

Communication Patterns in the Learning Process at Pesantren: A Cultural Communication Perspective on the Formation of Santri Values and Identity at Pesantren Alkhairat Ambon

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Abstract

Learning in pesantren (Islamic boarding schools) is not merely a process of knowledge transfer from educators to students; it is also a communicative process that facilitates the formation of the students' meanings, values, habits, and identities. This study aims to analyze the communication patterns established during the learning process at Pesantren Alkhairaat Ambon, utilizing a cultural communication perspective, specifically regarding the formation of student values and identities. A qualitative research approach was employed. Data were gathered through participant observation, open-ended interviews, and document analysis. Research informants included students, teachers (ustaz/ustazah), school leadership, parents, the school committee, and representatives from the Ministry of Religious Affairs. The results indicate that learning communication patterns at Pesantren Alkhairaat Ambon unfold through several interconnected forms: teacher-student communication, peer communication, independent study, and external communication between the pesantren and families. Learning extends beyond face-to-face classroom interactions, evolving through out-of-class study practices, group learning, peer tutoring, and parental involvement. The findings reveal that these communication patterns create a social space for students to cultivate independence, responsibility, and interpersonal skills, such as respecting others, while internalizing the values governing pesantren life. These patterns form a "triangular learning communication" model, with students, teachers, and parents as primary elements, while the pesantren, media, school committee, government, and peer tutors serve as supporting elements. From a cultural communication perspective, this pattern demonstrates that pesantren learning is a process of transmitting and constructing cultural meaning through both formal and informal interactions. This study contributes to the field of cultural communication by positioning the pesantren as a communicative space that not only transmits knowledge but also shapes the values and identities of its students.

Keywords: *Communication Patterns, Cultural Communication, Student Identity, Pesantren Learning.*

A. INTRODUCTION

Pesantren is one of the most important Islamic educational institutions in Indonesia and has historically played a significant role in the development of education, religious life, and social relations within Indonesian society. Its educational function extends beyond the transmission of religious and academic knowledge to include the formation of students' character, morality, habits, social attitudes, and value orientations. In this sense, pesantren education takes place within a broader social environment rather than being confined to formal classroom instruction. Previous studies have shown that pesantren integrate religious education, character formation, habituation, and everyday social practices into a relatively holistic

educational environment (Abdullah, 2020; Hidayat & Bujuri, 2020; Syafe'i, 2017). Recent studies likewise demonstrate that pesantren culture functions as an important educational environment through role modelling, habituation, institutional practices, and the transmission of shared values (Kawakip & Sulanam, 2023; Ma'arif & Arif, 2026).

Within this educational environment, communication constitutes a fundamental element of the learning process. Education essentially involves interaction between educators and learners through the exchange of messages, responses, interpretations, meanings, and social relationships. Learning, therefore, cannot be separated from communication because knowledge and values are not merely transferred but are also interpreted and negotiated through interaction. In the context of pesantren, this communicative process is particularly significant because santri do not interact with teachers only during formal instructional activities. They also live within an environment that regulates various dimensions of everyday life, including patterns of speech, respect for teachers, relationships with peers, time management, learning habits, religious practices, and compliance with institutional rules. Consequently, communication in pesantren operates simultaneously as an instructional process and as a mechanism through which cultural values are reproduced and internalized.

The distinctive character of pesantren education makes communication an important entry point for understanding how educational values are transmitted and how santri develop their social and cultural identities. Research on character education in Islamic boarding schools indicates that character formation is implemented not only through classroom teaching but also through extracurricular activities, habituation, exemplary behavior, and daily interaction (Hidayat & Bujuri, 2020). Similarly, Miftahuddin et al. (2024) demonstrate that Islamic character education in a boarding-school context is closely associated with the integration of religious knowledge, moral education, and everyday practices. These findings suggest that the educational process in pesantren should be understood as an integrated communicative and cultural process in which learning occurs through both explicit instruction and lived experience.

