

Adaptation of Islamic Religious Education for Children of Migrant Workers in Pesantren

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Abstract

This article aims to explore the adaptive patterns of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) for the children of migrant workers at Junior High School of SMP Pondok Pesantren Mambaul Ulum. Parental migration abroad evidently shapes the students' social and psychological conditions, which subsequently influence their religious development as well as their learning motivation. This study employs a qualitative approach utilizing in-depth interviews, participant observation, and documentation techniques. The study involved a total of eight participants: three administrators, three students and two guardians. The data analysis process is inductive in nature, aiming to identify emerging patterns of instructional adaptation derived from empirical findings. Data validity is ensured through source and methodological triangulation, as well as member checking with informants to confirm the accuracy of the interpretations. This study analyzes PAI adaptation using Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Theory, highlighting integrative curriculum, emotional support and collaborative strategies to strengthen students' religiosity and learning motivation. The findings of this study reveal three principal conclusions. First, the pesantren develops an integrative approach that harmonizes the formal curriculum with the boarding school culture in order to strengthen the spiritual dimension through the habituation of worship practices and the internalization of religious values in daily life. Second, the institution establishes emotional support systems grounded in both personal mentoring and peer-group assistance to reinforce students' psychological resilience in maintaining stable learning motivation. Third, collaboration between the school and guardians, the utilization of digital communication, and the implementation of participatory learning methods collectively optimize students' discipline and religiosity. These findings suggest that the role of PAI within pesantren cannot be confined to formal instruction alone, but must evolve into a relational and context-sensitive practice that meaningfully responds to the lived realities of children growing up in conditions of parental absence.

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INTRODUCTION

International labor mobility has increasingly evolved into a structural livelihood strategy across various regions of Indonesia, particularly in Madura, where limited employment opportunities, economic disparities, and strong migration networks have collectively encouraged individuals to seek work abroad (Abidin et al., 2022; Fathor & Fatmariyah, 2023). While this phenomenon contributes significantly to household income through remittances, it simultaneously produces less visible yet profound social consequences. One of the most critical implications is the emergence of a generation growing up without the consistent presence of their parents during crucial developmental stages. In many cases, children of migrant workers are raised by grandparents or extended family members, while others are entrusted to educational institutions such as pesantren. Data from the Manpower Office of East Java Province indicate that thousands of migrant workers



originate annually from Madurese regencies, resulting in a substantial number of children being left behind for prolonged periods, in some instances exceeding five years (BP2MI, 2023). In Pamekasan Regency, this condition is reflected in the increasing proportion of students identified as children of migrant workers within pesantren-based junior secondary schools.

At a broader level, labor migration constitutes a global phenomenon shaping socio-educational dynamics across diverse contexts, including Southeast Asia, Africa, and Latin America (De Bel-Air & Shah, 2025; Rubinskaya, 2023; Ruseishvili & Ryazantsev, 2024). In these settings, educational and religious institutions often extend beyond their formal roles, functioning as substitute environments of caregiving as parental absence becomes normalized (Elikwu et al., 2023; Fox & Finke, 2021). Empirical studies consistently indicate that children of migrant workers experience heightened emotional vulnerability, reduced learning motivation, and various behavioral challenges (Nandakumar & Ahmad Lone, 2025). Although remittances may improve access to education, they do not necessarily ensure the development of moral character or emotional stability (Islam & Alhamad, 2022). These conditions underscore the need to reposition Islamic Religious Education (PAI) beyond its conventional role as a formal subject. Instead, PAI must be understood as a strategic framework capable of fostering moral resilience and supporting the socio-emotional development of students. The absence of parental figures during formative years introduces complexities that cannot be adequately addressed through normative instructional approaches alone.

Within the pesantren context, Islamic education is inherently integrative, combining cognitive, affective, and psychomotor dimensions through a structured boarding system and the continuous habituation of religious practices (Nurcholiq, Yunita, & Rusdah, 2024). Historically, pesantren have served not only as institutions of knowledge transmission but also as environments for character formation rooted in exemplarity (*uswah*), collective discipline, and a strong spiritual culture. However, the socio-demographic shifts generated by global migration require these institutions to recalibrate their pedagogical approaches to remain responsive to the needs of students from transnational family backgrounds. Previous studies have examined the impact of parental migration on children's psychological well-being and academic outcomes (Merry et al., 2025), as well as patterns of caregiving and social challenges within migrant families in Indonesia (Abbas et al., 2025). Other research has explored the role of pesantren in character formation and the transformation of PAI in response to the digital era (Mulyana et al., 2023).

