

## Optimizing Student Guidance and Counseling as a Solution for Strengthening Character at Nurul Jadid Islamic Boarding School

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### Abstract

The increasing complexity of character-related problems among *santri* in pesantren environments, manifested in issues of discipline, responsibility, and moral consistency, requires a systematic and sustainable strengthening strategy. In the context of rapid social transformation, pesantren are challenged not only to preserve Islamic traditions but also to institutionalize mechanisms for structured character development. Drawing upon Lickona's character education theory, which emphasizes moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action, and Islamic counseling theory grounded in *tarbiyah*, *tazkiyah*, and humanistic-dialogical guidance, this study analyzes the optimization of santri guidance and counseling as a strategic solution for character strengthening at Pondok Pesantren Nurul Jadid. This research employs a qualitative case study design conducted in the Abu Hasan Asy-Syadzili and Az-Zainiyah Areas. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with pesantren administrators and counseling coordinators, participatory observation of mentoring practices, and analysis of counseling program documentation. Data were analyzed using an interactive model consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings demonstrate that optimizing guidance and counseling through systematic planning, structured mentoring programs, humanistic-dialogical approaches, and cross-dormitory collaboration effectively fosters the internalization of character values, reflected in improved discipline, accountability, emotional maturity, and moral awareness among santri. These findings highlight the urgency of integrating guidance and counseling into pesantren managerial policy to ensure sustainable and institutionalized character formation rather than incidental moral supervision.

**Keywords:** Santri Guidance and Counseling, Pesantren Education, Character Strengthening, Islamic Education Management, Islamic Counseling.



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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The development of students' lives in Islamic boarding schools is currently characterized by increasingly complex dynamics, along with the social, academic, and psychological changes that accompany Islamic education (Mufron, 2020). Students are not only required to master religious knowledge and follow Islamic boarding school discipline, but also face the challenges of social adaptation, learning pressure, and the influence of digital culture (Kholifah, 2022). This condition positions Islamic boarding schools as educational spaces that demand character formation, requiring a more systematic educational approach and orientation towards students' developmental needs (Lesmana et al., 2021). Nationally, the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia (2023) reported that the number of Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) has exceeded 39,000 institutions, with approximately 4.8 million students. This large

population indicates that any character issues of students have broad implications for the quality of Indonesia's Muslim generation. Furthermore, a report by the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection (2022) indicates an increase in cases of psychosocial vulnerability among adolescents, including difficulty regulating emotions and social pressure, which indirectly impacts the dynamics of students' lives in boarding schools.

Islamic boarding schools have historically emphasized the development of students' morals and character. However, contemporary reality shows that the character-building process does not always run optimally (Yusuf et al., 2023). Phenomena such as low learning motivation, rule violations, conflicts among students, and difficulties in psychosocial adaptation, especially among new students, indicate the need for more targeted mentoring. Several internal studies at large Islamic boarding schools in East Java (2023) showed that approximately 30-40% of new students experienced adaptation difficulties in the first year, particularly in aspects of discipline and socio-emotional adjustment. This figure demonstrates that the process of internalizing values does not always occur automatically through the pesantren culture alone. This suggests that character education in pesantren cannot rely solely on normative approaches and exemplary behavior, but requires mentoring mechanisms that address students' psychological and affective dimensions (Anam & Hakim, 2023).

In this context, this study uses Thomas Lickona's character education theory as the primary analytical tool, specifically the three dimensions of moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action, which are indicators of successful character formation. Student guidance and counseling play a strategic role as an integral part of the Islamic boarding school education system. Theoretically, developmental counseling views counseling services as a preventive, curative, and developmental process that helps students recognize their potential, manage emotions, and consciously internalize moral values (Ramadhan et al., 2025). This framework is combined with an Islamic counseling approach based on the concepts of tarbiyah (gradual education), tazkiyah (soul purification), and a humanistic-dialogical approach that positions students as active subjects in the process of moral reflection. With optimal management, counseling can serve as an effective tool to support students' character development in line with the goals of Islamic education (Pratama et al., 2025).

