

Islamic Guidance and Counseling Practices for Strengthening Student Adjustment: A Multisite Study in Urban Modern Pesantren of Medan

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ABSTRACT

Purpose – This study aims to examine in depth the application of Islamic counseling services in strengthening students' self-adjustment at three Islamic senior high schools (madrasah aliyah) affiliated with modern pesantren in Medan City—MA Darul Hikmah, MA Al-Kausar Al-Akbar, and MA Ta'dib Al-Syakirin. The research focus is directed toward addressing the empirical gap concerning the effectiveness of Islamic counseling services within an urban and boarding school-based context.

Design/methods/approach – Employing a qualitative approach with a multisite study design, data were collected through participatory observation, in-depth interviews, and document analysis. Informants consisted of school principals, counseling teachers, students, and parents. Data analysis was conducted thematically and across sites using the Miles, Huberman, and Saldana model.

Findings – Islamic counseling services play a strategic role in strengthening students' self-adjustment across three dimensions: social, emotional, and spiritual. The three pesantren adopt different approaches—spiritual-integrative, dialogical-reflective, and assertive-symbolic—yet share aligned objectives. The types of services include orientation, information, individual/group counseling, spiritual reinforcement, as well as evaluation and referral. Success is highly influenced by students' personal readiness and institutional support. However, the effectiveness of these services has not yet been measured using quantitative evaluative instruments, resulting in outcome assessments that remain descriptive.

Research implications – Practical implications include the need to formalize the structure of counseling services in pesantren, provide data-driven training for counseling teachers, strengthen the role of musyrif as informal mentors, and promote intensive collaboration with parents. This model is relevant for implementation in similar Islamic educational institutions to holistically strengthen students' character.

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1. Introduction

Pesantren education in Indonesia holds a strategic role within the national education system, deeply rooted in Islamic values and local traditions. According to Law of the Republic of Indonesia Number 20 of 2003 on the National Education System, pesantren is recognized as a formal religious educational institution (Article 30, Clause 4), equivalent to the school and madrasah education pathways (Articles 17 and 18). In this context, madrasahs function as educational institutions that integrate general and religious curricula, while pesantren offers an educational approach based on religious and traditional values (Daulay, 2001).



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With the advancement of science and technology, pesantren no longer operate exclusively within a traditional framework. Most pesantren in Indonesia, particularly in urban areas, have undergone significant transformation towards a more modern and integrative educational system (Qomar, 2007). This transformation includes not only curriculum renewal, but also the reformulation of caregiving models, the use of foreign languages, and the integration of classical Islamic values with contemporary learning strategies.

Medan City is one of the key regions where modern Islamic education has flourished, marked by the presence of Madrasah Aliyah (MA) affiliated with modern pesantren. MA of Pondok Pesantren Modern Darul Hikmah (PPMDH), MA of Pondok Pesantren Modern Al-Kausar Al-Akbar (PPMKA), and MA of Pondok Pesantren Modern Ta'dib Al-Syakirin (PPMTS) represent concrete examples of educational institutions that combine the national curriculum with the distinctive pesantren system (Grandtour MA PPMDH, 2020; Grandtour MA PPMKA, 2020; Grandtour MA PPMTS, 2020). These three institutions implement a boarding system, reinforce religious subjects such as Tafsir, Hadith, Fiqh, and Tawhid, and incorporate Arabic and English in the teaching-learning process, reflecting an integrative effort between Islamic values and global demands.

However, behind this successful integration lies a complex psychosocial dynamic in students' lives, particularly those who come from culturally and socially diverse family or community backgrounds. Adaptation to a new environment characterized by collectivism, high discipline, and intensive religious content may give rise to psychological challenges such as feelings of loneliness, alienation, academic pressure, and difficulty in forming social relationships (Yahya, 2015). These obstacles not only affect students' emotional development but also have an impact on academic and spiritual aspects overall (Depdiknas RI, 2003; Madjid, 1997).

In this context, Islamic counseling services serve as a crucial instrument in reinforcing students' adjustment to pesantren life. Counseling approaches based on Islamic values such as *tauhid*, *akhlakul karimah*, and *tawakkal* are believed to provide a spiritual and moral foundation for resolving students' psychological problems (Hamdani, 2001; Luddin, 2012). Counseling is understood not merely as a technical relationship between counselor and client, but as an integrative developmental process that touches on spiritual, emotional, and social dimensions in the students' everyday lives.

A number of previous studies have highlighted the practice and concept of Islamic counseling within the context of Islamic education, although their focuses remain diverse. A study at MAN 3 Medan indicated that the implementation of the principle of tauhid in counseling services has been consistently carried out by counseling teachers, albeit not yet as a formal part of institutional programming. Evaluations were conducted periodically to adjust to the evolving needs of the students (Panjaitan, 2019).

Meanwhile, research at MAN 2 Model Medan found that Islamic counseling was applied in the form of individual counseling, with counselors acting as facilitators in resolving students' problems. Interestingly, this approach emerged as a synthesis of conventional and Islamic methods, reflecting methodological flexibility in field practice (Situmorang, 2016).

