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## Empowering Senior Santri as Peace Educators: Developing a Community-Based Peer Mentorship Model to Prevent Violence in Islamic Boarding Schools

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### ABSTRACT

**Background:** This study addresses the critical social issue of violence and bullying within Islamic educational institutions. It focuses on the role and potential of senior santri (students) as peer mentors in Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) in Kediri, Indonesia, to act as agents of peace and change.

**Purpose of the Study:** The purpose is to examine how values grounded in education and empathy can mitigate violence, specifically through the peer mentoring practices of senior santri. The objective is to understand the nature of this mentorship to inform the development of a community-based violence prevention model.

**Methods:** This community service program employs a participatory action research (PAR) approach and a qualitative phenomenological design. The method involved collaborative engagement with ten senior santri through participatory observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. Data were analyzed using the Moustakas phenomenological method.

**Results:** The analysis identified seven core themes defining the mentorship, including its role as moral leadership, a shift from authority to empathy, and its function as a reflective, spiritual practice for violence prevention. The findings position peer mentorship as a foundational element for humanistic education (tarbiyah Islamiyah) and provide a basis for developing ethical training models to foster safe, non-violent educational environments.

### Keywords

Indonesia, Empathy, Phenomenology, Islamic Boarding School, Pedagogy, Spirituality, Peer Mentorship, And Violence Prevention

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## Introduction

There are many forms of violence and bullying around the world, with adverse effects on the mental, social, and academic spheres of the victims, and on school violence and bullying. Many of these problems originate from the absence of humane educational principles and an abuse of power (Smith, 2016). In the educational traditional *pesantren* (Islamic boarding schools) of Indonesia, the vertical and horizontal power relations between junior and senior students (junior and senior *santri*) are especially important to consider. Such power relations can lead to positive social orientations and guidance, but they can also foster an educational environment that normalizes violence and bullying. Therefore, these practices are often justified as a form of student discipline, but they are outright contrary to the values of *rahmah*, *uswah hasanah*, and the mutual respect that guide the education of the *pesantren* (Hefni, 2020).

Globally, peer mentorship is recognized as an effective intervention for fostering positive school climates. Evidence from programs such as the "Buddy Approach" demonstrates its success in reducing bullying by strengthening student solidarity and social accountability (Tzani-Pepelasi et al., 2019). In principle, the indigenous mentoring practices in *pesantren*, where senior *santri* act as guides and role models, align with this approach and are deeply resonant with Islamic principles like brotherhood (*ukhuwah*). From a character education perspective, such mentorship provides a structured context for developing empathy, emotional regulation, and interpersonal skills, which are crucial for shaping a positive professional and moral identity (Helou et al., 2022).

However, a significant gap persists in the current body of knowledge, particularly regarding the real challenges faced by *pesantren* communities. Although the effectiveness of peer mentorship has been well-established in Western, generally secular educational settings (Butler et al., 2024), its application within value-rich religious ecosystems where issues such as verbal aggression, senior–junior power imbalances, and normalization of punitive disciplinary traditions still emerge remains critically underexplored. Studies on models such as Mentors in Violence Prevention (MVP) show that the most substantial transformative impact often occurs among the mentors themselves, particularly in developing empathy and leadership, while benefits for mentees are less consistent (Butler et al., 2024). Cross-cultural adaptations of such programs have also encountered barriers, including resistance to reflective, dialogical mentoring practices in environments with strong hierarchical norms (Bruno et al., 2020), underscoring the need to ground mentorship in local religious, cultural, and communal realities.

Within the *pesantren* context, existing research has largely centered on the formal pedagogical roles of *kyai* or *ustadz*, while the everyday struggles and responsibilities of senior *santri*, such as mediating conflicts among peers, addressing bullying incidents, and supporting juniors who experience emotional distress, remain insufficiently documented. Their lived experiences, motivations, and spiritual-pedagogical reasoning represent a major gap in both academic understanding and practical community empowerment. Recognizing this subjective dimension is crucial for developing interventions that genuinely respond to the needs of the *pesantren* community and strengthen its internal capacity to prevent violence.

