

## **A STRUGGLE: THE EXPERIENCES AND NEEDS OF THE FIRST YEAR OF NEW SANTRI AT PESANTREN**

*Halimatus Sa'diah<sup>1</sup>, Aisyatin Kamila<sup>2</sup>, Ahmad Syamsul Muarif<sup>3</sup>, Cemara Syifa  
Lidyawangi<sup>4</sup>*

<sup>1,3,4</sup>KH. Mukhtar Syafaat, Blokagung-Banyuwangi, <sup>2</sup>Ibrahimi University,  
Sukorejo-Situbondo

e-mail: [1halimah@iaida.ac.id](mailto:1halimah@iaida.ac.id), [2kamilaisyatin96@gmail.com](mailto:2kamilaisyatin96@gmail.com),  
[3ahmadsyamsulm@iaida.ac.id](mailto:3ahmadsyamsulm@iaida.ac.id), [4syifacemara.017@gmail.com](mailto:4syifacemara.017@gmail.com)

### **Abstract**

The adaptation process is always experienced by new santri. However, some santri have difficulty getting through their first year due to differences in activities from their previous home habits. The focus of this study is to see the description of the experiences and needs of new santri in the first year. Participants are santri who have passed their first year at the Islamic boarding school with a total of 54 santri. Data collection was carried out through face-to-face interviews and Focus Group Discussions (FGD). As a result, there are two main themes in this study. First, related to the experiences of new santri, three most common things experienced by new santri were found, namely: (1) culture shock), (2) homesickness, and (3) social problems of friendship. Second, the results related to the needs of new santri in the first year of adaptation to the Islamic boarding school environment, participants require: (1) attention, (2) guidance by seniors, (3) justice from the Islamic boarding school administrators.

**Keywords:** adaptation, needs of santri, pesantren, santri.

### **Abstrak**

Proses adaptasi pada dasarnya adalah normal dan selalu dilalui santri baru. Namun, terdapat beberapa santri baru yang kesulitan melalui tahun pertamanya karena perbedaan kegiatan yang cukup jauh dari kebiasaan di rumah sebelumnya. Fokus penelitian ini guna melihat gambaran adaptasi yang berupa pengalaman dan kebutuhan santri baru di tahun pertama. Partisipan merupakan santri yang telah melewati tahun pertama di pondok pesantren dengan total partisipan sebanyak 54 santri. Pengumpulan data dilakukan dengan wawancara tatap muka dan *Focus Group Discussion* (FGD) untuk menambah berbagai sudut pandang mengenai pengalaman santri baru. Hasilnya, terdapat dua tema utama dalam penelitian ini. Pertama, terkait pengalaman santri baru ditemukan tiga hal yang paling umum dialami santri baru yaitu: (1) perbedaan budaya (*culture shock*), (2) rindu dengan rumah (*home sick*), dan (3) permasalahan sosial pertemanan. Kedua, hasil terkait kebutuhan santri baru di tahun pertama adaptasi dengan

lingkungan pesantren partisipan membutuhkan: (1) perhatian, (2) pembimbingan oleh senior, (3) keadilan dari pengurus pesantren.

**Kata kunci:** adaptasi santri, kebutuhan santri, pesantren, santri baru

## INTRODUCTION

Pesantren, as educational institutions, offer a holistic learning environment that integrates various aspects, including knowledge, behavior, cooperation, and responsibility (Lutfauziah et al., 2024). This approach equips santri to become well-rounded individuals who are integrated in both faith and knowledge (Syafe'i, 2017). Given the many positive aspects of pesantren many parents view them as a viable educational option for their children. Moreover, in the context of global developments, parents increasingly see pesantren as institutions capable of fostering their children's moral and ethical growth (Muhdi et al., 2023). As a result, there has been a notable increase in parental motivation to send their children to Pesantren, driven by the belief that the experience will positively shape their children's character (Firdaus et al., 2019).

While parental interest in Pesantren is increasing, the perspective from the child's side is quite different. Some children show reluctance to enter Pesantren, often due to the challenges they face in adapting to the new environment (Kaltsas & Gkaintartzi, 2021). These challenges arise because new students must navigate several stages of adaptation, ranging from physical to psychological preparation, as they adjust to the significant changes they encounter (Bukhori & Cikusin, 2023).

The challenges of the adaptation process are normal and commonly experienced by new santri. Santri undergo critical life stages, facing challenges that are more difficult than those in previous development stages. These challenges include living in dormitories away from their parents and learning to manage life problems effectively in a new environment.

