




Counselor Communication Strategy in Handling Deviant Behavior of Al-Mawaddah Students

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the communication strategies employed by counselors in addressing deviant behavior among santri at Pondok Pesantren Nurul Jadid, Al-Mawaddah area. Deviant behavior in this context is not merely a matter of discipline but is closely related to interpersonal communication dynamics within the guidance process. Using a descriptive qualitative approach, data were collected through in-depth interviews, observation of counseling sessions, and documentation. The data were analyzed using an interactive model involving data reduction, display, and conclusion drawing. The findings indicate that effective counseling is achieved through empathetic, dialogical, and persuasive communication grounded in the principle of *bil hikmah*. Such strategies foster an open and supportive environment, encourage self-reflection, and enhance santri's internal awareness to improve their behavior. This study also proposes the "CURHAT" counseling communication model as a systematic framework for guiding behavioral change. The findings highlight the importance of humanistic and participatory communication in ensuring effective counseling practices and offer practical insights for developing Islamic-based counseling approaches in educational settings.

Keywords: Communication Strategy, Islamic Boarding School Counseling, Interpersonal Communication.

INTRODUCTION

Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) function not only as institutions for learning religious knowledge but also as environments for cultivating moral character. The *pesantren* environment serves as a strategic space for shaping students' attitudes and behavior through continuous communication processes. However, not all students are able to adapt effectively to the *pesantren* environment (Romadhoni & Muyasaroh, 2025).

Several factors influencing adaptability were identified by Schneider (1955), including physical condition, developmental maturity, psychological aspects, and environmental influences. These factors may contribute to the emergence of deviant behavior, such as violations of *pesantren* regulations and a lack of respect toward fellow students (Riyani et al., 2023).

This condition indicates that students require appropriate guidance to return to positive behavioral patterns. In this regard, the role of counselors is crucial, not only as supervisors but also as companions who are sensitive to the psychological conditions, social environment, and religious beliefs of students (Kumala, 2024). Rahma and Sadali (2022) argue that counselors play a significant role in supporting students' personal development, enabling them to become confident individuals, capable of making appropriate decisions, and committed to religious values.

The success of the counseling process largely depends on the counselor's ability to employ effective communication strategies, particularly interpersonal communication that is empathetic, dialogical, and persuasive. Through appropriate communication strategies, counselors can build open and trusting relationships, allowing students to reflect on themselves and become motivated to improve their behavior (Apriyadi, 2024).

Nevertheless, many previous studies emphasize the importance of counseling in fostering student development, yet they tend to focus on general counseling theories and communication approaches. These studies have not specifically examined the communication strategies used by counselors within the *pesantren* context.

Moreover, the concept of Islamic communication found in *da'wah* literature is predominantly used for disseminating religious teachings collectively, rather than as a practical strategy for guiding students individually. This situation reveals a theoretical gap regarding the limited integration between counseling communication approaches and Islamic interactional values in *pesantren*-based counseling services.

Previous research by Arifin et al. (2025) focused on counseling services in *pesantren* to support the psychological adaptation of new female students. Their findings indicate that *pesantren* values significantly influence the counseling process, which incorporates spiritual methods and character development (Fahrudi et al., 2025). While this study shares similarities in context and counseling practice, it differs in its focus on communication strategies used by counselors in addressing deviant behavior.

Similarly, a study by Jalil and Saman examined the role of communication in Islamic counseling within *pesantren*. Their findings suggest that effective communication determines counseling success, defining counseling as a process of delivering Islamic-based information between counselor and student (Ramadhani & Halwati, 2024). However, this study emphasizes linguistic aspects and does not specifically address the handling of deviant behavior.

Another study by Robbaniyah, Lina, and Masoud explored communication patterns between counselors and students, finding that open interpersonal communication supports student development, with both formal and informal interactions contributing to discipline (Husna & Hamid, 2025). While relevant, this study does not specifically examine counseling strategies for addressing deviant behavior.

Based on these studies, there remains a lack of research focusing on communication strategies employed by counselors in handling deviant behavior through an Islamic communication perspective. Therefore, this study aims not only to fill this gap but also to contribute to the broader discourse on communication in *pesantren* contexts.