Previous research on learning communication at Pesantren Alkhairaat Ambon provides an important empirical basis for this discussion. The study shows that learning activities do not occur exclusively through face-to-face interaction between ustaz/ustazah and santri. Instead, learning takes place through various forms, including classroom instruction, activities outside the classroom, independent learning, peer tutoring, and group learning. Parents may also become indirectly involved in supporting santri's learning activities. These findings are significant because they indicate that the boundaries between instructional communication and social communication in pesantren are not always clearly separated. An activity conducted outside the classroom may remain part of the learning process when it is related to students' learning tasks, experiences, and educational achievement.

One important example is independent learning. Following direct interaction between ustaz/ustazah and santri, students may be given opportunities to study independently without continuous supervision from teachers. Such practices indicate that learning communication does not necessarily require continuous direct interaction between teachers and students. Rather, communication may create an environment that enables santri to assume greater responsibility for their own learning. This pattern is consistent with the broader characteristics of pesantren education, in which independence, discipline, responsibility, and habituation are developed through students' participation in daily institutional activities (Hidayat & Bujuri, 2020; Ma'arif & Arif, 2026).

In addition to independent learning, the Alkhairaat Ambon study identifies peer tutoring as another form of learning communication. Santri who are considered more competent in a particular subject may be entrusted by ustaz/ustazah to assist or teach their peers. Such a practice illustrates the existence of horizontal communication alongside the more conventional vertical communication between teachers and students. Knowledge is therefore not transmitted exclusively from educators to learners but can also circulate among santri through peer interaction. Recent research similarly highlights peer interaction and collaborative learning as important components of character formation and social learning in contemporary Islamic boarding schools (Wahono et al., 2026). Peer communication may consequently function not only as a mechanism for academic assistance but also as a medium through which norms of cooperation, responsibility, solidarity, and mutual support are learned.

The involvement of parents in group learning activities further expands the communicative structure of pesantren education. When santri conduct group learning at the home of one of their peers, parents may coordinate with pesantren leaders or ustaz/ustazah concerning the activities assigned to students. Such interaction demonstrates that educational communication in pesantren can extend beyond the teacher–student relationship to include the family. This finding is particularly relevant because previous research has emphasized the importance of collaboration between pesantren, parents, and the wider community in sustaining character education and controlling students' behavior both inside and outside the pesantren environment (Hidayat & Bujuri, 2020).

The phenomenon can consequently be conceptualized as a triangular learning communication model involving educators, learners, and parents as the principal actors, while the pesantren institution, learning media, school or pesantren committees, government institutions, and peer tutors function as supporting elements. This model suggests that learning communication in pesantren is multidirectional rather than merely linear. Communication takes place vertically between teachers and santri, horizontally among santri, and institutionally between the pesantren and parents or other educational stakeholders. Such a configuration provides a broader understanding of learning communication as a social process embedded in an educational community.

A cultural communication perspective is therefore particularly relevant to examining this phenomenon. Communication in pesantren cannot be separated from the values, traditions, norms, symbols, and everyday practices that constitute the institution's cultural environment. Santri learn not only from what ustaz/ustazah explicitly teach but also from how teachers communicate, how respect is demonstrated, how institutional rules are implemented, how senior members become role models, how peers cooperate, and how families interact with the pesantren. From this perspective, communication becomes a mechanism through which culture is transmitted, interpreted, negotiated, and reproduced. Kawakip and Sulanam (2023), for example, demonstrate that shared values in pesantren contribute significantly to the construction of Islamic educational identity. Their findings indicate that institutional identity is sustained through shared educational practices, moral development, and collective awareness.

The relationship between communication, culture, and identity is also relevant to understanding the distinctive educational environment of pesantren. Pesantren culture may operate as a form of hidden curriculum in which values are learned through repeated practices and everyday interaction rather than through formal instructional materials alone. A recent systematic review confirms that role modelling, habituation, curriculum integration, and pesantren culture collectively constitute important mechanisms for sustaining character education and transmitting values such as religious commitment, social responsibility, discipline, and independence (Ma'arif & Arif, 2026). Thus, the cultural dimension of communication provides an analytical framework for explaining how educational interaction contributes to the formation of santri identity.