A doctoral dissertation at the Indonesia University of Education emphasized the importance of understanding the concept of the ideal human (*insan kamil*) in constructing a Qur'anic Islamic Counseling framework. This approach positions the spiritual aspect as the existential foundation in the counseling process (Sutoyo, 2005).

Similarly, research on the role of kiai in counseling services at three pesantren in Yogyakarta asserted that the counseling process occurs not only formally but also informally through personal and cultural social interactions within the pesantren environment (Lubis, 2003).

These findings indicate that Islamic counseling has been practiced in various forms across Islamic educational institutions. However, most studies remain conceptual or limited to descriptive

implementation without offering an in-depth analysis of how counseling services influence students' self-adjustment processes—particularly within the context of modern urban pesantren. This indicates a continued opening for more focused and in-depth research.

Based on the review of prior literature, it appears that studies on Islamic counseling in pesantren tend to emphasize normative and procedural aspects, such as the implementation of counseling principles, conceptual framework development, or the informal role of kiai in the counseling process (Lubis, 2003; Panjaitan, 2019; Situmorang, 2016; Sutoyo, 2005). However, there remains a gap in exploring how the actual application of counseling services concretely contributes to students' self-adjustment, especially within modern pesantren in urban settings like Medan City. In this regard, the empirical gap and the divide between theoretical knowledge and field practice remain prominent.

This study seeks to bridge these two types of gaps through an exploration of the forms of services, implementation barriers, and the impact of Islamic counseling services on students' social, emotional, and spiritual adjustment processes.

This research is designed to address the following questions:

- a. How is Islamic counseling implemented at MA of Pondok Pesantren Modern Darul Hikmah, Al-Kausar Al-Akbar, and Ta'dib Al-Syakirin in Medan City?
- b. What are the forms of self-adjustment development provided to students at the three madrasah aliyah?
- c. What types of services are delivered by counseling teachers to reinforce students' self-adjustment?
- d. What are the supporting and inhibiting factors in reinforcing students' self-adjustment in modern pesantren-based madrasah aliyah across Medan City?

This study aims to describe and analyze the implementation of counseling services in reinforcing students' self-adjustment at three madrasah aliyah under the auspices of modern pesantren in Medan City, namely MA PPM DH, MA PPM KA, and MA PPM TS. The research is directed toward uncovering in depth the service processes provided by counseling teachers, along with the strategies and approaches used in addressing student adjustment issues.

Specifically, this study also aims to comprehensively understand how the process of self-adjustment development is shaped through Islamic counseling interventions across social, emotional, and spiritual dimensions. Additionally, it examines the types of services implemented and the internal and external factors that influence the effectiveness of such services.

Theoretically, the results of this research are expected to contribute to the development of a conceptual framework for Islamic counseling services oriented toward self-adjustment development. This contribution is significant in expanding the academic literature on the integration of psychological approaches and Islamic values within the context of Islamic educational institutions.

Practically, this research holds substantial potential benefits for stakeholders in Islamic education. For school principals, the findings can serve as a reference in formulating adaptive and contextual counseling policies. For counseling teachers, the results may offer a foundation for developing more responsive service approaches to meet students' needs. For the teaching faculty at large, this research reinforces the importance of collaboration between academic and character-building dimensions. Lastly, for students, understanding the strategic role of Islamic counseling is expected to enhance awareness and active participation in the process of character development and spiritual resilience.

Thus, this study not only addresses empirical needs in the field but also provides conceptual and applicative contributions to the development of Islamic counseling practices aligned with the demands of modern education and Islamic values.

2. Theoretical Review

Self-adjustment is a crucial process in boarding-based education systems such as modern pesantren, particularly in urban areas like Medan City. Urban environments bring complex psychosocial dynamics, including tendencies toward individualism, competitive academic pressure, and cross-cultural communication challenges. Within this context, students are required to adapt not only to a highly disciplined and religious boarding system, but also to a new social reality that often differs from the cultural backgrounds of their home communities.

Students' self-adjustment encompasses three principal dimensions: social, emotional, and spiritual adjustment. Social adjustment refers to the ability to build positive interpersonal relationships with fellow students, teachers, and the surrounding environment. Emotional adjustment involves the capacity to manage internal pressures, anxiety, or internal conflicts arising from academic demands and communal living. Meanwhile, spiritual adjustment pertains to the depth of religiosity and the ability to integrate Islamic values into everyday life (Yahya, 2015).

To support this adjustment process, Islamic counseling becomes a strategic approach. This approach not only incorporates conventional counseling techniques but also emphasizes deep ruhaniyah (spiritual) mentoring. Islamic counseling is founded on the paradigm of nurturing the insan kamil—the complete human being who balances intellectual, emotional, and spiritual aspects. Values such as tauhid, patience (sabr), gratitude (shukr), trust in God (tawakkal), and noble character (akhlakul karimah) constitute the core foundation of this developmental process (Sutoyo, 2005).

In the pesantren context, Islamic counseling services are not always formally structured. It has been noted that kiai or ustaz often play informal roles as spiritual mentors in daily interactions, which frequently have a greater impact than formal institutional counseling relationships. This highlights the importance of cultural and relational dimensions in the practice of Islamic counseling (Lubis, 2003).

