduction (imitation): Students began to imitate the positive behaviors displayed by Kyai, such as punctuality, sincerity, and simplicity.
4. Motivation: Students are encouraged to maintain and develop this attitude because they feel appreciated and get real examples.

Through a dialogical communicative approach, Kyai succeeds in forming a critical and participatory learning environment, where students feel safe to ask questions, discuss, and even express their opinions. In this context, learning is no longer just a knowledge transfer activity, but a process of forming a complete personality and spirituality.

Conclusion

Dialogical communication between kyai and students at the Darussyifa Al-Fithroh Integrated Islamic Boarding School plays a very significant role in creating a meaningful, effective, and transformative learning process. Kyai not only acts as a teacher, but also as a spiritual guide and moral example who is able to build emotional closeness and trust with students. Two-way interaction based on the values of sincerity, mutual respect, and openness has been proven to be able to encourage students to be more active in the learning process, think critically, and form strong characters and noble character. Learning built through a dialogical approach creates an atmosphere conducive to the deep internalization of Islamic and national values. This makes the pesantren an educational institution that not only focuses on the cognitive aspect, but also balances the affective and spiritual dimensions of students. Thus, dialogical communication is one of the main pillars in producing superior students who are ready to become agents of change in society. Therefore, strengthening the capacity of dialogue communication in the pesantren environment needs to be continuously developed and supported, both through training for teachers and the

creation of a constructive dialogue culture among all elements of the pesantren. With this step, pesantren will be more able to answer the challenges of the times, strengthen the Islamic identity of students, and maintain its relevance as a center of moral education, character, and Islamic civilization based on the noble values of the nation.

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