The importance of this perspective becomes even more apparent in the context of contemporary pesantren, which operate amid modernization, globalization, and technological change. Pesantren are required to preserve their distinctive Islamic educational identity while simultaneously responding to changing educational and social demands. Research indicates that pesantren have demonstrated different forms of adaptation while maintaining core religious and moral values (Zainuri et al., 2025). At the same time, the persistence of shared values remains an important factor in maintaining institutional identity and continuity (Kawakip & Sulanam, 2023). Communication is therefore not merely a technical component of teaching; it constitutes an important cultural process through which pesantren negotiate continuity and change.

Based on this background, this article examines learning communication at Pesantren Alkhairaat Ambon from the perspective of cultural communication. The study focuses not only on how learning messages are delivered but also on how communication patterns are embedded in the cultural practices of pesantren and how they contribute to the formation of santri values and identity. The research questions are: (1) What patterns of communication are established in the learning process at Pesantren Alkhairaat Ambon? and (2) How do these-communication patterns contribute to the formation of santri values and identity? Accordingly, the objectives

of this article are to analyze the forms of learning communication occurring at Pesantren Alkhairaat Ambon, explain the relationship between learning communication and pesantren cultural practices, and interpret the contribution of these communication patterns to the formation of santri values and identity. By placing learning communication within a cultural framework, this study seeks to contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of pesantren education as an interactive, social, and culturally embedded process.

B. METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach with an exploratory case study design to examine learning communication within the social and cultural context of Pesantren Alkhairaat Ambon. A case study was considered appropriate because it enables an in-depth investigation of a phenomenon within its real-life context using multiple sources of evidence (Yin, 2018). The qualitative approach was used to explore participants' experiences, interpretations, and interactions in the learning process (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The study was conducted at Pesantren Alkhairaat Ambon. Participants included santri, ustaz/ustazah, pesantren leaders and management, parents, the school committee, and representatives of the Department of Religious Affairs. Participants were selected purposively based on their involvement in and knowledge of the learning process.

Data were collected through participant observation, in-depth interviews, and document analysis. Observation focused on classroom and extracurricular learning activities, independent learning, peer interaction, and other social interactions related to learning. In-depth interviews were conducted openly with selected participants to explore their experiences and perspectives regarding learning communication. Documents, including institutional policies, photographs, statistical data, and other relevant records, were analyzed as complementary sources of evidence. The use of multiple sources enabled triangulation and strengthened the credibility of the findings (Yin, 2018).

Data were analyzed through data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification (Miles et al., 2014). The analysis involved coding relevant data, grouping codes into categories, and identifying themes related to learning, communication, interaction, values, and identity. Thematic analysis was used to identify recurring patterns and meanings across the dataset (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The emerging themes were then interpreted in relation to the cultural communication perspective and the role of communication in shaping santri values and identity.

The trustworthiness of the findings was enhanced through source and method triangulation, by comparing information obtained from different participants and data collection techniques. This procedure helped establish the credibility and consistency of the interpretations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

C. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Learning as a Space for Communication

The findings indicate that learning at Pesantren Alkhairaat Ambon extends beyond formal classroom instruction. Learning activities involve teacher–student interaction, practical activities outside the classroom, independent learning, peer tutoring, and group learning. Thus, the classroom is not the only space in which knowledge and values are produced. Learning takes place through a broader network of social interactions within the pesantren environment.

This finding demonstrates that learning communication in pesantren is situational, contextual, and participatory. Santri acquire knowledge not only through verbal messages delivered by teachers but also through observation, experience, interaction, and repeated practices. This is consistent with research showing that character education in pesantren is integrated into curricular, extracurricular, and habituation activities rather than being restricted to formal instruction (Hidayat & Bujuri, 2020). The pesantren therefore functions as an educational ecosystem in which everyday interaction becomes part of the learning process.