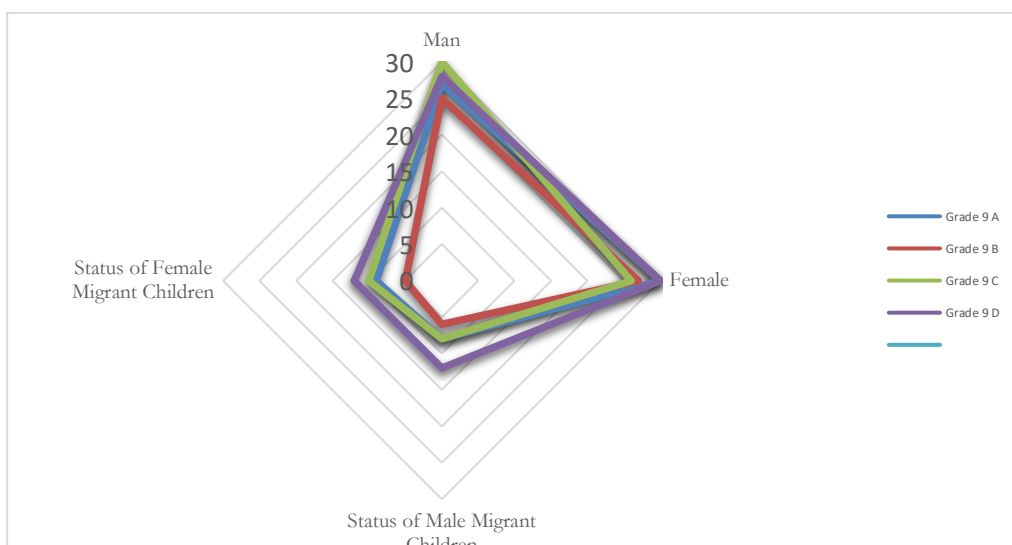


Figure 1. Class Data of 9th Grade Studens of Mambaul Ulum Bata-Bata
(Source: Author's synthesis)

Despite these contributions, existing scholarship largely treats migration and Islamic education as separate analytical domains. As a result, limited attention has been given to how pesantren actively reconfigure their pedagogical practices to respond to the lived realities of children of migrant workers. This gap becomes particularly significant in contexts where the majority of students are directly affected by parental migration. To substantiate the empirical relevance of this study, the distribution of students categorized as children of migrant workers is illustrated in the following figure, which reflects the concentration of this phenomenon within the research site. To provide an empirical grounding of the research context, the distribution of students identified as children of migrant workers is illustrated in **Figure 1**.

Such evidence reinforces the urgency of examining how educational institutions respond to this condition, not merely at the level of access but in terms of pedagogical and socio-emotional adaptation. This study is grounded in Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, which conceptualizes child development as the result of interactions across multiple environmental layers, and in educational adaptation theory, which emphasizes the need for institutional responsiveness to social change (Tseng & Wu, 2025; Warnick, 2023; Yang & Eunjooh Oh, 2024). Within this framework, the disruption of the family microsystem due to parental migration positions educational institutions as critical agents in reconstructing a supportive developmental environment.

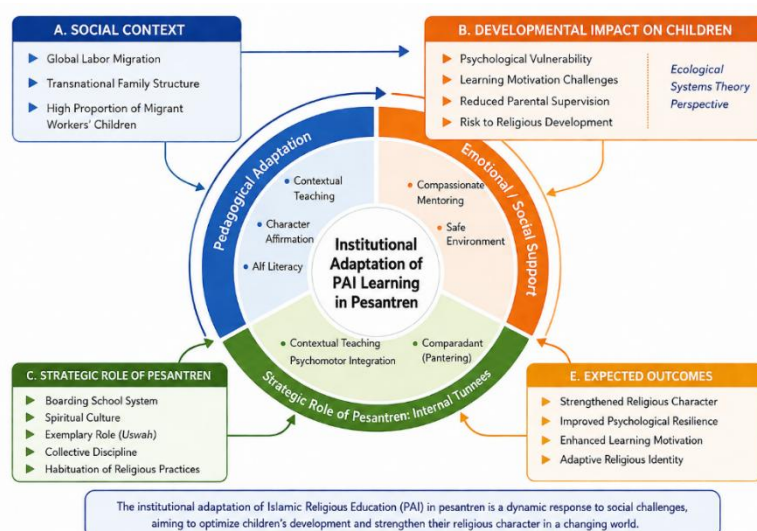


Figure 2. Conceptual Framework of Adaptation of PAI Learning for Children of Migrant Worker in Pesantren
(Source: Author's synthesis)

Accordingly, this study aims to analyze the strategies of PAI learning, the efforts to enhance its effectiveness, and the patterns of institutional adaptation implemented at SMP Pondok Pesantren Mambaul Ulum Pamekasan, where approximately 60% of students are children of migrant workers. By situating PAI within the intersection of migration, education, and child development, this research seeks to provide a more integrated understanding of how religious education functions not only as a pedagogical process but also as a socio-emotional intervention. Rather than viewing parental absence solely as a deficit, this study explores how pesantren-based education transforms this condition into a structured framework for resilience, discipline, and identity formation. To synthesize the relationship between migration dynamics, educational responses, and developmental outcomes, the conceptual framework of this study is presented in **Figure 2**.