This study adopts the principle of *Bil Hikmah* as the foundation for communication between counselors and students, as emphasized in QS. An-Nahl verse 125. In this context, *Bil Hikmah* is not merely understood as a normative directive in *da'wah*, but as a theoretical framework for counseling communication practices. It refers to the communicator's ability to deliver messages appropriately, contextually, and wisely by considering the psychological, social, and cognitive conditions of the audience (Fauzi & Librianti, 2021).

Operationally, the concept of *Bil Hikmah* in counseling communication encompasses several key dimensions: (1) appropriateness, referring to the counselor's ability to adjust language and communication methods to the students' characteristics; (2) compassion, involving the delivery of messages without verbal or symbolic aggression; (3) reasoned dialogue, emphasizing logical arguments that are acceptable to students without triggering resistance; and (4) transformative intent, referring to communication that not only informs but also encourages self-awareness and behavioral change.

Thus, *Bil Hikmah* functions as an analytical framework to examine how counselors establish effective, persuasive, and humanistic communication relationships in addressing deviant behavior among students. This approach integrates Islamic communication values with modern counseling practices, resulting in a model that is contextualized within *pesantren* culture.

The success of counselors in addressing deviant behavior is not solely determined by guidance strategies but also by their ability to create persuasive closeness through effective communication. This study also offers new insights into Islamic communication discourse based on observations of counseling practices within *pesantren*. Therefore, this research aims to examine the application of Islamic communication in counseling and to analyze the strategies employed by counselors in addressing deviant behavior among students at Pondok Pesantren Nurul Jadid, Al-Mawaddah area.

METHODS

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach to explore in depth the communication strategies used by counselors in addressing deviant behavior among santri in Islamic boarding schools. (Millatinnafi'ah & Claretta, 2024). The research was conducted at Pondok Pesantren Nurul Jadid, specifically in the Al-Mawaddah area.

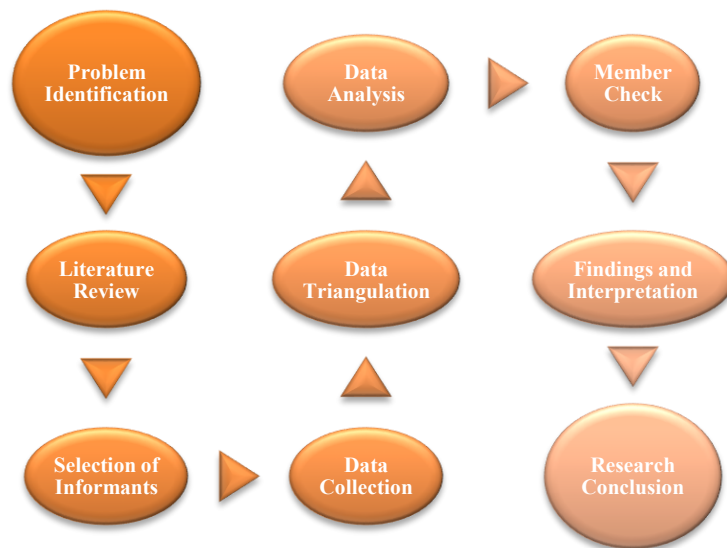
The informants in this study consisted of 5 counselors and 10 santri who were actively involved in counseling activities. Informants were selected using purposive sampling criteria, including (1) counselors who had direct experience in handling cases of deviant behavior, and (2) santri who had participated in counseling sessions due to behavioral or disciplinary issues.

Data were collected through in-depth interviews, direct observation of counseling sessions, and documentation studies. Each interview lasted approximately 30–60 minutes and was conducted repeatedly to ensure data saturation.

To ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the data, this study applied triangulation of sources and methods, as well as member checking to validate the consistency between researcher interpretations and participants' perspectives. (Qomaruddin & Sa'diyah, 2024).

The following illustrates the research flow applied in this study:

Figure 1: Research Flow



Ethical Considerations

This study carefully considers research ethics as an essential component in maintaining scientific integrity. Prior to data collection, informed consent was obtained from all participants. The informants were provided with clear explanations regarding the research objectives, interview procedures, and their rights to refuse or withdraw participation at any time without any consequences.