Several empirical studies also affirm the relevance of this approach. Counseling teachers at MAN 3 Medan have consistently applied the principles of Islamic counseling, although these have not yet been systematically integrated into institutional programs (Panjaitan, 2019). At MAN 2 Model Medan, counseling approaches were found to be flexible, combining Western individual methods with Islamic values (Situmorang, 2016). Both studies demonstrate that Islamic counseling in practice tends to be adaptive rather than purely normative, and is capable of responding to the psychosocial needs of students contextually.

This theoretical framework is further reinforced by the social constructivist approach, which views psychosocial reality as shaped through social interaction and the individual's construction of meaning within specific symbolic and cultural environments. Within this framework, students form meanings of their life experiences through Islamic values, acquired reflectively through the counseling process. Islamic counseling thus functions as an educational and transformative space that facilitates the internalization of values and the reinforcement of religious meaning in response to life's challenges.

Based on this framework, Islamic counseling services have three main functions:

- a. Preventive: Preventing the emergence of psychological crises through character development and early spiritual reinforcement.
- b. Curative: Providing solutions to the emotional and social problems students face in daily life.
- c. Transformative: Shaping students' character and religious identity through the experiential learning of Islamic values in real-life situations.

This framework serves as the analytical basis of the present study, aimed at assessing how Islamic counseling services are implemented in the three madrasah aliyah of modern pesantren in Medan City to strengthen students' self-adjustment, with particular attention to the urban context, cultural dynamics, and complex spiritual needs.

3. Research Methodology

3.1. Research Design and Approach

This study employed a qualitative approach with a multisite study design to explore in depth the dynamics of Islamic counseling services in strengthening students' self-adjustment within the context of urban modern pesantren. This design was selected as it allows for the exploration of a shared phenomenon—namely, the application of Islamic counseling and the process of students' self-adjustment—across three *madrasah aliyah* (MA) affiliated with modern pesantren in Medan City: Pondok Pesantren Modern Darul Hikmah (PPMDH), Al-Kausar Al-Akbar (PPMKA), and Ta'dib Al-Syakirin (PPMTS).

The selection of this design represents a methodological response to prior research gaps, which tended to be normative and contextually limited. Through the multisite approach, this study captures variations in the approaches and practices of Islamic counseling services within the urban context—specifically Medan City, which features complex social, cultural, and religious dynamics, as previously discussed in the introduction.

The qualitative method is employed to systematically describe actual facts relevant to the issue under investigation (Margono, 2010). Furthermore, this approach produces descriptive data in the form of written or spoken words from informants, as well as observed behavior (Moleong, 2002). This study focuses on three main aspects: (1) the implementation of Islamic counseling services, (2) patterns of students' self-adjustment across social, emotional, and spiritual dimensions, and (3) institutional policies of the pesantren in supporting the adaptation process.

3.2. Participants and Research Locations

The research locations were selected purposively, taking into account the urban characteristics, the integration of modern and Islamic education systems, and the presence of active Islamic counseling services. The three pesantren-based MAs studied share similar institutional backgrounds and structures, yet reflect diversity in their student development approaches.

Key informants included school principals, Islamic counseling teachers (BK), teaching staff, students, parents, and community leaders. Informants were selected through purposive sampling, targeting participants with direct and relevant experience in the implementation of counseling services in pesantren.

The study was conducted from January 2023 to June 2024, encompassing the phases of preparation, data collection, analysis, and validation through triangulation and peer debriefing.

3.3. Data Collection Techniques and Instruments

Data were collected through three complementary techniques: participatory observation, in-depth interviews, and document study. The researcher served as the primary instrument (human instrument) (Faisal, 2010), engaging actively in the pesantren environment through exploration, cooperation, and participation phases.

- a. *Participatory observation* was employed to gain contextual understanding of the counseling service implementation, students' behavioral dynamics, and the psychosocial climate of the pesantren environment. This observation was aimed at capturing expressions of social, emotional, and spiritual adjustment in students' daily lives.
- b. *In-depth interviews* were conducted with pesantren leaders, BK teachers, subject teachers, students, and parents. The interview instruments encompassed aspects relevant to the study's *objectives*, such as the forms of counseling services, strategies for self-adjustment

development, and the challenges and supporting factors in implementing Islamic counseling (Arifin, 2011).

- c. *Document study* involved the collection of institutional documents, BK work programs, counseling *activity* archives, meeting minutes, and other supporting materials (Arikunto, 2011). This documentation helped reconstruct the practice of Islamic counseling both formally and informally.

These three techniques were employed triangulatively to strengthen data validity (Emzir, 2012), particularly in understanding the application of values such as *tauhid*, *tawakkal*, and *akhlakul karimah* in counseling services.

3.4. Data Analysis Technique

Data were analyzed thematically and iteratively using the model that includes stages of data reduction, condensation, display, and verification (Miles et al., 2014). The analysis was conducted at two levels: intra-site (within each pesantren) and cross-site (comparative across pesantren).