As illustrated in **Figure 2**, the study conceptualizes adaptation as a dynamic process linking macro-level social conditions to micro-level educational practices and developmental outcomes. The social context of global labor migration generates transnational family

structures that shape children's developmental conditions, including emotional vulnerability and reduced supervision. These challenges are addressed through institutional adaptation in PAI learning, which operates through pedagogical adjustments and emotional-social support within the pesantren environment. In this sense, the pesantren functions not merely as an educational institution but as a reconstructed developmental space, mediating disruption and producing outcomes such as strengthened religiosity, improved psychological resilience, and sustained learning motivation.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study adopts a qualitative approach with a case study design to examine how Islamic Religious Education (PAI) is adapted for children of migrant workers within the socio-institutional setting of a pesantren. The selection of this design is closely aligned with the research objective, which requires an in-depth understanding of lived experiences, institutional practices, and contextual dynamics rather than generalizable measurement (Miller et al., 2022; Naeem & Thomas, 2025; Qur'an & N., 2025). The study was conducted at SMP Pondok Pesantren Mambaul Ulum Pamekasan, Madura, where a significant proportion of students come from migrant worker families. Informants were selected purposively based on clearly defined criteria (Kelly & Sennott, 2025; Perez, 2024). Student participants were required to (1) be actively enrolled in the school, (2) have at least one parent working abroad for a minimum of one year, and (3) participate in both formal schooling and boarding activities. Additional informants included substitute guardians who were directly involved in daily caregiving, as well as school actors such as the Principal or Vice Principal and PAI teachers, who hold institutional and pedagogical insights into the learning process.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and participant observation, allowing the researcher to capture both articulated experiences and observed practices (Khan & MacEachen, 2022; Wall et al., 2021; Whitney & Evered, 2022). The interview protocol was organized around several thematic domains, including instructional adaptation strategies in PAI, forms of emotional and spiritual guidance, communication patterns between the school and guardians, and challenges arising from parental migration. Observations were conducted across multiple settings, including classroom learning, dormitory-based religious activities, and everyday interactions between teachers and students. Participant observation took place over an extended period from March 2024 to November 2025, during which field notes were systematically documented to capture recurring patterns in behavior, interaction, and instructional practice. This prolonged engagement enabled the researcher to move beyond surface-level impressions and identify consistent forms of adaptation embedded in daily routines (Alvarado et al., 2024; Dado et al., 2023; Stockless & Brière, 2024).

Data analysis followed an inductive process involving data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing (Laari, 2025; Nicmanis, 2024; Yip & Zeng, 2025). Rather than imposing predefined categories, patterns were allowed to emerge from the data and were then interpreted through the lens of Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Theory (El Zaatari & Maalouf, 2022). The coding process categorized findings into multiple ecological levels, including the microsystem (direct interactions among students, teachers, and peers), mesosystem (relationships between school and guardians), exosystem (indirect effects of parental migration), and macrosystem (the broader cultural and religious values of the pesantren). This theoretical integration provided a structured way to understand how different environmental layers shape educational adaptation. To ensure the credibility of the findings, the study employed triangulation of sources and methods, alongside member checking with informants to confirm the accuracy of interpretations and reduce the risk of misrepresentation (Al-Eisawi, 2022; Palmer & Udoh, 2024; Stockless & Brière, 2024).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

At the beginning of the academic year, SMP Pondok Pesantren Mambaul Ulum conducts an initial identification of students' backgrounds. Students complete administrative forms detailing parental occupation, place of residence, and caregiving arrangements. In several cases, teachers follow up with brief individual conversations to clarify family conditions. The collected information is compiled by the student affairs division and used to determine dormitory placement as well as mentoring needs. As noted by the Vice Principal for Student Affairs, *"At the start of the year, we map which students come from migrant worker families. This helps us decide how to guide them from the beginning."* (Zakki, 2025). During the early weeks of boarding, students demonstrate varied patterns of adaptation. Some students tend to withdraw and limit interaction, especially in unfamiliar social environments, while others display more expressive behavior, including seeking attention from peers and teachers. A homeroom teacher explained, *"Some students prefer to stay quiet and observe, but others try to get attention. We approach them differently depending on their condition"* (Tamam, 2025). In response, teachers provide additional attention, particularly outside formal class hours, to support students' adjustment to the boarding environment.

In classroom settings, Islamic Religious Education (PAI) is delivered through a combination of explanation, dialogue, and participatory activities. Teachers frequently invite students to connect lesson topics with their personal experiences. One student stated, *"When the teacher talks about family, we are asked to share our stories. Sometimes I talk about my mother working abroad"* (Alisa, 2025). Teachers also create opportunities for discussion, particularly for students who show low motivation. As one teacher described, *"We give time for students to speak, especially those who seem less motivated. Sometimes they just need someone to listen"* (Rifqi, 2025). Outside the classroom, interactions between students, teachers, and dormitory supervisors (*musyrif*) occur regularly in informal settings. After congregational prayers and during evening hours, students gather in small groups. In these moments, some students share personal experiences, including feelings of longing for their parents or challenges in communicating with guardians at home. A dormitory mentor noted, *"At night, students often open up more. They talk about missing their parents or problems at home"* (Marsuki, 2025). These interactions provide additional space for students to express themselves beyond formal instructional contexts.