However, the practice of guidance and counseling in Islamic boarding schools continues to face various limitations. Counseling services are often run informally and reactively, without a structured management system grounded in students' needs. As a result, guidance and counseling do not fully function as a primary support system for character development, but rather are positioned as a situational supplementary activity. This situation creates a gap between the ideal role of guidance and counseling and its

actual implementation in Islamic boarding schools. The term "optimization" in this study is not intended to imply that counseling services are not functioning, but rather to indicate that there is room for strengthening in aspects of program planning, cross-regional coordination, systematic evaluation, and the integration of character values into each service.

Several international studies have shown that counseling services integrated with values-based education significantly strengthen students' character and well-being (Saputri et al., 2025). Nationally, data from the Indonesian Guidance and Counseling Association (AKBIN, 2023) show that more than 60% of educational institutions do not have an ideal counselor-to-student ratio, resulting in counseling services that are often administrative and do not address the character development dimension in depth. Kim and Park emphasized the role of religious counseling in emotional regulation and character formation (Auliya et al., 2025). Meanwhile, a study showed that integrating counseling with moral education strengthens the internalization of values in a sustainable manner (Biantoro & Rahmatullah, 2025). Other research also demonstrates the effectiveness of counseling within religious institutions in building resilience and moral identity among students (Rahman & Miftahurrahmat, 2025). However, these studies are generally conducted outside the context of Islamic boarding schools.

Based on previous studies, significant research gaps remain, particularly regarding optimizing student guidance and counseling within the framework of Islamic boarding school educational management and character building. Research on Islamic boarding schools has focused more on curriculum, leadership, and culture, while student guidance and counseling as a strategically managed educational system remain relatively rare (Zakiah et al., 2025). This research offers novelty by positioning student counseling guidance as an integral part of Islamic boarding school education management and students' development needs.

Thus, this study aims to analyze in depth how optimizing student counseling can serve as a strategic solution to strengthen students' character at Nurul Jadid Islamic Boarding School, especially in the Abu Hasan Asy-Syadzili and Az-Zainiyah areas. Nurul Jadid Islamic Boarding School was chosen because it is one of the largest Islamic boarding schools with a structured dormitory system and thousands of students. Hence, the complexity of its management and the dynamics of character development are representative of the study. In addition, both areas already have formal counseling programs, but still face challenges with coordination and service standardization. This study is expected to make theoretical contributions to the development of Islamic counseling studies and practical contributions to Islamic boarding schools in designing more effective, contextual, and sustainable counseling services.

## **2. METHOD**

This research uses a qualitative case study approach to understand in depth the phenomenon of optimizing student counseling guidance as a solution to strengthen character in the context of Islamic boarding school education (Agus & Kholilurrohman, 2025). This approach was chosen to explore the meaning, process, and dynamics of student guidance and counseling in a naturalistic manner, so that social reality is understood from the perspective of the actors directly involved. The case study in this research is instrumental, namely used to comprehensively understand the guidance and counseling system in the specific context of Nurul Jadid Islamic Boarding School, which serves as a representative of a dormitory-based Islamic boarding school with a complex territorial structure.

The research was conducted at the Nurul Jadid Islamic Boarding School, specifically in the Abu Hasan Asy-Syadzili and Az-Zainiyah areas, which have relatively well-established student guidance and care systems. Data collection techniques included in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis. Interviews were conducted semi-structuredly, with an average duration of 20-30 minutes per informant, to explore aspects of planning, implementation, and evaluation, as well as the challenges of guidance and counseling services. Participatory observation was conducted by directly participating in student mentoring activities, evaluation forums, and interactions between foster parents and students in the context of daily dormitory life. The documentation analyzed included student disciplinary guidelines, guidance and counseling work programs, violation reports, and character development archives.