Furthermore, the confidentiality of participants' identities was strictly maintained by anonymizing their names in the research report. The data collected were used solely for academic purposes and were analyzed objectively without causing harm to any parties. Thus, this study is not only methodologically sound but also adheres to the principles of ethical social research.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Results Presentation

A. Forms of Deviant Behavior among *Santri* in Al-Mawaddah

The findings indicate that deviant behavior among *santri* in the Al-Mawaddah area tends to be non-criminal in nature and is more closely related to issues of discipline and participation in pesantren activities. The observed behaviors include absence from mandatory activities, delays in achieving program targets, decreased learning discipline, and limited communication with administrators.

As expressed by one of the counselors:

“Usually, the santri who skip activities do not explicitly reject the rules, but they feel overwhelmed. Some of them say they are tired, but when we explore further, it turns out they feel pressured by the tight schedule and expectations from the institution.” (Emil, Counselor)

These findings suggest that such violations do not represent direct resistance to the pesantren system, but rather reflect students' inability to adapt to the rhythm and demands of pesantren life.

Moreover, the behavioral patterns are generally non-confrontational. Santri do not openly resist rules but tend to avoid activities and withdraw from social interactions. This is supported by the following statement:

"There are also students who become very quiet and avoid communication. When we ask them, they often say I'm fine, but actually they feel uncomfortable and do not know how to express their feelings." (Devi, Counselor)

This condition indicates that deviant behavior is characterized by withdrawal behavior, which often emerges as a response to psychological pressure, boredom, or an inability to manage environmental demands. Therefore, deviant behavior in this context should not be simply understood as rule violation, but rather as a symptom of more complex emotional and interpersonal communication issues (Mnir et al., 2026).

B. Contributing Factors and Counselors Responses

The findings reveal that deviant behavior is influenced by a combination of internal and external factors. Internal factors include physical fatigue due to intensive activities, boredom with routine, emotional stress, and difficulties in understanding learning materials. External factors are related to social dynamics among santri, institutional program demands, and ineffective communication with administrators.

To clarify the relationship between behavior, causes, and counselor responses, the findings are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Deviant Behavior, Causes and Counselor Responses

Deviant Behavior	Main Causes	Counselor Responses
Absence from activities	Fatigue, poor time management	Creating a safe environment
Decreased learning discipline	Boredom, emotional pressure	Exploring feelings
Disrespectful behavior	Emotional instability	Emotional validation
Tardiness	Irregular lifestyle	Habit Reflection
Incomplete tasks	Lack of understanding	Providing assistance and solutions

The table indicates that counselors' responses are not oriented toward punishment but rather toward opening communication spaces and understanding students' conditions. Initial responses tend to be exploratory and supportive rather than repressive.

These findings emphasize that the communication approach employed by counselors focuses on identifying root causes rather than merely correcting surface-level behaviors (Laili & Asari, 2024). Thus, counseling is positioned as a process of understanding rather than mere social control.

C. Initial Counselor Responses and Communication Patterns

The findings show that the initial stage of the counseling process plays a crucial role in determining the effectiveness of communication between counselors and *santri*. Counselors do not immediately provide advice or reprimands but instead prioritize creating a comfortable and emotionally safe environment.

As stated by a counselor:

“A sense of comfort at the beginning greatly influences the honesty of the santri.”
(Avi, Counselor)

This approach is implemented through informal communication, gentle language, and a non-judgmental attitude. The strategy aims to reduce psychological tension and open space for more honest dialogue.

In practice, counselors apply interpersonal communication patterns consisting of empathetic, dialogical, and persuasive communication. Empathetic communication is reflected in the counselor’s ability to actively listen and understand students’ feelings. Dialogical communication is manifested through two-way interactions that allow students to express their experiences.

Meanwhile, persuasive communication is used to encourage gradual behavioral change without excessive pressure (Gobel & Usman, 2025). This approach enables *santri* to actively participate in the change process, resulting in more internalized and sustainable outcomes.

D. The “CURHAT” Counseling Communication Model

This study identifies a counseling communication model termed “CURHAT,” which consists of six main stages: Chemistry, Case Disclosure (*Ungkap Kasus*), Empathic Response (*Reaksi Empati*), Solution Gathering (*Himpun Solusi*), Alternative Solutions, and Follow-Up (*Tindak Lanjut*).