The pesantren also facilitates scheduled online communication between students and their parents. These sessions are typically arranged on weekends or during specific periods such as examinations or religious holidays. Teachers observe that such interactions often influence students' engagement. *"After video calls with their parents, some students become more enthusiastic and active again"* (Zakki, 2025). This indicates that communication with parents continues to play a role in students' daily experiences despite physical separation. Daily life in the pesantren is structured through consistent routines, including five daily congregational prayers, Qur'an recitation (*tadarus*), study of classical Islamic texts (*kitab kuning*), and public speaking activities (*muhadharah*). Students participate collectively in these activities, which are carried out in a regular and organized manner. A guardian observed, *"Since staying at the pesantren, my grandchild has become more disciplined and reminds me to pray"* (Mustakim, 2025). Over time, some students who initially struggled with discipline begin to follow these routines more consistently.

The dormitory system organizes students into small groups under the supervision of *musyrif*. Each group consists of students from diverse family backgrounds, including children of migrant workers. Within these groups, students interact frequently, share responsibilities, and support each other in daily activities. Observations indicate that peer relationships contribute to students' adaptation to the boarding environment. In terms of discipline, when students commit minor violations, teachers and dormitory supervisors prioritize dialogue before applying formal sanctions. Students are asked to explain their behavior, and guidance is provided through personal conversations. A guidance and counseling teacher explained, *"We usually ask why the student behaved that way first. Many problems come from emotional issues"*

(Marsuki, 2025). This approach is applied consistently, particularly for students who show signs of difficulty adapting. The school maintains records of students' academic performance, participation in religious activities, and behavioral development. Based on these records, teachers provide additional support, including remedial sessions for students who experience learning difficulties. These sessions are conducted outside regular class hours in a more individualized setting. *"We give extra time for students who struggle, but we do it personally so they don't feel embarrassed"* (Rifqi, 2025). This allows students to receive support without drawing attention to their difficulties.

Recognition is given to students who demonstrate positive changes, both academically and behaviorally. This recognition is delivered during school gatherings or through informal interactions. According to a teacher, *"Even small improvements are appreciated so students feel noticed"* (Zakki, 2025). Such practices are observed to influence students' confidence and participation in activities. Collaboration between the school and guardians is maintained through periodic communication. Guardians are occasionally invited to attend meetings or activities at the pesantren. The principal stated, *"We communicate with guardians so that what we teach here continues at home"* (Soleh, 2025). Through this interaction, the school shares information about students' development and coordinates expectations regarding behavior and discipline. Overall, the findings show that the pesantren implements a structured system combining initial identification, daily routines, classroom interaction, informal mentoring, peer support, and institutional coordination.

These elements are observed to shape how children of migrant workers adapt to the educational and social environment within the pesantren. To provide a clearer overview of the empirical findings, **Figure 3** summarizes the main patterns of adaptation observed in the field.

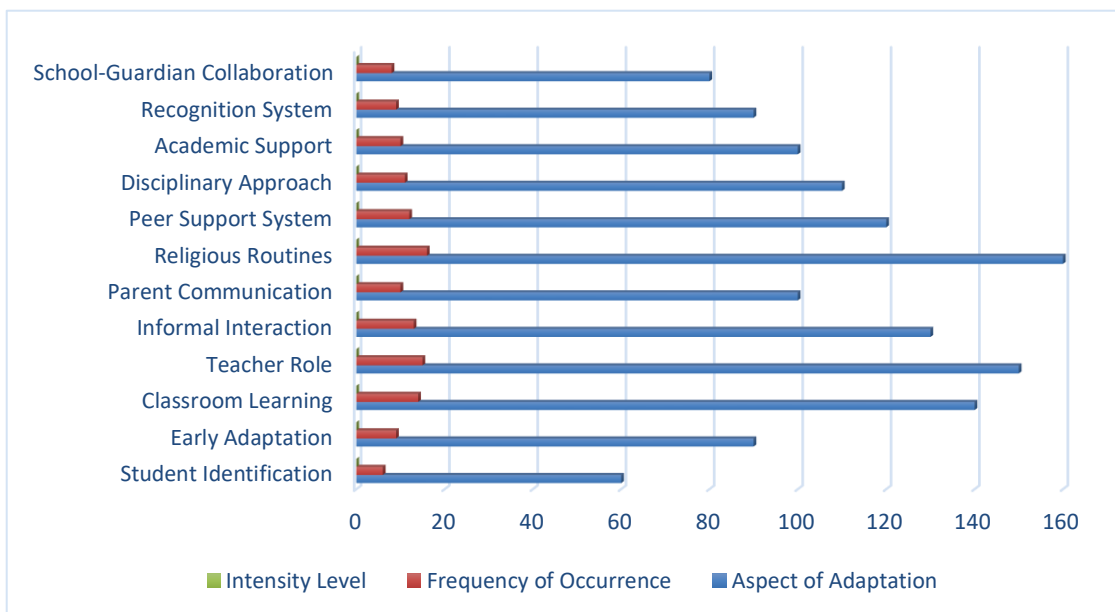


Figure 3. Adaptation of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) for Children of Migrant Workers