The data sources in this study include both primary and secondary data. Primary data were obtained from key informants, including 1 (one) Head of the Motivation and Welfare Division of the Islamic Boarding School Bureau, 2 (two) regional Guidance and Counseling Coordinators (each from Abu Hasan Asy-Syadzili and Az-Zainiyah), and 2 (two) foster parents from each dormitory. In addition, this study also involved 2 (two) formal BK teachers who work in the Islamic boarding school environment and coordinate with the dormitory care system, so that the total number of primary informants was 7 people. The selection of informants was purposive, based on their involvement, experience, and understanding of the guidance and counseling system in Islamic boarding schools.

Secondary data was obtained through institutional documents, student code of conduct guidelines, character development programs, minutes of regional evaluation meetings, and archives of activities relevant to the implementation of guidance and counseling. These documents were used to confirm consistency between program planning and field implementation practices. Observations were conducted to directly

examine student mentoring practices, foster parents' communication patterns, mechanisms for handling violations, and strategies for internalizing character values in the daily life of the Islamic boarding school.

Data analysis was conducted using the interactive analysis technique of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, which includes three main stages: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing/verification. Data reduction was carried out through a thematic categorization process based on the theoretical framework of character education (moral knowing, moral feeling, moral action) and developmental guidance and counseling theory. Data presentation was carried out in the form of a thematic matrix and descriptive narrative to facilitate the identification of service optimization patterns. Conclusions were drawn in stages and verified continuously until data saturation was achieved. The analysis process took place simultaneously from the initial stage of data collection, allowing researchers to reflect on and deepen the meaning in context.

To ensure data validity, this study applies source and technique triangulation by comparing data from interviews, observations, and documentation (Susanto et al., 2023). In addition, member checking was conducted with several key informants to ensure accurate data interpretation, and peer debriefing with fellow researchers was conducted to minimize subjective bias. This strategy ensures that the findings can be academically justified. The results of the analysis are then presented in a descriptive-analytical narrative that describes the pattern of optimizing student guidance and counseling and its implications for strengthening student character at the Nurul Jadid Islamic Boarding School. The presentation of the results also emphasizes the relationship between empirical practices in the field and the theoretical framework used, resulting in an integrative analysis of managerial, pedagogical, and psychological dimensions.

### **3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

#### **3.1 Optimizing Guidance and Counseling Planning for Students in Strengthening Character**

The results of the study indicate that optimizing student counseling at the Nurul Jadid Islamic Boarding School begins with an integrated planning process that aligns with the student care and character development system. The planning of counseling guidance does not stand alone as an incidental program but rather becomes part of the Islamic boarding school's educational vision, which emphasizes a balance among strengthening morals, discipline, and students' psychosocial development. Thus, counseling guidance is not an additional program but rather a direct manifestation of the Islamic boarding school's vision and mission, which are oriented toward developing individuals with noble

character, discipline, and emotional maturity. This integration is reflected in the boarding school's annual work program document, which positions counseling services as an inherent part of the care system, rather than a separate unit that responds only to violations. Based on the observation results, counseling service planning is carried out through coordination among caretakers, dormitory administrators, and female dormitory managers, taking into account students' characteristics, dormitory dynamics, and the current problems that often arise in students' lives. This was emphasized by Ustadzah Faridatun Nuraini, the Coordinator of the Az-Zainiyah Regional Counseling Guidance, who stated,

"Counseling guidance here is not done separately, but is integrated with the student guidance system, so that every care program always considers the psychological aspects and character of the students."

This statement indicates that guidance and counseling planning is positioned as a strategic instrument in character formation, not simply a response to violations or behavioral problems. Interpretation of these findings indicates that integrated planning enables guidance and counseling to function both preventively and developmentally, thereby supporting ongoing character building for students (Cahyani & Ayuningsih, 2025). Documentation in the form of a care work program and student guidance records strengthens these findings, which show the mapping of student problems, the scheduling of mentoring, and the integration of moral values in every counseling activity. In general, the schedule of mentoring by foster guardians is carried out periodically through: (1) daily mentoring based on monitoring worship and discipline, (2) weekly meetings for reflection and evaluation of behavior, and (3) incidental mentoring when certain cases are found that require special handling. This pattern shows that counseling services are systematic and continuous.