Data condensation involved the processes of selecting, focusing, abstracting, simplifying, and transforming. The main analytical themes included the dimensions of counseling services (preventive, curative, transformative), forms of students' self-adjustment (social, emotional, spiritual), and institutional adaptation strategies to meet the needs of urban students.

The final results were presented in the form of interpretive narratives and analytical visualizations, including cross-site interaction diagrams (Sugiyono, 2006).

3.5. Data Validity Assurance

To ensure the validity and reliability of the data, this study applied source and technique triangulation, peer debriefing, and negative case analysis. Dependability was tested through an audit trail conducted in collaboration with the research advisor. Confirmability was assessed by examining the consistency between empirical data and theoretical interpretation (Moleong, 2002). External validity (transferability) was enhanced through rich contextual description, enabling findings to be relevant—albeit in a limited scope—to similar pesantren settings (Sarwono, 2006).

4. Research Findings

4.1. Counseling Application

4.1.1. Application of Counseling at MA Pondok Pesantren Modern Darul Hikmah

The implementation of counseling services (BK) at MA Pondok Pesantren Modern Darul Hikmah aims to assist students in facing personal, social, academic, and spiritual issues that often arise within the highly disciplined dynamics of pesantren life. Based on the data, of the 31 students who served as informants, 18 reported having been summoned by the counseling teacher, while the remaining 13 had not (see Summary Table of Counseling Summons).

Common violations included: failing to participate in congregational prayers, secretly bringing mobile phones, not wearing complete attributes (e.g., headbands), dating, being late to class, and involvement in physical altercations. One student stated:

"I was summoned for leaking the format of student leadership to a new institution." (DH Student)

The pesantren classifies violations into three categories: severe (A), moderate (B), and minor (C), with a tiered system of sanctions ranging from verbal warnings and activity restrictions to character development programs, suspension, or expulsion. A developmental approach is prioritized before final punitive measures are taken:

"When it comes to character development, it's not straight to suspension; we coach them first. Suspension is the last resort." (DH Counseling Teacher)

In addition to sanctions, the development process includes personal discussions with students and daily supervision conducted by *musyrif* and counseling teachers.

4.1.2. Application of Counseling at MA Pondok Pesantren Modern Al-Kausar Al-Akbar

At MA Pondok Pesantren Modern Al-Kausar Al-Akbar, the counseling process is implemented communicatively, prioritizing a tiered developmental model that begins with verbal warnings and may lead to suspension. Of the 15 students interviewed, 5 reported being summoned by the counseling teacher, while 10 had not.

Reported violations included: leaving the pesantren without permission, skipping religious activities such as prayer, fighting, and meeting with parents without approval. One student recounted:

"I had my head shaved for getting into a fight. If the violation is serious, the parents might be called or you could be suspended." (AK Student)

Sanctions include symbolic punishments such as cleaning the yard, shaving heads, and reciting the Qur'an in public. The developmental process is carried out through direct communication, the issuance of written agreements, and the involvement of parents:

"If a student commits a violation, we invite the parents to sit down together and find a solution." (AK Counseling Teacher)

The counseling teacher also applies a point-based violation system and evaluates root causes to ensure the developmental process is effective and not merely punitive.

4.1.3. Application of Counseling at MA Pondok Pesantren Modern Ta'dib Al-Syakirin

At MA Pondok Pesantren Modern Ta'dib Al-Syakirin, the counseling process is highly intensive. Of the 17 students interviewed, 13 reported having been summoned by the counseling teacher, while 4 had not. Violations included leaving the premises without permission, bringing electronic devices, not bringing school supplies, speaking harshly, and hitting other students.

Sanctions were administered in physical, symbolic, and collective forms, including: shaving heads, standing on stage, running laps around the field, and wearing special attributes such as a red *jilbab* to mark the violation:

"When I violated the rule by bringing a phone, my entire class and I were made to wear red *jilbabs*." (TAS Student)

These sanctions are intended to be educational, though students expressed a desire for more empathetic approaches that consider their psychological well-being. This is reflected in the following feedback:

"Reduce the physical punishments. Teachers should try to understand us more and offer encouragement." (TAS Student)

The counseling teacher noted that strict measures are necessary within the pesantren setting, but they are still accompanied by spiritual and personal approaches:

"If they are avoiding accountability, we summon them. But we still do it with a religious and moral approach." (TAS Counseling Teacher)

The application of counseling services at MA Darul Hikmah, Al-Kausar Al-Akbar, and Ta'dib Al-Syakirin demonstrates varied approaches, yet they share a common objective: to support students' self-adjustment through structured discipline and developmental processes.

At MA Darul Hikmah, counseling emphasizes gradual personal development before the imposition of sanctions. Counseling teachers and *musyrif* collaborate in daily supervision and handling of violations.

MA Al-Kausar Al-Akbar adopts a communicative and collaborative approach with parents. The violation point system and trigger evaluation reflect a systematic preventive effort.

MA Ta'dib Al-Syakirin applies a stricter and more symbolic approach, employing visual and physical sanctions. Nonetheless, efforts are made to integrate spiritual values into the development process, alongside student appeals for a more empathetic method.

Overall, the three institutions illustrate that counseling services function not merely as instruments of discipline enforcement, but also as tools for character formation, demanding a balance between firmness and empathy.