(Source: Author's field data synthesis)

Figure 3 presents the distribution of adaptation aspects based on their frequency of occurrence in the field data. The findings indicate that religious routines, teacher roles, and informal interactions appear with the highest intensity, suggesting their central role in shaping students' adaptation within the pesantren environment. As a result, adaptation is not limited to instructional methods alone. It extends to the entire structure of students' academic and residential life, producing cumulative and sustainable developmental outcomes.

Discussion

Strategies for Teaching Islamic Religious Education to Children of Migrant Workers

The strategies of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) for children of migrant workers at SMP Pondok Pesantren Mambaul Ulum Pamekasan reflect an adaptive pedagogical response to the socio-emotional conditions shaped by parental migration. Children of migrant workers commonly experience prolonged separation from parents due to economic factors, which often leads to limited emotional interaction and irregular communication patterns (Tang et al., 2024). These conditions create a heightened need for educational approaches that address not only cognitive development but also emotional and spiritual dimensions. The findings indicate that teachers assume multiple roles that extend beyond instructional delivery, including providing emotional support and informal guidance. This strategy can be interpreted as a response to the reduced presence of parental figures, where teachers function as consistent adult figures within the educational environment. Such an approach aligns with the perspective that learning processes are more effective when supported by meaningful interpersonal relationships. The allocation of time for personal dialogue, particularly for students experiencing behavioral changes or declining motivation, demonstrates that PAI is implemented as a developmental process that integrates affective and spiritual engagement.

From an ecological perspective, this adaptation can be understood through Bronfenbrenner's framework, particularly at the microsystem level, where direct and continuous interaction plays a central role in shaping individual development (Abbas et al., 2025). The pesantren environment functions as an alternative microsystem by providing structured routines, close teacher–student relationships, and consistent moral guidance. This explains why students gradually demonstrate improved discipline and emotional stability, as the environment offers predictable patterns of interaction that compensate for instability in family structures. At the mesosystem level, the effectiveness of PAI strategies is strengthened through coordination between the school and students' families or guardians. Regular communication and collaborative guidance efforts contribute to the alignment of values across different environments (Masruhin et al., 2024). This consistency is crucial, as the internalization of religious values is more likely to occur when students encounter similar expectations both at school and at home. In the context of Madurese migrant families, where caregiving is often delegated to extended family members, such coordination becomes particularly important in minimizing conflicting norms.

Meanwhile, the exosystem, represented by parents working abroad, indirectly influences students' psychological and educational experiences. Economic remittances may support material needs, yet they also introduce emotional distance and fragmented parenting practices. The findings suggest that PAI strategies respond to this condition by integrating religious values such as patience (*sabr*), trust in God (*tawakkal*), and responsibility into students' daily experiences. This indicates that religious education functions not only as normative instruction but also as a coping mechanism that helps students reinterpret their family situations in a more constructive way. The implementation of emotional and spiritual approaches further reinforces this adaptation. Informal counseling spaces and dialogical interactions allow students to express personal experiences and emotional concerns. This approach is effective because it creates a supportive environment where students feel acknowledged, which in turn enhances their engagement in learning. Rather than adopting a repressive disciplinary model, the pesantren emphasizes persuasive and dialogical strategies that connect religious teachings with students' lived realities. This explains why students are more receptive to moral guidance, as the learning process is directly relevant to their personal contexts.

Another important aspect is the use of contextualized learning, where religious subjects such as aqidah, akhlaq, and fiqh are linked to the realities of migrant family life. By adapting concepts such as *birrul walidain* to the condition of long-distance relationships,

teachers enable students to practice religious values in ways that are meaningful and applicable. This finding supports previous studies that highlight the importance of contextual learning in enhancing understanding and internalization of religious teachings (Sabarudin et al., 2023). More importantly, it shows that contextualization also serves a psychological function by helping students maintain a sense of connection with their parents despite physical separation. Religious habituation emerges as another key factor in explaining the effectiveness of these strategies. The consistent implementation of daily religious routines, including congregational prayers, Qur'anic recitation, and other collective activities, creates a stable environment that fosters discipline and a sense of belonging. This stability is particularly important for children of migrant workers, who may experience emotional uncertainty in their family environments. The effectiveness of habituation lies in its repetitive and collective nature, which gradually reinforces behavioral patterns and internalizes values through practice rather than instruction alone.