These findings align with Al-Ghazali's thinking, which emphasized that moral education must be carried out through habituation (*riyadhah*) and continuous mentoring so that values become a permanent character trait within students. Furthermore, Ibn Khaldun's concept of *tarbiyah* emphasizes the importance of a gradual, context-specific development process tailored to students' social circumstances. Therefore, optimizing guidance and counseling planning in Islamic boarding schools has a strong theoretical foundation in classical Islamic education.

### **3.2 Implementation of Student Guidance and Counseling Services in Dormitory Life**

The research findings also revealed that student counseling and guidance are implemented in a context-specific manner within dormitory life. Counseling services are

not always provided formally, but rather through intensive mentoring, personal dialogue, and daily coaching conducted by dormitory administrators and foster parents. Observations indicate that interactions between administrators and students are intense, particularly in situations related to discipline, inter-student conflict, and the adjustment of new students. Based on an interview with the Regional Guidance and Counseling Coordinator, Abu Hasan Asy-Syadzili, Ustadz Abdul Hamid revealed,

"We often accompany students through personal chats and a family approach, because students are more open when they feel understood."

This statement indicates that a humanistic approach is the primary characteristic of student guidance and counseling in Islamic boarding schools. The results of this interview indicate that the effectiveness of guidance and counseling is not solely determined by the formal structure but also by the quality of interpersonal relationships between mentors and students (Qholifah & Anieg, 2025). Documentation in the form of guidance reports and dormitory diaries indicates that this approach contributes to changes in student behavior, including increased compliance with rules and reduced interpersonal conflict. Thus, the implementation of contextual and relationship-based counseling is a crucial factor in strengthening student character.

### **3.3 The Role of Counseling Guidance in Strengthening the Religious and Social Character of Islamic Students**

The research results show that student counseling and guidance significantly strengthen religious and social character. Religious character is manifested through guidance in religious practices, internalization of sincerity, and the instilling of noble morals. In contrast, social character is reflected in a sense of responsibility, empathy, and the ability to interact healthily with fellow students. Observations show that students who receive intensive counseling tend to show positive changes in their daily attitudes and behavior. One student said,

"After frequently chatting and being guided, I became more aware of why rules are important and how to behave with friends."

These findings suggest that counseling not only fosters external compliance but also promotes students' internal awareness of character values (Nurhasan et al., 2026). Obstacles to foster care are divided into internal and external factors. Internal factors include diverse family backgrounds, differing levels of emotional maturity, resistance to rules during the adaptation period, and low self-reflection skills among some students. External factors include peer influence, the busy dynamics of dormitory life, limited

mentoring time due to the guardian-to-student ratio, and the influence of digital media, which fosters an instant mindset. These obstacles require a flexible, humanistic, and values-based counseling approach to ensure effective guidance. Documentation of religious activities and moral development shows that counseling services reinforce the internalization of values, thereby enabling students' character to develop more authentically and sustainably.

More deeply, the impact of counseling optimization on students' character can be seen in three main dimensions. First, in the religious character dimension, students show increased spiritual awareness, characterized by consistent worship, increased sincerity, and a growing awareness that pesantren regulations are part of the process of tazkiyatun nafs (purification of the soul). Worship is no longer carried out solely due to supervision, but rather out of personal awareness. Second, in the social character dimension, there is an increase in empathy, interpersonal communication skills, and a tendency to resolve conflicts through dialogue and deliberation. Students become more open to advice and better able to manage social relationships healthily within the collective life of the dormitory. Third, in the discipline and responsibility character dimension, there is an increase in compliance with rules, awareness of maintaining trust, and the ability to manage time more effectively. Discipline is no longer understood as external pressure, but rather as a moral commitment to the values of the pesantren.