Addressing this gap is therefore not only of academic importance but also essential for community service. Insights into senior *santri*'s mentoring experiences can inform the development of contextually grounded, value-oriented peer mentorship frameworks that leverage the moral and social capital of *pesantren*. Such frameworks are urgently needed to build emotionally supportive and non-violent learning environments, an issue increasingly highlighted by educators, practitioners, and community leaders (Hunter et al., 2022).

Accordingly, this study aims to investigate the lived experiences of senior *santri* in they develop their pedagogical competence and fulfill their roles as peer mentors to prevent violence and bullying. Through a phenomenological research design, the study seeks to uncover the essential meanings and values that senior *santri* attribute to their mentoring practices. The findings

are expected to contribute not only to theoretical models of character education within religious communities but also to practical efforts in community service initiatives aimed at fostering safe, compassionate, and dignified educational environments in Islamic boarding schools.

This section provides a comprehensive theoretical foundation for the study by examining the evolution of key themes: the conceptualization of pedagogical competence in Islamic education, the evidence for peer mentorship, violence prevention in residential schools, and the specific Islamic values that underpin social relationships in pesantren. The review concludes with a synthesized conceptual framework that addresses the identified research gaps.

The understanding of pedagogical competence has evolved from focusing solely on technical proficiency to encompassing moral and spiritual dimensions, particularly within religious education. Early foundational work by [Vygotsky \(1978\)](#) on social constructivism emphasized that learning is socially mediated and occurs through interaction, a principle that resonates deeply with communal education systems like pesantren ([Vygotsky, 1978](#)). [Shulman's \(1987\)](#) articulation of pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) further refined the teacher's role to include both subject expertise and didactic skill ([Shulman, 1987](#)).

Within Islamic educational philosophy, pedagogical competence is inseparable from *tarbiyah*, the holistic process of nurturing intellectual, moral, and spiritual growth based on divine values ([Rahman, 2019](#)). Classical scholars such as [Al-Ghazali \(1997\)](#) stressed that the educator (*murabbī*) is not merely a transmitter of knowledge but a moral exemplar (*uswah hasanah*) ([Al-Ghazali, 1997](#)). This aligns with [Lickona's \(2016\)](#) framework of character education, which emphasizes virtue modeling ([Lickona, 2016](#)), and [Mezirow's \(2018\)](#) transformative learning theory, which regards reflection as a catalyst for moral and cognitive transformation ([Mezirow, 2018](#)). In pesantren, senior santri enact this *murabbī* role at the peer level, promoting moral formation through habituation and example ([Hasan, 2020](#)). This aligns with [Bandura's \(1977\)](#) social learning theory, which posits that individuals acquire behavior through observation and imitation within social contexts ([Bandura, 1977](#)). Recent professional studies reinforce these links: [Helou et al. \(2022\)](#) found that value-based reflection in nursing education enhanced empathy and professional ethics. Collectively, this body of work underscores that pedagogical competence in pesantren must integrate methodological skill with ethical and spiritual intentionality ([Helou et al., 2022](#)).

Peer mentorship is a well-established pedagogical strategy grounded in developmental and sociocultural learning theories. [Vygotsky's \(1978\)](#) Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) demonstrates how learners progress through interaction with more capable peers, while Schön's (1983) concept of the reflective practitioner emphasizes that professional growth stems from reflection-in-action ([Vygotsky, 1978](#)).

Empirically, anti-bullying frameworks such as [Olweus's \(Olweus, 1993\)](#). The Whole-School Approach identified peer support as crucial for reducing aggression. The "Buddy Approach" in the UK demonstrated that empathy-based peer relationships strengthen solidarity and accountability ([Tzani-Pepelasi et al., 2019](#)). Similarly, the Mentors in Violence Prevention (MVP) program reported increased leadership and empathy among student mentors ([Butler et al., 2024](#)).