However, the findings also indicate that these strategies are not uniformly effective for all students. The success of emotional support, contextual learning, and religious habituation depends on the level of student participation and engagement. Students who remain socially withdrawn or less involved in communal activities tend to experience weaker outcomes, suggesting that adaptation is influenced not only by institutional support but also by individual responsiveness. Furthermore, while the pesantren environment provides significant support, it cannot fully replace the emotional role of parents, indicating inherent limitations in institutional-based adaptation. The flexibility of the disciplinary approach further contributes to the effectiveness of PAI strategies. By prioritizing counseling and moral guidance over punitive measures, the pesantren encourages students to develop internal awareness of their actions. This approach is particularly relevant for children who may exhibit behavioral issues related to emotional stress. By addressing the underlying causes of behavior, discipline becomes a process of learning rather than control, which supports long-term character development.

Enhancing the Effectiveness of Islamic Religious Education

Enhancing the effectiveness of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) for children of migrant workers at SMP Pondok Pesantren Mambaul Ulum Pamekasan is achieved through a combination of institutional, pedagogical, and psychosocial strategies. The need for such a comprehensive approach is rooted in the specific vulnerabilities experienced by children who grow up in conditions of parental absence due to labor migration. These conditions often result in emotional instability, reduced parental supervision, and fragmented patterns of value transmission, thereby requiring educational institutions to assume a more integrated developmental role (Hidayat et al., 2024). One of the key strategies identified is the use of systematic student development records that document academic performance, behavioral patterns, and emotional conditions. The existence of such records enables teachers to adapt instructional approaches and mentoring strategies based on individual student needs. This approach explains why the effectiveness of PAI in this context cannot be reduced to classroom instruction alone but must be understood as a continuous and coordinated process that connects academic, emotional, and social dimensions. In line with this, the effectiveness of learning is closely linked to the alignment between school-based guidance and the broader social environment of the students, particularly their home context (Nasucha et al., 2023).

The integration of communication technology further strengthens this process by maintaining emotional connections between students and their parents working abroad. Regularly facilitated online interactions contribute to reducing emotional distance and reinforcing students' motivation to learn. This mechanism can be interpreted as a compensatory strategy within the exosystem, where indirect parental presence is reintroduced through mediated communication. The effectiveness of this approach lies in its ability to restore a sense of relational continuity, which is essential for sustaining students' psychological engagement and sense of responsibility.

Another central factor influencing the effectiveness of PAI is the implementation of participatory learning approaches. The findings demonstrate that dialogical methods, group discussions, and experience-based case analysis significantly enhance student engagement. This supports previous research emphasizing the role of participatory pedagogy in improving comprehension and involvement (Tambak & Sukenti, 2023). However, the present findings extend this perspective by showing that, within the context of children of migrant workers, participatory approaches serve a dual function. In addition to facilitating cognitive understanding, they also provide a structured space for emotional expression and social integration. This dual function explains why participatory learning is particularly effective in pesantren settings, where students' personal experiences are directly incorporated into the learning process.

Furthermore, this finding contributes to the broader discourse on migrant children's education by challenging the tendency to separate academic achievement from socio-emotional adaptation. While existing studies often focus on cognitive outcomes, the present study demonstrates that participatory PAI learning also supports coping processes and identity formation. By engaging students in discussions that relate religious values to their lived realities, learning becomes a means through which students interpret and negotiate their experiences within a moral framework. The contextualization of concepts such as honesty (*amanah*) in relation to remittances from migrant parents illustrates how religious education can be made directly relevant to students' socio-economic conditions (Prahmana, 2022). This testimony reinforces the notion that participatory pedagogical approaches simultaneously strengthen conceptual understanding and cultivate student self-confidence (Sentürk & Isikan, 2024). The effectiveness of PAI is further reinforced through habituation-based assessment systems that integrate religious practices into daily routines.

Indicators such as participation in congregational prayers, Qur'anic recitation, and other religious activities function as mechanisms for continuous character development rather than rigid control. The success of this approach can be explained by the role of structured routines in creating a sense of stability and predictability, which is particularly important for children experiencing emotional uncertainty. Through repetition and consistency, these practices gradually shape behavior and internalize values in a way that is both experiential and sustainable. In addition, the development of intrinsic motivation is emphasized as a core objective of PAI. The framing of academic achievement as a form of filial responsibility reflects an effort to connect learning motivation with moral and spiritual values. This strategy is effective because it aligns personal goals with culturally and religiously meaningful expectations, thereby strengthening students' commitment to learning. The integration of motivational reinforcement across various institutional settings further ensures that these values are consistently communicated and internalized.