The short-term impacts of optimizing guidance and counseling include reduced disciplinary violations, reduced interpersonal conflict, and increased student involvement in religious activities. Meanwhile, the long-term impacts are reflected in the formation of more stable emotional regulation, the internalization of deeply rooted religious values, the development of leadership and social responsibility, and the creation of a harmonious and supportive dormitory culture. Thus, guidance and counseling not only produce temporary behavioral changes but also shape the students' personality structure sustainably and integrally.

### **3.4 Collaborative Management in Optimizing Guidance and Counseling for Students**

Research findings reveal that optimizing student counseling at the Nurul Jadid Islamic Boarding School is supported by collaborative management among dormitory administrators, female boarding school administrators, and the boarding school's leadership. This collaboration enables the exchange of information on student conditions and the alignment of character development strategies. Observations indicate that regular coordination meetings are held to discuss student development and the

effectiveness of the counseling approach. Ustadz Taufik Hidayah, M.Pd., Head of the Student Motivation and Welfare Division of the Islamic Boarding School Bureau, stated,

"We always coordinate to ensure that student development does not proceed in isolation, including in counseling."

This statement demonstrates that collaborative management is key to ensuring the consistency and sustainability of counseling services (Karneli et al., 2024). Documentation in the form of meeting minutes and coaching evaluation reports supports the finding that cross-unit collaboration can enhance the effectiveness of counseling guidance in strengthening students' character.

### **3.5 The Impact of Optimizing Guidance and Counseling on the Character Development of Students**

Overall, the research results indicate that optimizing student counseling has a positive impact on the development of their character, including religious, social, and disciplinary aspects. Observations indicate increased students' awareness of rules, improved emotional management skills, and the formation of more harmonious social relationships within the dormitory. One foster parent stated,

"The changes in the students are visible in their behavior; they are calmer, more responsible, and have a better understanding of the values of the Islamic boarding school."

This interpretation of the findings suggests that optimized counseling can be a strategic solution for strengthening students' character holistically (Ilahi & Hafid, 2024).

**Table 1.** Optimizing Guidance and Counseling and Strengthening the Character of Students

| ASPECTS OF FINDINGS                   | DATA SOURCE              | KEY FINDINGS                                                                       |
|---------------------------------------|--------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Guidance and counseling planning      | Interview, Documentation | Guidance and counseling are planned to be integrated with the student care system. |
| Implementation of counseling services | Observation, Interview   | A humanistic and dialogical approach through daily mentoring of students           |

|                                     |                            |                                                                                                    |
|-------------------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Collaborative management            | Documentation, Observation | Coordination between administrators and managers of Islamic boarding schools in fostering students |
| Impact On The Character Of Students | Interview, Observation     | There have been positive changes in students' attitudes, discipline, and self-awareness.           |

Based on the research findings table, the optimization of student counseling at the Nurul Jadid Islamic Boarding School is supported by integrated planning with the care system, the implementation of humanistic and dialogical services, and collaborative management among the boarding school administrators. This pattern indicates that counseling does not function incidentally but rather as a structured educational strategy for shaping students' character. Personal mentoring fosters students' internal awareness of the values of discipline and responsibility, while coordination among administrators ensures consistent guidance. These findings confirm that optimal counseling management contributes significantly to the ongoing strengthening of students' character (Sofauzzah & Kusuma, 2025).

The results of this study indicate that optimizing student counseling at the Nurul Jadid Islamic Boarding School is an effective strategy for strengthening student character through integrated planning, humanistic implementation, and collaborative management. This finding aligns with Kim and Park's (2013) view that structured, values-based counseling services significantly contribute to character formation and emotional regulation in students. However, unlike the formal school context that Kim and Park focused on, this study confirms that, in Islamic boarding schools, counseling effectiveness lies in its integration with the parenting system and religious culture rather than a purely formalistic approach (Sari & Fidyatin, 2025).