New santri must undergo a lengthy adaptation process, and many are unable to complete it successfully. This process includes several phases: the fun phase (honeymoon phase), the feeling of not fitting in (frustration phase), learning to adjust and become a good student (readjustment phase), and finally, fully integrating into the pesantren community (resolution phase) (Bukhori & Cikusin, 2023).

The initial research conducted by the author, which involved brief interviews with the dormitory head and teachers, revealed that several new santri were unable to participate in activities at the pesantren due to the overwhelming number of scheduled events. Additionally, some santri faced challenges as a result of issues that had been imposed by their parents. Furthermore, some new students brought problems from home, such as addiction to gadgets, which affected their adjustment to the pesantren environment.

The first-year experience of students is a unique area of exploration that can provide valuable insights into their needs and help increase their enthusiasm for learning at the Islamic boarding school. This first year often represents a challenging transitional period—physically, emotionally, and spiritually. For many students, it is a significant departure from their previous daily lives, especially for those coming from environments that are unfamiliar with the disciplined, rule-bound lifestyle of an Islamic boarding school. Therefore, the focus of this study is to explore the experiences and needs of new students during this critical transition.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

The adaptation process of new students in the pesantren environment is highly diverse, involving cultural integration and social challenges. New santri go through various stages of adaptation, from initial excitement to eventual

integration into society, influenced by traditional values and contemporary challenges.

### **Adaptation Stages**

The process of adapting to the boarding school environment goes through several stages (Bukhori & Cikusin, 2023), namely:

1. **Preparation for Change:** New students prepare themselves physically and psychologically before entering the boarding school environment.
2. **Honeymoon Phase:** Initial excitement about the new environment is common.
3. **Frustration Phase:** Feelings of homesickness and culture shock often arise.
4. **Re-adjustment:** Students learn to navigate their new environment and meet expectations.
5. **Resolution:** Successful adaptation leads to full integration into the student community.

### **Cultural Integration**

The process of students' adjustment to the pesantren environment often encounters obstacles related to culture (Setiawan et al., 2015), including language barriers. New students often have difficulty with the local dialect, as many pesantren are located in areas with different regional languages or accents. This language barrier can pose challenges to effective communication, academic performance, and social integration within the pesantren. As a result, these students must work extra hard to learn and master the local dialect, which is often necessary to understand classroom instructions, engage in social interactions, and fully participate in pesantren activities (Setiawan et al., 2015). Overcoming this language barrier is critical to their successful adaptation.

### **Social Challenges**

Pesantren implement a variety of rules and support systems to help new santri adjust to a structured and disciplined environment. Ideally, there are guidelines

and mentoring systems, peer support groups, or designated staff members who are responsible for guiding santri through the adaptation process. By providing clear expectations and consistent support, pesantren ensure that new students feel accepted and supported as they adjust to their new cultural and social environment (Setiawan et al., 2015).

New boarding students often face social challenges such as loneliness, difficulty forming friendships, and homesickness, particularly during the initial weeks. Girls, younger students, and international students are more likely to experience these social difficulties during their transition (Hadwen, 2015). New students in boarding schools face social challenges such as separation from parents and familiar surroundings (Pfeiffer et al., 2016).

## **METHOD**

In this study, a qualitative method with a phenomenological approach was employed to achieve the research objectives (Creswell, 2014). The participants were santri who had completed their first year at the pesantren, with a total of 54 santri involved.

To select data sources, the researcher identified participants who met specific criteria: they had completed their first year at the pesantren and were willing to participate in the study.

Data collection was conducted through face-to-face interviews and Focus Group Discussions (FGD), aiming to capture diverse perspectives on the santri' experiences during their first year. The primary focus of the study was to explore the experiences of being a new santri and the specific needs students have when starting at the pesantren.

The qualitative data analysis process involved four main steps: data collection, data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions. To ensure data validity, member checking was implemented (Creswell, 2014).

## RESULTS

The research conducted provides in-depth insights into two main themes derived from the experiences and needs of new students. The first theme, *Experiences of New Santri*, describes some of the challenges faced by students when they first begin life at the pesantren. The second theme, *Needs of New Santri*, focuses on what they require to adjust and feel more comfortable in the pesantren.