4.2. Forms of Student Self-Adjustment Development

4.2.1. Forms of Student Self-Adjustment Development at MA Pondok Pesantren Modern Darul Hikmah

The self-adjustment development of students at MA Pondok Pesantren Modern Darul Hikmah is directed toward forming students capable of living with discipline, complying with rules, and adapting to the pesantren environment. Development strategies are carried out through spiritual, personal, and integrative approaches within routine pesantren activities. The counseling teacher explained:

“We start the development process from the beginning—introducing the pesantren environment, habituating students to prayer, and instilling time discipline.” (DH Counseling Teacher)

The developmental activities include:

- a. *Masa Ta'aruf Santri Baru (Matsama)* as the initial adaptation to the pesantren environment
- b. Habituation of obligatory and sunnah worship practices
- c. Book *studies (kajian kitab)*, motivational sermons, and spiritual mentoring
- d. *Strengthening* communication between students and *musyrif* mentors

In addition, the pesantren administration pays attention to students' cultural background adjustment, as they come from various provinces. Differences in habits and communication styles present initial challenges, which are addressed through cultural approaches and the instillation of shared values as fellow students:

“Many students are from outside regions, such as Aceh and Riau. So we teach them to adapt to each other from the start.” (DH Female Teacher)

Students acknowledged that the adjustment process was challenging at first, but guidance from teachers and the pesantren environment enabled gradual adaptation:

“I was initially shocked by the tight schedule, but I got used to it over time because we were guided and directed often.” (DH Student)

Development is also carried out through daily supervision, personal approaches, and motivational efforts, aimed at fostering students' awareness of the importance of aligning with pesantren values and rhythm of life.

4.2.2. Forms of Student Self-Adjustment Development at MA Pondok Pesantren Modern Al-Kausar Al-Akbar

The student self-adjustment development process at MA Pondok Pesantren Modern Al-Kausar Al-Akbar is implemented through a communicative and familial approach. Counseling teachers and *musyrif* serve as the primary mentors in helping students understand the rules and fostering personal responsibility.

"We don't immediately reprimand them harshly—we usually start with a conversation so that they open up. We guide them with compassion." (AK Counseling Teacher)

Developmental activities include:

- a. Daily religious activities (congregational prayer, tadarus, study circles)
- b. Discussion forums and group deliberations with students
- c. Reinforcement of moral values, independence, and responsibility
- d. Student-led organizational activities such as OSIM and event committees

The dialogical development model encourages students to be receptive to feedback and correction. Students reported that this method made them more reflective and adaptive:

"When I first joined, I often broke the rules. But after many conversations and encouragement, I became more aware." (AK Student)

Beyond formal development, weekly evaluations and daily monitoring are conducted to assess students' adjustment progress both academically and socially.

4.2.3. *Forms of Student Self-Adjustment Development at MA Pondok Pesantren Modern Ta'dib Al-Syakirin*

At MA Pondok Pesantren Modern Ta'dib Al-Syakirin, student self-adjustment development follows a firm and structured approach. The primary emphasis is placed on discipline, role modeling, and adherence to pesantren regulations.

"We lead by example through the *musyrif*. When students see exemplary behavior, they will naturally adjust." (TAS Counseling Teacher)

Developmental activities include:

- a. Discipline reinforcement through intensive supervision
- b. Assignment of daily responsibilities (rotations, cleanliness duties, etc.)
- c. Monitoring of attendance in worship and classes
- d. Weekly spiritual lectures and motivational talks

Several students observed that the strict system encouraged greater discipline and accountability:

"If we don't adjust quickly, we'll be sanctioned. But from that, I learned to obey and take responsibility." (TAS Student)

The role modeling approach by *musyrif* mentors serves as the main method for encouraging students to naturally follow pesantren norms. Although the focus is on regulation, moral development remains a central element in cultivating self-adjustment.

The forms of student self-adjustment development across the three pesantren-based *madrasah aliyah* reflect a diversity of approaches, yet they complement one another. A summary of the development characteristics is presented in the table below:

Pesantren	Characteristics of Self-Adjustment Development
Darul Hikmah	Spirituality, worship habituation, daily supervision, and cross-cultural adaptation among students
Al-Kausar Al-Akbar	Communicative, familial, dialogue-based development, and personal reflection
Ta'dib Al-Syakirin	Firm and structured, discipline-oriented, with role-modeling approach

Overall, these developmental efforts are directed toward shaping students capable of adjusting spiritually, socially, and culturally within the pesantren environment, which is characterized by its unique value system and rhythm of life.