Remedial programs and individualized academic support also play a significant role in enhancing effectiveness. By providing additional learning opportunities in a personalized manner, the pesantren minimizes academic disparities while avoiding stigma. This approach not only improves academic outcomes but also contributes to students' self-confidence, as they receive support without being publicly identified as struggling learners. The emphasis on recognition and positive reinforcement further strengthens this process by providing social validation, which is particularly important for children who may feel overlooked due to parental absence (Hillman et al., 2023). From an ecological perspective, these strategies collectively strengthen the microsystem by providing structured routines, consistent relationships, and supportive learning environments. The pesantren functions as a stable setting that compensates for reduced parental interaction, thereby supporting students' emotional and behavioral development. At the mesosystem level, the effectiveness of PAI is enhanced through sustained communication between the school, guardians, and parents working abroad, ensuring continuity of values across different environments. This interconnected system explains why the effectiveness of PAI in this context is not

determined by a single factor but by the synergy between institutional practices, social relationships, and broader socio-economic conditions.

However, the findings also suggest that the effectiveness of these strategies is not absolute. Variations in student participation, differences in family communication patterns, and the persistence of emotional distance from parents indicate that institutional interventions have inherent limitations. While the pesantren can provide structured support and relational stability, it cannot fully replace the role of parents in children's emotional development. This highlights the importance of viewing PAI effectiveness as a dynamic and context-dependent process, shaped by both institutional efforts and external socio-cultural factors.

Patterns of Adaptation in Islamic Religious Education for Children of Migrant Workers

The patterns of adaptation in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) at SMP Pondok Pesantren Mambaul Ulum Pamekasan are formulated as a direct response to the social, psychological, and cultural conditions of children raised in transnational family contexts. Parental migration generates emotional distance, shifts in caregiving arrangements, and reduced parental supervision, all of which shape students' developmental experiences (Miheţ, 2022). These conditions necessitate adaptive strategies that do not alter the core principles of Islamic education but instead modify pedagogical approaches, instructional methods, and guidance systems to ensure relevance and effectiveness. One fundamental adaptive pattern lies in the use of early social mapping to identify students' family backgrounds and caregiving structures. This mapping functions as a diagnostic mechanism that enables educators to anticipate potential emotional and behavioral challenges. The effectiveness of this strategy can be explained by its role in enabling targeted interventions, as teachers are able to adjust their approaches based on students' specific socio-emotional conditions.

Such differentiation is particularly important in migrant contexts, where students do not share uniform experiences but instead exhibit diverse responses to parental absence. Instructional flexibility emerges as another key adaptation. Rather than delivering standardized content, teachers contextualize lessons by linking religious concepts to the lived realities of migrant families. This approach is effective because it prevents the emergence of negative self-perceptions among students and instead reframes parental migration as an expression of responsibility and sacrifice. By emphasizing positive meanings, the learning process reduces psychological burden and supports students in constructing a more resilient self-understanding. This finding reinforces the argument that contextualized pedagogy enhances not only cognitive comprehension but also emotional acceptance of personal circumstances. The organization of dormitory life further reflects an intentional adaptive design.

The implementation of small-group mentoring systems under the supervision of *musyrif* creates a structure of peer-based support that facilitates social integration. This arrangement explains why students gradually develop a sense of belonging, as frequent interaction within smaller groups fosters trust and mutual assistance. The effectiveness of this approach is consistent with findings that peer solidarity plays a crucial role in supporting adaptation among children in non-traditional family settings (Van Den Berghe et al., 2024). Spiritual practices constitute a central component of the adaptation process. Activities such as *qiyamul lail*, communal *dhikr*, and other forms of religious engagement function not only as ritual obligations but also as mechanisms for emotional regulation. Their effectiveness can be understood through the concept of *tarbiyah bil hāl*, where values are internalized through repeated practice and lived experience. Through consistent participation in structured religious routines, students gradually develop emotional stability and self-regulation. At the same time, the principle of *tarbiyah bil rahmah* is reflected in relational interactions characterized by empathy, attentiveness, and emotional support. The integration of these two approaches explains why spirituality functions as an effective coping mechanism: it

combines habituation with relational care, allowing students to manage emotional distress while assigning positive meaning to their experiences (Sentürk & Isikan, 2024).

However, the effectiveness of spiritual-based adaptation is not uniform across all students. Variations in participation intensity and emotional engagement significantly influence outcomes. Students who are less involved in communal practices or who remain socially withdrawn tend to experience weaker internalization of values. This indicates that adaptation is not solely determined by institutional design but also depends on individual responsiveness and the quality of relational interaction within the educational environment. Another important adaptive pattern is the implementation of a balanced disciplinary approach. By prioritizing dialogue and understanding over punitive measures, the pesantren addresses behavioral issues as manifestations of underlying emotional conditions. This approach is effective because it transforms discipline into a process of moral learning rather than control. By identifying the root causes of misconduct, such as the need for attention or difficulties in emotional regulation, educators are able to guide students toward greater self-awareness and responsibility (McKenna, 2022). The cultural context of Madura further shapes these adaptation patterns. Local values such as *gotong royong* (mutual cooperation) and respect for elders reinforce the moral framework within which students develop.