### *Experiences of New Santri*

#### **1. Culture Shock**

Many new santri experience culture shock when they first enter Pesantren. This occurs because they have to adapt to a culture that is different from their everyday lives. Differences in lifestyle, daily habits, dress, and even worship practices at Pesantren can be confusing and challenging for newcomers. This culture shock can lead to feelings of surprise, confusion, or even stress, as they adjust to traditions that are very different from what they were accustomed to before.

#### **2. Homesickness**

New santri often feel homesick for their families and homes, which is normal, especially for those who are away from their parents or family for the first time. This homesickness can significantly impact their emotional well-being, leading them to feel lonely or anxious due to the distance from home. It may also affect their motivation to adapt to life at the pesantren, and emotional support is often needed to overcome it.

#### **3. Social Problems**

While at pesantren, new santri must also adapt to a larger social environment, which includes interacting with peers, caregivers, and teachers. Some students find it difficult to communicate or form social relationships with others. These social challenges often involve difficulties in socializing, making friends, or even experiencing minor conflicts due to differences in character and background.

### *Needs of New Santri*

#### **1. Emotional Attention**

According to data processing results, new santri need attention from the pesantren, whether from pengasuh, ustadz, or their peers. This attention is crucial to help them feel accepted and valued in their new environment. Such attention can take various forms, including emotional support, such as listening to their concerns, or academic assistance, such as guiding them through learning activities. Adequate attention will help santri overcome anxiety and feel more secure in the pesantren environment.

#### **2. Guidance and Mentoring**

New santri require more intensive guidance to assist them in the adjustment process. This guidance should cover various aspects, such as the way of life at the pesantren and social adaptation. It is important because new santri may not fully understand the rules of the pesantren or how to interact effectively within that environment.

#### **3. Justice**

The results of this study reveal that a key need for new santri is fair treatment. This fairness involves equal treatment regardless of their background or social status. New santri need to feel that they are treated justly in terms of learning opportunities, access to resources, and other rights at the pesantren. Injustice or discrimination can lead to feelings of discomfort or frustration, which can hinder their adaptation process.

## **DISCUSSION**

This study shows that the first year as a new student presents various challenges. The results identify two main themes: the experiences of new students and their needs. Both themes provide in-depth insights into the experiences and needs faced by new students when entering the pesantren environment.

The study reveals that new santri often experience culture shock, which is a feeling of discomfort when adapting to an environment that is very different from life at home. New students generally face difficulties during the adaptation process, requiring a significant amount of time to adjust to the activities at the pesantren and to integrate with the applicable rules and regulations (Hestyaningsih et al., 2024). It is undeniable that culture shock increases academic stress in pesantren (Arifin, 2023). This culture shock phenomenon can disrupt students' learning processes and social interactions. Santri who experience culture shock often struggle with communication and adapting to new norms in the pesantren (Tsani, 2023).

Based on the results of interviews conducted with 54 santri in Blokagung, Banyuwangi, the researchers identified several factors that contribute to culture shock in new santri. The interviews revealed that the inability to adapt to the pesantren environment, characterized by rules, values, and habits that differ from their previous lives, is one of the main causes. As explained in the study by Hariri (2024), students often struggle with time management due to the tight schedule of activities at the pesantren. The dynamics of self-adjustment in new santri due to adjustments to existing regulations, social interaction with friends as well as language and discipline barriers (Haiffahningrum & Satiningsih, 2022). This presents a challenge for new santri, requiring them to maintain a high level of discipline and learn to develop effective time management skills.

Homesickness is also a common issue experienced by new santri. It can interfere with concentration and daily activities at the pesantren. The environment, which is different from their hometown, makes it easier for students to miss their families. Biasi et al (2018) stated that homesickness is a complex issue that affects an individual's emotional, cognitive, social, and somatic functions. The transition from an old environment to a new one requires an adaptation process, which includes communication adaptation, stress

management, handling change, and cultural integration. This transition can lead to both physical and psychological problems.

One issue that is often highlighted is homesickness (Utami, 2015). Most individuals who relocate are at risk of experiencing homesickness during their first year, which can lead to various types of stress, characterized by anxiety, loneliness, discomfort, and rejection of the new environment, with a tendency to return to their place of origin (Stroebe et al., 2015). Homesick distress as a significant factor affecting students' academic performance and retention, highlighting that feelings of anxiety, loneliness, and discomfort can arise from homesickness, particularly among those experiencing a lack of social acceptance in a new environment (Sun et al., 2016).