2. Teacher–Student Communication

The primary communication pattern identified in the study is interaction between ustaz/ustazah and santri. Teachers provide learning materials, instructions, assignments, guidance, and supervision while also creating opportunities for santri to manage aspects of their own learning. Importantly, this relationship is not purely instructional. The findings indicate the existence of familial relationships in which teachers may also function as companions and parental figures for santri during their stay at the pesantren.

This pattern gives teacher–student communication both pedagogical and cultural functions. Pedagogically, teachers transmit knowledge and provide direction; culturally, they communicate norms concerning respect, responsibility, social relationships, and appropriate behavior. Similar findings have been reported in research on students' communication patterns in Islamic boarding schools, where teacher modelling and two-way communication were found to contribute to empathy, mutual trust, and students' sense of belonging (Putri et al., 2022). Thus, santri learn not only what they should know but also how they should behave as members of the pesantren community.

3. Independent Learning and the Construction of Autonomy

Independent learning is another important finding. Santri are given opportunities to study without continuous direct supervision from ustaz/ustazah, both after formal instruction and during designated learning periods. This practice indicates a shift from communication as direct instruction toward communication that creates conditions for student autonomy.

The process can be understood as: Communication → Habituation → Experience → Internalization → Autonomous Identity

The teacher initially provides direction and learning expectations; subsequently, santri are given responsibility for managing their learning. Independence therefore becomes something experienced and practiced rather than merely explained. This finding is consistent with research showing that pesantren character education is developed through habituation and the integration of values into students' everyday activities (Hidayat & Bujuri, 2020). The educational message embedded in independent learning is essentially one of trust: santri are trusted to manage their time, learning activities, and responsibilities.

4. Peer Communication and Peer Tutoring

The findings also reveal a horizontal dimension of learning communication through peer interaction and peer tutoring. Santri with stronger competence in particular subjects may be entrusted by teachers to assist or teach other santri. The communication pattern consequently develops from: Teacher → Santri into Teacher → Peer Tutor → Other Santri. This does not eliminate the authority of the teacher. Instead, the teacher provides legitimacy and direction, while the peer tutor becomes an intermediary in the learning process. Peer tutoring consequently transforms santri from passive recipients into participants and producers of knowledge.

The finding is supported by recent research on peer interaction in modern pesantren, which shows that peer support and collaborative learning can contribute to teamwork, religious practice, emotional resilience, and moral development (Wahono et al., 2026). At the same time, peer interaction may also generate negative influences when undesirable peer norms emerge. Therefore, the Alkhairaat model is significant because peer authority remains connected to teacher guidance and institutional norms.

From a cultural communication perspective, peer tutoring communicates values of cooperation, responsibility, trust, solidarity, leadership, and mutual assistance. It also demonstrates that pesantren culture is not reproduced solely through vertical transmission from teachers to students; santri themselves participate in reproducing and disseminating that culture.

5. Group Learning as Collective Communication

Group learning expands learning communication from interpersonal interaction to collective communication. Santri discuss assignments and learning materials with their peers, and some activities may take place at the home of a santri. Consequently, learning can extend beyond the physical boundaries of the pesantren.

The communication pattern can be represented as: Teacher → Santri → Learning Group → Parents → Pesantren. When group learning takes place at a santri's home, parents may communicate with the pesantren concerning the activity. The home therefore becomes an additional learning space, while parents become part of the educational communication environment. This finding reinforces the view that pesantren education operates through an immersive social environment rather than through classroom instruction alone. Research on pesantren character education

similarly emphasizes that character formation is integrated into daily activities and requires interaction among educational institutions, families, and the wider community (Hidayat & Bujuri, 2020).

6. Communication Between the Pesantren and Parents

An important finding is the involvement of parents in the learning communication system. Parents communicate with the pesantren particularly when learning activities occur outside the institution or when students encounter learning difficulties. Such communication serves several functions: coordination, supervision, problem solving, learning support, and continuity between pesantren and family education.