4.3. Types of Counseling Services

4.3.1. Types of Counseling Services at MA Pondok Pesantren Modern Darul Hikmah

The counseling teacher at MA Pondok Pesantren Modern Darul Hikmah provides various services aimed at strengthening students' self-adjustment to the pesantren environment. These services are implemented in an integrated manner with dormitory and academic development programs. The types of services offered include:

- a. Orientation Services, particularly during *Masa Ta'aruf Santri Baru* (MATSAMA), to introduce students to pesantren life, rules, daily schedules, and core values.
- b. Information Services, delivered both formally and informally, to help students understand behavioral boundaries, the sanction system, and conflict resolution methods.
- c. Personal and Social Guidance Services, directed at students experiencing adaptation difficulties, friendship conflicts, or mild emotional issues. The counseling teacher explained: "If a student struggles to adjust, we approach them. We don't impose sanctions immediately—we conduct personal development first." (DH Counseling Teacher)
- d. Individual and Group Counseling Services, provided to students showing signs of psychological stress or deeper social challenges. Small groups are formed to share experiences and provide mutual support.
- e. Referral Services, activated in severe cases that cannot be handled solely by the counseling teacher, such as personal trauma or deviant behavior.

Some students expressed that the active and nonjudgmental involvement of counseling teachers made them feel safer and more open during their adjustment process:

"I almost gave up because I couldn't stand it, but the counseling teacher spoke to me. Eventually, I learned to accept and feel comfortable." (DH Student)

4.3.2. Types of Counseling Services at MA Pondok Pesantren Modern Al-Kausar Al-Akbar

Counseling services at MA Al-Kausar Al-Akbar emphasize a dialogical and humanistic approach. The counseling teacher serves as a supportive and open companion regarding students' personal and social issues. The services provided include:

- a. Individual Counseling Services, conducted personally and empathetically when students experience inner conflict, adaptation problems, or pressure from dormitory life. "I talk to the student without judging. From there, we learn what the real issue is." (AK Counseling Teacher)
- b. Group Counseling Services, organized thematically around topics such as "how to adapt," "managing stress," or "improving communication."
- c. Social Services, including communication guidance, how to show respect to peers, and resolving misunderstandings within the dormitory environment.
- d. Preventive Information Services, delivered through routine briefings on the importance of discipline, etiquette, and responsibility as a student.
- e. Mediation Services, facilitated by the counseling teacher when conflicts arise between students or between students and *musyrif*.

Students indicated that the counseling services at Al-Kausar helped them develop a stronger sense of self-awareness and better readiness in facing social pressures:

"I once had an argument with my roommate. It was mediated in the end, and I learned to listen to others." (AK Student)

4.3.3. Types of Counseling Services at MA Pondok Pesantren Modern Ta'dib Al-Syakirin

At MA Pondok Pesantren Modern Ta'dib Al-Syakirin, counseling services are delivered in a more structured manner, emphasizing discipline, compliance, and exemplary behavior. These services support student adjustment to the pesantren's strict system. The services provided include:

- a. Personal Guidance Services, targeting students who have not yet understood the pesantren's daily rhythm or who struggle to adapt to the demands of communal living.
- b. Individual Counseling Services, conducted intensively for students who repeatedly violate rules. The counseling teacher stated:
"If violations occur repeatedly, we have a one-on-one discussion. We try to find the root cause." (TAS Counseling Teacher)
- c. Group Counseling Services, usually in the form of small-group discussions aimed at fostering personal responsibility and enhancing social awareness.
- d. Spiritual Strengthening Services, delivered in collaboration with *ustadz* and *musyrif*, in the form of moral development, *tazkiyah an-nafs*, and the internalization of Islamic manners.
- e. Evaluative Services, where counseling teachers participate in character assessment forums, violation reporting, and the preparation of follow-up recommendations.

According to several students, the firm yet consistent approach helped them quickly realize the importance of self-adjustment:

"At first, I was often reprimanded. But because of constant supervision and responsibility assignments, I learned to be independent." (TAS Student)

Across the three research sites, it can be concluded that the types of counseling services provided by counseling teachers generally include orientation, information, personal and social guidance, individual and group counseling, referral services, and evaluative services. However, the implementation of each service is tailored to the specific character of each pesantren.

MA Darul Hikmah emphasizes the integration of counseling services with spiritual development and cultural adaptation of students. Al-Kausar Al-Akbar prioritizes dialogical approaches, mediation, and the strengthening of students' self-awareness. Meanwhile, Ta'dib Al-Syakirin focuses on character formation through firm guidance and reinforcement of disciplinary values.

All three pesantren demonstrate that counseling services function not merely as responses to student problems but as an essential component of a sustainable and structured self-adjustment development system.

4.4. Supporting and Inhibiting Factors in Strengthening Students' Self-Adjustment

4.4.1. Supporting Factors in Students' Self-Adjustment

The findings identified several key supporting factors that play a crucial role in strengthening students' self-adjustment at *madrasah aliyah* within modern pesantren. These factors are categorized into internal student dimensions and the external pesantren environment.

a. Internal Factors

- Mental Readiness and Personal Motivation

Students who possess strong motivation and a sufficient understanding of pesantren life from the outset tend to adjust more quickly. This was emphasized by one teacher:

"Students who already have strong motivation from the beginning adjust very quickly—even those from outside the island." (DH Counseling Teacher)

- Diligence and Personal Flexibility
The students' ability to accept changes in routine and adapt to the collective lifestyle constitutes an internal strength that facilitates adjustment.
- b. External Factors
 - Guidance from Counseling Teachers and Musyrif
Humanistic approaches, emotional closeness, and exemplary behavior exhibited by counseling teachers and *musyrif* play a key role in creating a supportive environment.
 - Religious Collective Culture of the Pesantren
Shared living, collective discipline, and a consistently religious atmosphere help students internalize pesantren values naturally.
 - Emotional Support from Parents
Students with strong and positive relationships with their parents tend to exhibit better emotional stability. The counseling teacher noted:
"We frequently communicate with the parents. When students know their families care, they become more enthusiastic about adjusting." (AK Counseling Teacher)

4.4.2. Inhibiting Factors in Students' Self-Adjustment

In addition to supporting factors, the study also found several obstacles experienced by students during their adjustment process. These obstacles stem from both personal conditions and institutional limitations.