New santri often face social problems, such as difficulties in interacting with peers and interpersonal conflicts. The implications of these social problems include the inability to establish positive relationships, which can lead to social isolation and emotional stress (Haiffahningrum & Satiningsih, 2022). The relationship between social problems and adaptation has been discussed in several studies. Research by Tsani (2023) shows that santri who experience social problems tend to have lower levels of adaptation. Additionally, Hestyaningsih et al. (2024) found that support from peers can help reduce the negative impact of social problems on the adaptation process.

New santri at pesantren have specific needs that must be addressed to facilitate their adjustment. These needs include emotional support, guidance, and fair treatment, which are essential for their successful integration into the pesantren environment. Meeting these needs has important implications for the management of pesantren, especially in creating a more supportive and inclusive atmosphere for new santri.

Research by Zahro (2024) emphasizes that positive early experiences can improve the adaptation process in pesantren. This quantitative study shows that good social support influences 32.1% of students' adjustment. Additionally,

research on emotional attention carried out by pesantren administrators and peers helps new santri feel accepted (Yulistia et al., 2024). The role of mentors in explaining the rules and fostering interactions in the pesantren environment further supports santri' sense of worth and acceptance, which is vital for their adaptation (Ringganis & Darmayanti, 2023; Yulistia et al., 2024).

The need for emotional and academic attention from caregivers and mentors is crucial for the adjustment process. Fair treatment received by new santri also fosters acceptance and self-confidence, which ultimately increases their involvement in the pesantren (Ridho, 2024). Fair treatment, free from bias regarding the santri' backgrounds, also helps them feel accepted, appreciated, and trusted (Luqman, 2022). Thus, good treatment by caregivers and administrators is a vital factor in ensuring the welfare of new students in the pesantren.

## CONCLUSSION

The findings of this study indicate that the experiences and needs of new santri play a significant role in their ability to adjust to life in the pesantren. These experiences are often marked by emotional and social challenges, such as culture shock, homesickness, and social difficulties. At the same time, their primary needs include emotional attention, guidance, mentoring, and fair treatment/justice, all of which are essential for helping them feel accepted and empowered to thrive in the pesantren environment.

## REFERENCE

- Arifin, S. (2023). Hubungan Culture Shock Dengan Tingkat Stress Pada Santri Baru Di Pondok Al-Amin Preduan. *PROFESSIONAL HEALTH JOURNAL*, 5(1), 31–40. <https://doi.org/10.54832/phj.v5i1.428>
- Biasi, V., Mallia, L., Russo, P., Menozzi, F., Cerutti, R., & Violani, C. (2018). Homesickness Experience, Distress and Sleep Quality of First-Year University Students Dealing with Academic Environment. *Journal of Educational and Social Research*, 8(1), 9–17. <https://doi.org/10.2478/jesr-2018-0001>