This finding suggests that educational responsibility is not completely concentrated within the teacher–student relationship. Rather, it is distributed across an educational network. When students do not achieve expected learning outcomes, communication between parents and the pesantren can become a mechanism for identifying problems and developing solutions. Hidayat and Bujuri (2020) similarly emphasize the importance of collaboration between parents, the pesantren, and the broader community in supporting character development.

7. Cultural Communication and Value Formation

The various communication patterns identified in this study demonstrate that values are transmitted not only through explicit religious or moral instruction but also through everyday experience and repeated interaction. Five values are particularly visible: independence, responsibility, politeness, togetherness, and respect.

Independence is communicated through opportunities for self-directed learning. Responsibility is developed through assignments, group learning, peer tutoring, and compliance with institutional rules. Politeness and respect are communicated through patterns of speaking, addressing teachers, dress, and everyday behavior. Togetherness emerges through peer interaction, group learning, and the familial relationship between teachers and santri.

These findings reinforce the argument that pesantren character education operates through habituation and the integration of values into daily life (Hidayat & Bujuri, 2020). They are also consistent with research showing that shared values maintained within pesantren contribute to the construction and preservation of Islamic educational identity (Kawakip & Sulanam, 2023).

Thus, communication in Alkhairaat functions not simply as a channel for transferring information but as a cultural mechanism for transmitting meaning and values. What santri repeatedly see, hear, practice, and experience gradually becomes part of their understanding of appropriate behavior and membership within the pesantren community.

8. Communication and the Construction of Santri Identity

The findings suggest that santri identity develops through the accumulation of communication experiences. Independent learning provides an experience of autonomy; peer tutoring provides an experience of leadership and responsibility; group learning provides an experience of cooperation; interaction with teachers provides an experience of respect and pedagogical relationships; and compliance with pesantren norms provides an experience of belonging to a particular community.

Santri identity can therefore be understood through four interconnected dimensions:

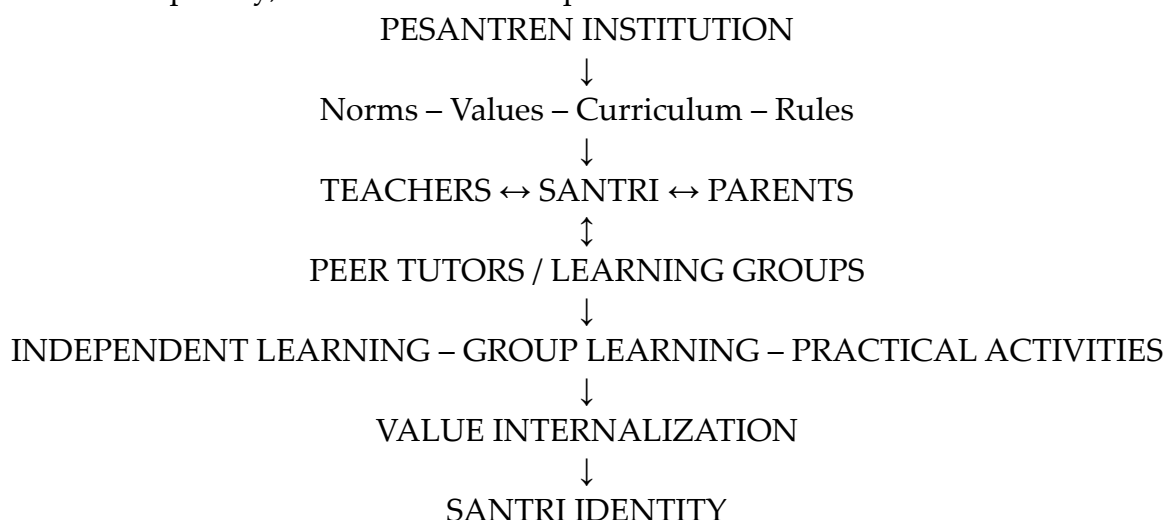
- a. Identity as learners, developed through academic activities and learning responsibilities;
- b. Identity as members of the pesantren community, developed through participation in shared norms and practices;
- c. Identity as autonomous individuals, developed through independent learning; and
- d. Identity as social individuals, developed through peer tutoring, group learning, cooperation, and mutual assistance.