- a. Internal Factors
 - Lack of Mental Readiness and Misguided Initial Expectations
Some students reported being surprised by the intensity and discipline of pesantren life, which was far beyond their expectations:
"I didn't expect the schedule to be this packed. I thought it would be like a regular school." (DH Student)
 - Social and Emotional Difficulties
Some students found it difficult to form social connections, especially those from troubled family backgrounds or with introverted personalities.
- b. External Factors
 - Limited Counseling Support Facilities
The lack of counseling infrastructure—such as private rooms, psychological support tools, and dedicated time for sessions—reduces the effectiveness of student guidance.
 - Imbalanced Counselor-to-Student Ratio
The limited number of counseling teachers results in a lack of intensive and sustained engagement with all students.
 - Non-Humanistic Disciplinary Approaches
In some cases, punitive disciplinary methods without prior dialogue lead students to withdraw emotionally:
"Once, when I made a mistake, I was immediately scolded and made to stand in the sun. That made me even more afraid." (TAS Student)

Cross-site findings show that successful student adjustment depends significantly on the interaction between internal and external factors. Students with mental preparedness, character flexibility, and social support from teachers and family adapt more easily to the pesantren culture.

However, adjustment difficulties arise when students lack psychological readiness, receive little emotional support, or are placed within institutional systems that have not yet optimized their counseling services. Therefore, strengthening counseling services, training *musyrif*, and promoting

preventive-humanistic developmental approaches are essential to ensuring comprehensive success in students' self-adjustment.

5. Discussion

This study aimed to examine in depth the application of Islamic counseling services in strengthening students' self-adjustment at three *madrasah aliyah* affiliated with modern pesantren in Medan City (MA Darul Hikmah, MA Al-Kausar Al-Akbar, and MA Ta'dib Al-Syakirīn). The analytical focus encompassed four key aspects: (1) the implementation of counseling services, (2) the forms of self-adjustment development, (3) the types of services provided by counseling teachers, and (4) supporting and inhibiting factors in the adaptation process. These findings explicitly answer all the research questions and reinforce both the empirical and conceptual contributions to the practice of value-based and context-sensitive Islamic counseling in local and global educational settings.

The interpretation reveals that all three pesantren adopt distinct styles of Islamic counseling, yet they adhere to consistent foundational principles. MA Darul Hikmah emphasizes spiritual development and collaboration between counseling teachers and *musyirif*; MA Al-Kausar highlights a dialogical approach and collaboration with parents; and MA Ta'dib Al-Syakirīn applies a firm and symbolic approach to reinforce discipline. These findings expand upon previous discussions with the added focus on institutional adaptation and student character formation within urban environments, in line with the theory of *insan kamil* (Panjaitan, 2019; Situmorang, 2016; Sutoyo, 2005).

The developmental strategies in all three institutions target three dimensions: social, emotional, and spiritual. MA Darul Hikmah facilitates cross-cultural adaptation through religious habituation; MA Al-Kausar promotes personal reflection through open communication; MA Ta'dib emphasizes exemplary conduct and responsibility as adaptive strategies. These findings align with social constructivism and support the argument that students' self-adjustment is shaped through systemic interactions imbued with religious values (Yahya, 2015).

All three pesantren provide orientation, information, individual and group counseling, spiritual reinforcement, evaluative services, and referrals. MA Darul Hikmah integrates these services within its dormitory system, MA Al-Kausar focuses on mediation and interpersonal dialogue, while MA Ta'dib strengthens its counseling services through structured character development and institutional collaboration. This is consistent with the preventive, curative, and transformative dimensions of Islamic counseling (Sutoyo, 2005), while also strengthening adaptive local practices and values.

Internal factors such as students' mental readiness and personal motivation enhance the adjustment process, while external support from counseling teachers, *musyirif*, the religious culture of the pesantren, and parental involvement collectively create a supportive ecosystem. Challenges arise from misguided expectations, limited counseling facilities, an imbalanced counselor-to-student ratio, and non-humanistic disciplinary practices. The synergy between personal readiness and institutional support emerges as a key determinant of effective adaptation.

Theoretically, these findings broaden the framework of Islamic counseling by demonstrating that humanistic and spiritual paradigms such as *insan kamil* can be operationalized dynamically within modern and urban contexts. As an important addition, international literature underscores the necessity of evidence-based accountability in counseling service evaluation (Dimmitt et al., 2007; Fairchild, 1994; Whiston & Aricak, 2008). This theme is particularly relevant as a foundation for strengthening the counseling system in modern pesantren in order to ensure that service effectiveness is systematically documented.