At the same time, remittances from migrant parents function as an exosystem influence that shapes students' perceptions of responsibility, economic value, and familial duty. This dimension highlights the need to understand PAI not only as a religious process but also as one embedded within broader socio-economic realities. The involvement of guardians, particularly grandparents, strengthens value continuity by ensuring that norms practiced in the pesantren are reinforced within the home environment, thereby reducing the risk of normative dissonance. Extracurricular activities also contribute to adaptive processes by providing spaces for identity development. Through participation in social and religious programs, students are able to express their potential and construct positive self-identities as both santri and members of migrant worker families. This suggests that adaptation is not limited to coping with challenges but also involves the active formation of identity and self-worth.

The ongoing evaluation of student development represents another critical dimension of adaptation. By continuously assessing the effectiveness of guidance strategies, the institution is able to refine its approaches and respond to emerging challenges. This iterative process explains why the adaptation model remains dynamic rather than static, allowing the pesantren to adjust its strategies in accordance with students' evolving needs (Hamka, 2023). From an ecological perspective, these adaptation patterns operate across multiple system levels. At the microsystem level, the pesantren reconstructs a stable environment through consistent interaction, structured routines, and accessible adult support. At the mesosystem level, coordination between school, guardians, and parents ensures alignment of values across different contexts. At the exosystem level, migration-related factors such as remittances and long-distance parenting indirectly shape students' experiences. The effectiveness of these adaptations lies in their integrative nature, which addresses these interconnected layers simultaneously (Panahandehpour et al., 2023).

Drawing on Urie Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, the adaptation of Islamic Religious Education in this pesantren exemplifies interventions that operate across multiple layers of the child's developmental ecology. The effectiveness of these adaptations lies in their ability to reconstruct a stable and responsive microsystem through continuous interaction, structured routines, and accessible adult support, which together compensate for the disruption caused by parental absence. Regular teacher–student engagement and peer-based dormitory systems create consistent relational patterns that foster emotional security and behavioral regulation, while the integration of religious practices provides a meaningful framework through which students interpret their experiences. At the mesosystem level, coordinated communication between school, guardians, and parents strengthens consistency in values, thereby reducing conflicting expectations across environments. However, these

adaptations do not function uniformly for all students. Their effectiveness is contingent upon the intensity of participation and the students' capacity to engage with the available support systems.

Students who remain socially withdrawn or experience limited communication with parents may not fully benefit from these structures. Furthermore, while institutional routines provide stability, they cannot entirely replace the emotional presence of parents, indicating that the adaptive model mitigates but does not eliminate the developmental challenges associated with transnational family conditions. At the microsystem level, dormitory life, interactions with teachers, *musyrif*, and peers constitute the primary arena for re-establishing a sense of security and attachment previously disrupted by parental migration. Intensive interactions, small-group guidance, and collective spiritual practices foster relational patterns that are both supportive and stable. This stability is vital, as Bronfenbrenner highlights that the quality of proximal processes serves as the principal driving force of child development.

Taken together, this study contributes to the ongoing discourse on Islamic education by demonstrating that the adaptation of PAI in pesantren cannot be understood as a purely instructional adjustment, but rather as a reconfiguration of the educational environment itself in response to shifting family structures. By situating PAI within the ecological realities of children of migrant workers, this research shows how religious education operates simultaneously as a pedagogical, emotional, and social mechanism that stabilizes students' developmental conditions. The integration of structured routines, relational support, and contextualized learning does not merely enhance academic outcomes, but also provides a meaningful framework through which students interpret their lived experiences. In this sense, the contribution of this study lies not in proposing a new model in abstract terms, but in revealing how existing pesantren practices, when read through an ecological lens, already function as adaptive systems capable of negotiating the tensions between parental absence and student development.

CONCLUSION

The increasing prevalence of transnational family structures, particularly among migrant worker communities, has introduced complex socio-emotional challenges that conventional models of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) are not fully equipped to address. This study demonstrates that the pesantren at SMP Mambaul Ulum responds to this gap through a layered and adaptive educational system, where instruction is inseparable from emotional mentoring, religious habituation, and institutional coordination. Rather than functioning merely as a site of knowledge transmission, the pesantren reconfigures itself into a substitute developmental environment, where structured routines, dialogical pedagogy, and peer-based interactions collectively stabilize students' psychological conditions and sustain their learning motivation. These findings suggest that the effectiveness of PAI in migrant-affected contexts lies not in curricular modification alone, but in the integration of relational, spiritual, and ecological dimensions of learning. At the same time, the study underscores an inherent limitation: institutional interventions, however comprehensive, cannot fully compensate for the emotional absence of parents, indicating that educational adaptation operates within, rather than beyond, broader socio-family constraints. This points to the need for future research that incorporates the perspectives of migrant parents and explores hybrid support systems that bridge institutional care with transnational family engagement.

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