This interpretation corresponds with Kawakip and Sulanam's (2023) finding that shared values and collective educational practices contribute to the construction of Islamic educational identity in pesantren. The present findings extend this argument by showing that identity formation occurs through everyday communication practices, not only through formally articulated institutional values.

9. The Triangular Learning Communication Model

The most significant finding of this study is the emergence of the Triangular Learning Communication Model, which positions teachers, santri, and parents as the three principal actors in the learning communication network. The pesantren institution, peer tutors, learning groups, media, school committees, and government institutions function as supporting elements.

Conceptually, the model can be represented as:



The model demonstrates that learning communication at Alkhairaat is relational rather than linear. A linear model that places the teacher as the sole sender and santri as receivers cannot adequately explain independent learning, peer tutoring, group learning, and parental involvement. Instead, communication moves in multiple directions: teachers communicate with santri, santri communicate with peers, peer tutors facilitate learning, families communicate with the pesantren, and all of these interactions are embedded within institutional norms.

This finding is consistent with research on communication patterns in Islamic boarding schools showing that two-way communication, teacher modelling, and close peer relationships contribute to character development, trust, and a sense of belonging (Putri et al., 2022).

10. Communication, Habituation, and Identity Formation

The findings further indicate a sequential relationship between communication, habituation, values, and identity: Interaction → Meaning Exchange → Habituation → Value Internalization → Identity. A value such as independence initially appears as an educational principle. It is then translated into independent learning practices, repeated through everyday activities, experienced by santri, and gradually internalized as part of their self-understanding. The same process applies to responsibility, cooperation, respect, and politeness.

Therefore, the culture of pesantren is not merely taught but also lived and reproduced through communication. Recent scholarship similarly characterizes pesantren as holistic and culturally embedded learning ecosystems in which character education is sustained through institutional culture, habituation, and everyday educational practices (Ma'arif & Arif, 2026).

Nonverbal communication also contributes to this process. Dress, language, forms of address, manners, respect toward teachers, and participation in institutional activities function as cultural symbols through which santri learn the meanings associated with membership in the pesantren community. Communication therefore operates simultaneously at verbal, behavioral, relational, and symbolic levels.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that learning communication at Pesantren Alkhairaat Ambon is a cultural, relational, and participatory process. It transmits knowledge while simultaneously constructing meanings, internalizing values, and shaping santri identity. The Triangular Learning Communication Model provides an analytical representation of this process by connecting teacher–student interaction with peer communication, family involvement, institutional norms, and everyday learning practices. The principal contribution of the study is therefore the identification of learning communication as a mechanism through which pesantren culture is continuously reproduced and through which santri develop their identities as learners, community members, autonomous individuals, and socially responsible persons.

D. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that learning communication at Pesantren Alkhairaat Ambon extends beyond conventional teacher–student interaction and involves multiple interconnected forms, including teacher–student communication, peer communication, independent learning, peer tutoring, group learning, and parent–pesantren communication. These patterns demonstrate that learning in pesantren is a collective and culturally embedded process.

The Triangular Learning Communication Model, involving teachers, santri, and parents as the main actors, highlights the importance of collaboration within the broader educational ecosystem, supported by the pesantren institution, peer tutors, media, school committees, and government. From a cultural communication perspective, these interactions function not only to transmit knowledge but also to communicate and internalize values such as independence, responsibility, respect, cooperation, and social awareness. Through continuous interaction and habituation, these values contribute to the construction of santri identity. Thus, learning communication at Pesantren Alkhairaat Ambon can be understood as a cultural process through which knowledge, meaning, values, and identity are simultaneously transmitted and constructed.

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