“At the beginning, we never directly ask about the problem. We usually start with casual conversations asking about their daily activities, friends, or even small things. From there, we build trust so they feel safe to open up.” (Avi, Counselor)

“When the santri finally tell their story, we try not to judge. We repeat their words and show that we understand their feelings. For example, we say, ‘It must be difficult for you.’ That makes them feel heard.” (Devi, Counselor)

“We don’t directly give solutions. Instead, we ask them what they think is the best step. Sometimes they already know what they should do, they just need someone to guide them to realize it.” (Emil, Counselor)

“After the session, we still monitor them. We ask again after a few days whether they have tried the solution or not. This follow-up is important so they don’t feel abandoned.”
(Avi, Counselor)

This model represents a systematic communication process in building interpersonal relationships and promoting behavioral change among *santri*. Each stage serves a distinct function while being interconnected in forming a comprehensive communication flow.

To illustrate, the conceptual model is presented in Figure 2.



Figure 2: Conceptual Model of CURHAT Counseling Communication Based on *Bil Hikmah*

This model demonstrates that counseling communication occurs in stages, beginning with relationship building and culminating in the evaluation of behavioral change. The process is not linear but reflective and participatory, involving santri actively in each stage (Army et al., 2025).

2. Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that deviant behavior among santri in Islamic boarding schools cannot be simply reduced to normative violations, but rather should be understood as an expression of complex psychological and social dynamics. This finding reinforces previous studies emphasizing that withdrawal behavior in educational settings is often associated with adaptation pressures and emotional responses rather than direct resistance.

Furthermore, the empathetic communication strategies employed by counselors are proven to be crucial in opening space for constructive dialogue. Empathy in counseling communication significantly enhances client openness and facilitates behavioral change. In this study, empathy is not only a communication technique but also a psychological mechanism that creates emotional safety among santri.

Overall, the “CURHAT” counseling communication model proposed in this study can be viewed as a contextual and integrative framework. Compared to general counseling models that tend to be procedural, the CURHAT model emphasizes relational, reflective, and value-based communication rooted in Islamic principles.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that addressing deviant behavior among *santri* in Islamic boarding schools cannot rely on repressive approaches, but instead requires humanistic communication strategies oriented toward the development of internal awareness. The findings from the Al-Mawaddah area of Pondok Pesantren Nurul Jadid confirm that effective counseling is built upon the integration of empathetic, dialogical, and persuasive communication. Empathetic communication creates a safe space in which *santri* feel

accepted and valued; dialogical communication encourages their active involvement in self-reflection; while persuasive communication facilitates gradual behavioral change without coercion. These three approaches not only address surface-level problems but also foster sustained self-awareness and moral responsibility among *santri*.

Theoretically, this study contributes to the development of Islamic counseling communication by demonstrating that the concept of *bil hikmah* is not merely normative, but can be operationalized as a strategic framework in counseling practices. The novelty of this study lies in the formulation of the “CURHAT” counseling communication model, which is integrative, contextual, and grounded in *pesantren* values, thereby bridging Islamic communication theory with practical counseling applications. This model highlights that behavioral change among *santri* does not occur instantly, but through a gradual, reflective, and participatory communication process.

From a practical and institutional perspective, the findings offer important implications for the development of student guidance systems in *pesantren*, particularly in shifting from control- and punishment-based approaches toward more communicative, educational, and humanistic methods. Counselors are positioned not only as supervisors but also as facilitators of meaningful interpersonal communication with *santri*. However, this study is limited by its focus on a single *pesantren* setting and its qualitative approach, which does not measure the effectiveness of communication strategies quantitatively. Therefore, future research is recommended to expand the scope of locations and participants, as well as to examine the effectiveness of *bil hikmah*-based counseling communication models through quantitative or longitudinal approaches to achieve broader generalization and stronger empirical validation.

Authorship Contribution

Zakiyah Romdlany contributed to the conceptualization of the study, development of the methodology, data collection, and drafting of the initial manuscript. Zyda Firizqiyati Fudyus contributed to data analysis, validation of findings, as well as the revision, editing, and finalization of the manuscript for publication.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest in this study, whether financial, professional, or personal, that could have influenced the results or interpretation of the research.

AI Usage Declaration

The authors declare that the use of artificial intelligence (AI) in this study was limited to assistance in language editing, sentence refinement, and improving the clarity of academic writing. All ideas, analyses, data interpretations, and conclusions are the original work of the authors.

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