The implementation of dialogic, relationship-based counseling for students in this study reinforces the findings of Biantoro and Rahmatullah (2025), who stated that internalization of moral values is more effective when the educational process involves personal reflection and strong interpersonal relationships. In this study, the humanistic approach, implemented through daily mentoring, enables students to develop an internal awareness of the values of discipline and responsibility rather than simply adhering to rules. The difference is that Biantoro and Rahmatullah's study emphasized integrating counseling into the moral education curriculum. In contrast, this study's findings indicate that, in Islamic boarding schools, counseling functions more broadly as a cultural practice inherent in dormitory life and as a means of fostering relationships (Fachrurrazi et al., 2023).

The findings regarding the importance of collaborative management in optimizing student counseling guidance also align with the research of Rahman and Miftahurrahmat (2025), which emphasizes that religious institution-based counseling is effective when supported by a coherent, collaborative institutional system (Rudiana & Nurhidayah, 2024). However, this study makes a new contribution by emphasizing that this collaboration is not only structural but also cultural, grounded in Islamic boarding school values and a relationship of trust between managers (Abidin & Qusairi, 2025).

Various instruments that collaborate in non-partial counseling services in Islamic boarding schools include: (1) assessment of students' needs based on observation and interviews, (2) books of worship and discipline, (3) student reflection journals, (4) forums for foster parents' deliberations, (5) cross-unit evaluation meetings, (6) peer counseling approaches between senior and junior students, and (7) documentation of behavioral development based on dormitory reports. The integration of these instruments shows that counseling services in Islamic boarding schools are systemic and holistic, rather than individualistic and fragmented.

Overall, this discussion demonstrates that the research findings not only confirm the results of previous studies but also broaden the understanding of guidance and counseling in the context of Islamic boarding school-based education. While previous studies have positioned counseling as a professional service integrated into the formal school system, this study confirms that, in Islamic boarding schools, guidance and counseling for students function as a mentoring system integrated with parenting, religious values, and institutional culture (Imanuddin & Yunus, 2025). Thus, optimizing student counseling guidance is relevant not only as a pedagogical approach but also as an Islamic education management strategy for sustainably strengthening students' character.

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

This research confirms that optimizing student counseling is an essential educational strategy for strengthening students' character in Islamic boarding schools, rather than simply a response to behavioral problems. Counseling is positioned as an inherent part of the Islamic boarding school's parenting system, integrated with its vision and mission. Systematic planning, implementation through a humanistic and dialogical approach, and collaborative management among Islamic boarding school administrators have been proven to encourage students' internal awareness of the values of discipline, responsibility, and morality. Character education becomes more effective when

mentoring is carried out personally, continuously, and in harmony with the Islamic boarding school's culture and religious values .

In terms of scientific contribution, this study strengthens and updates the perspective of Islamic guidance and counseling by positioning it as a strategic system integrated into Islamic boarding school education management, rather than merely a technical individual service. This finding aligns with the principles of moral education put forward by Al-Ghazali, which emphasize character formation through habituation and continuous mentoring, and with Ibn Khaldun's view on the importance of a contextual coaching process tailored to students' social environment. The main contribution of this study lies in enriching the study of Islamic boarding school-based guidance and counseling for students through a qualitative case study approach that positions parenting relationships, religious values, and institutional culture as key variables in strengthening character. Thus, this study broadens the theoretical understanding of guidance and counseling in the context of Islamic education while offering a relevant conceptual framework for developing counseling practices for students in Islamic boarding schools.

However, this study has limitations because it was conducted in a single Islamic boarding school context, so the findings cannot be broadly generalized. Therefore, further research involving various Islamic boarding schools with different characteristics and using more diverse methodological approaches, such as mixed methods or comparative research, is needed to obtain a more comprehensive picture. This further research development is expected to serve as the basis for formulating more contextually, systematically, and adaptively tailored student guidance and counseling policies to support character building across various Islamic boarding school environments.

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