- Bukhori, I., & Cikusin, Y. (2023). Adaptation of Santri in the Islamic Religious Educational Culture. *Journal Education Multicultural of Islamic Society*, 3(1), 19–41. <https://doi.org/10.33474/jemois.v3i1.20004>
- Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*. SAGE.
- Firdaus, Z., Amin, & Maspan. (2019). Parents' Motivation in Entering Their Children to Islamic Boarding School. *Jurnal At-Tarbiyat: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam*, 5(1). <https://doi.org/10.37758/jat.v5i1.388>
- Hadwen, K. M. (2015). *Leaving home: Investigating transitioning challenges faced by boarding students and their families*.
- Haiffahningrum, D. N., & Satiningsih, S. (2022). Pengalaman Penyesuaian Diri Bagi Santri Baru di Lingkungan Pesantren X: Studi Fenomenologi. *Character Jurnal Penelitian Psikologi*, 9(7), 1–13. <https://doi.org/10.26740/cjpp.v9i7.47819>
- Hariri, M., Listiana, H., Zuhud, M., & Ihsan, M. (2024). Tantangan Santri Baru Dalam Menyikapi Perbedaan Jadwal Sekolah dan Pondok Pesantren di Pamekasan. *AHSANA MEDIA: Jurnal Pemikiran, Pendidikan Dan Penelitian Ke-Islaman*, 10(2), 163–174. <https://doi.org/10.31102/ahsanamedia.10.2.2024.163-174>
- Hestyaningsih, L., Roswanto, B., Namina, A. V., & Athiyallah, A. (2024). Adaptasi Kehidupan Santri Baru di Pondok Pesantren (Literatur Review). *Madaniyah*, 14(1), Article 1. <https://doi.org/10.58410/madaniyah.v14i1.834>
- Kaltsas, E. P., & Gkaintartzi, A. (2021). Boarding Schools. *Annals of Language and Literature*, 5(1), 8–11. <https://doi.org/10.22259/2637-5869.0501002>
- Luqman, K. (2022). Teori Hirarki Kebutuhan dan Santri Yang Beraktualisasi di Pondok Pesantren Darul Ulum Gersempal Omben Sampang. *Bayan Lin-Naas: Jurnal Dakwah Islam*, 5(1), Article 1. <https://doi.org/10.28944/bayanlin-naas.v5i1.533>
- Lutfauziah, A., Al-Muhdhar, M. H. I., Suhadi, & Rohman, F. (2024). Does Environmental Education Curriculum Affect Student's Environmental Culture in Islamic Boarding School. *Revista de Gestão Social e Ambiental*, 18(5), e05621–e05621. <https://doi.org/10.24857/rgsa.v18n5-079>
- Muhdi, A., Sudadi, S., Antoni, A., Daelami, M. S., & Judijanto, L. (2023). The Urgency of Islamic Boarding Schools in the Contemporary Era. *Al-Hijr: Journal of Adulearn World*, 2(3), 233–255. <https://doi.org/10.55849/alhijr.v2i3.575>
- Pfeiffer, J. P., Pinguart, M., & Krick, K. (2016). Social Relationships, Prosocial Behaviour, and Perceived Social Support in Students From Boarding

- Schools. *Canadian Journal of School Psychology*, 31(4), 279–289.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0829573516630303>
- Ridho, A. (2024). Predicting Santri Engagement by Attachment to Caregiver. *Jurnal Psikogenesis*, 12(1), Article 1. <https://doi.org/10.24854/jps.v12i1.4439>
- Ringganis, K., & Darmayanti, K. K. H. (2023). I am Closer to Friends, I Feel Worthy: Santri's Peer-Attachment and Self-Esteem. *Jurnal Psikologi Islam Dan Budaya*, 6(1), Article 1. <https://doi.org/10.15575/jpib.v6i1.23553>
- Setiawan, Y., Kosasih, A., & Komariah, S. (2015). Pola Adaptasi Sosial Budaya Kehidupan Santri Pondok Pesantren Nurul Barokah. *SOSIETAS*, 5(1). <https://doi.org/10.17509/sosietas.v5i1.1519>
- Stroebe, M., Schut, H., & Nauta, M. (2015). Homesickness: A Systematic Review of the Scientific Literature. *Review of General Psychology*, 19(2), 157–171. <https://doi.org/10.1037/gpr0000037>
- Sun, J., Hagedorn, L. S., & Zhang, Y. (Leaf). (2016). Homesickness at College: Its Impact on Academic Performance and Retention. *Journal of College Student Development*, 57(8), 943–957.
- Syafe'i, I. (2017). Pondok Pesantren: Lembaga Pendidikan Pembentukan Karakter. *Al-Tadzkiyyah: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam*, 8(1), 61. <https://doi.org/10.24042/atjpi.v8i1.2097>
- Tsani, I. T. (2023). *Adaptasi Santri Baru terhadap Culture Shock di Pondok Pesantren At-Taujiah Al-Islamy 02* [Universitas Gadjah Mada]. <https://etd.repository.ugm.ac.id/penelitian/detail/226620>
- Utami, L. S. S. (2015). Teori-Teori Adaptasi Antar Budaya. *Jurnal Komunikasi*, 7(2), Article 2. <https://doi.org/10.24912/jk.v7i2.17>
- Yulistia, D., Elviana, E., & Hafizah, H. (2024). Peran Pembina Asrama dalam Mengembangkan Motivasi Siswa Asrama Putera MA Sumatera Thawalib Parabek. *ANWARUL*, 4(1), 258–263. <https://doi.org/10.58578/anwarul.v4i1.2487>
- Zahro, U. A. (2024). Pengaruh Dukungan Sosial Terhadap Penyesuaian Diri Santri Kelas 7 Di Smp Islam Excellent as Syafi'ah Nganjuk. *Shine: Jurnal Bimbingan Dan Konseling*, 4(2), Article 2. <https://doi.org/10.36379/shine.v4i2.607>