Practically, the implications of this study suggest:

- a. The formalization of counseling services within the institutional structure of pesantren.

- b. Training for counseling teachers in data collection and analysis to enhance service accountability (aligned with the Accountability Bridge Model by Astramovich & Coker, 2007, and MEASURE by Dahir & Stone, 2003).
- c. The strengthening of *musyirif* roles in informal mentoring as an extension of counseling services.
- d. Intensive collaboration with parents as part of the prevention and recovery system.

This study is limited to three institutions in Medan and relies on a qualitative approach that did not yield quantitative evaluative data. Long-term observation was also not feasible. These limitations indicate the need to strengthen the findings through outcome-based evaluation indicators.

Future research should:

- a. Develop evaluative instruments such as SCoPES (Whiston & Aricak, 2008) to measure the effectiveness of personal/social and spiritual dimensions of student development.
- b. Employ quantitative and mixed-methods designs with outcome-based evaluation approaches (academic, emotional, spiritual).
- c. Compare counseling and adaptation models between urban pesantren and those in rural or diaspora settings to enhance the transferability of findings.

This discussion affirms that Islamic counseling services, when implemented in an adaptive, value-based, and credibly accountable manner, have the potential to become effective instruments for strengthening students' self-adjustment across social, emotional, and spiritual dimensions. The flexible yet structured service models in the three pesantren studied have demonstrated success in balancing firmness with empathy. This study offers both conceptual and practical contributions, presenting a more holistic and evidence-based approach to the development of Islamic counseling in modern pesantren education.

6. Conclusion

This study has comprehensively addressed all research questions regarding the application of Islamic counseling services in strengthening students' self-adjustment at three *madrasah aliyah* affiliated with modern pesantren in Medan City: MA Darul Hikmah, MA Al-Kausar Al-Akbar, and MA Ta'dib Al-Syakirin. Through a multisite study design and a framework integrating spiritual, emotional, and social dimensions, the findings demonstrate that Islamic counseling services at these institutions are implemented adaptively, value-driven, and contextually responsive to the challenges of an urban environment.

In general, Islamic counseling services have proven to play a strategic role in supporting the self-adjustment process of students. The three pesantren adopt different approaches—Darul Hikmah with an integrative and spiritual model, Al-Kausar with a dialogical and reflective model, and Ta'dib Al-Syakirin with a firm and symbolic model—yet all share the same foundational principle: cultivating student character and psychosocial resilience by balancing firmness with empathy. These findings enrich the Islamic counseling literature with practical dimensions that have thus far received limited scholarly attention, and demonstrate that Islamic values such as *tauhid*, *tawakkal*, and *akhlakul karimah* can be effectively operationalized in boarding school-based counseling services.

The study also shows that the types of services provided by counseling teachers include orientation, information, individual and group counseling, spiritual guidance, evaluation, and referral. The effectiveness of these services depends heavily on the synergy between internal student readiness (motivation, character flexibility) and external factors (support from counseling teachers and *musyirif*, the religious culture of the pesantren, and parental involvement). Conversely, obstacles such as lack of mental readiness, limited counseling facilities, imbalanced counselor-to-student ratios, and non-humanistic disciplinary approaches may hinder the optimal adjustment process.

Practically, these findings imply the need to formalize counseling services within the institutional structure of pesantren, enhance the capacity of counseling teachers in data-based evaluation, and optimize the role of *musyrif* as an informal extension of counseling support. Collaboration between counseling teachers, dormitory supervisors, and parents is also shown to be critical in fostering a supportive environment that sustains students' adjustment.

Despite the study's significant conceptual and practical contributions, certain limitations remain. The study is qualitative and confined to the urban context of Medan City; thus, generalizations to pesantren in other regions should be made with caution. Additionally, the absence of quantitative evaluative data limits direct assessment of the impact of counseling services on students' psychosocial and spiritual outcomes.

For future development, subsequent research is advised to adopt a mixed-methods approach with outcome-based quantitative instrumentation such as SCoPES, and to broaden the research sites to include pesantren in rural areas or diaspora contexts. This is important to test the transferability of the findings and to deepen understanding of student adaptation dynamics in diverse sociocultural settings.

In conclusion, this study affirms that Islamic counseling, when implemented adaptively, structurally, and in alignment with core Islamic values, can serve as an effective instrument in shaping students who are socially resilient, emotionally stable, and spiritually steadfast. The successful approaches demonstrated by the three modern pesantren in this study may serve as applicable and relevant models for other Islamic educational institutions in Indonesia and in comparable educational and cultural contexts.

Declarations

Author contribution statement

Raudhatuz Zahrah initiated the research topic, formulated the core research questions, and coordinated the manuscript writing process. Lahmuddin Lubis contributed to the development of the theoretical framework and provided oversight on the research methodology. Masganti Sitorus conducted the data collection, performed the data analysis, and contributed to the interpretation of the findings.

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Data availability statement

The datasets generated during and analyzed during the current study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Declaration of Interest's statement

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have influenced the work reported in this paper.

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