However, previous studies ([Butler et al., 2024](#)) have not examined the intersection between peer mentorship and spiritual pedagogy within Islamic educational contexts. Bruno et al. found that in Sweden, the MVP model encountered cultural resistance linked to [Hofstede's \(2019\)](#) power-distance and masculinity-femininity dimensions ([Hofstede, 2019](#)). These findings underscore the necessity of culturally adaptive mentorship grounded in local moral frameworks such as *ukhuwah* and *rahmah*.

Research on violence in residential learning environments highlights how institutional ecology shapes behavior. [Bronfenbrenner's \(1979\)](#) ecological systems theory explains how nested

social systems influence individual development. In boarding schools, hierarchical structures can normalize aggression unless balanced by empathy-based relationships (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

Programs such as the MVP model foster proactive “active bystanders” who intervene before violence occurs (Butler et al., 2024). This aligns with Noddings’ (2018) ethics of care, which positions nurturing relationships as central to moral education (Noddings, 2018). Empirical studies confirm that open dialogue and emotional support enhance school safety (Tzani-Pepelasi et al., 2019). Within pesantren, integrating these approaches through Islamic values could prevent violence while reinforcing spiritual accountability.

The ethical and social dynamics of pesantren are rooted in classical Islamic concepts of adab (moral discipline) and ta’dīb (character formation). Al-Ghazali’s *Iḥyā’ ‘Ulūm al-Dīn* emphasized that education must cultivate inner virtue, while Al-Attas (2018) viewed adab as recognizing one’s proper place in the moral and cosmic order (Al-Attas, 2018).

These principles manifest in ukhuwah (brotherhood), tawāḍu’ (humility), and raḥmah (compassion), forming the moral structure of inter-santri relations. This process parallels Wenger’s (2019) communities of practice model, where learning occurs through legitimate peripheral participation (Wenger, 1998). Modern research by Narvaez (2019) and Brownie et al. (2022) confirms that collaboration-based learning environments enhance ethical reasoning and emotional well-being (Narvaez, 2016). Consequently, pesantren’s peer system represents a living model of humanistic education rooted in faith-based moral consciousness.

Although numerous studies have explored peer mentorship and character education, few have addressed their convergence within Islamic boarding schools. Prior works, such as Butler et al. (2024) and Bruno et al. (2020), analyzed mentorship as a psychosocial or cultural tool but neglected its spiritual-pedagogical potential (Butler et al., 2024). Similarly, Islamic education research (Rahman, 2019) has highlighted tarbiyah and uswah hasanah but lacked integration with contemporary mentoring theory.

This study bridges these domains by introducing the construct of spiritual-pedagogical competence, defined as the integration of pedagogical skill, empathy, and spirituality manifested through peer mentorship. It contributes theoretically by expanding peer mentorship frameworks to religious educational contexts and practically by proposing culturally grounded strategies for violence prevention in pesantren.

## Method

This community service program employs a participatory action research (PAR) approach and a qualitative phenomenological design to explore the lived experiences of senior *santri* in guiding their juniors and preventing violence and bullying. The method involved collaborative engagement with ten senior *santri* through participatory observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. The phenomenological approach enabled the researchers to uncover the essential meanings that senior *santri* assign to their mentoring practices (Van Manen, 2016), while the participatory and community-engaged components aligned the research directly with the mandate of community service. This integration was operationalized through several key stages: first, a collaborative identification of mentoring challenges together with *pesantren* leaders and senior *santri*; second, participatory observation of authentic, dormitory-based mentoring routines; and third, dialogical reflection sessions that functioned as iterative feedback loops. Through these processes, participants became active contributors whose insights shaped both data interpretation and the future direction of community empowerment programs. Bracketing (*epoche*) was maintained throughout the process to minimize researcher biases and ensure that interpretations remained grounded in participants’ authentic experiences.

Participants were recruited through purposive sampling based on their direct involvement in community mentoring roles (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The sample consisted of ten senior *santri* from two Islamic boarding schools in Kediri, Indonesia, each with at least three years of experience living in the *pesantren* environment. Participants had current or prior responsibilities in mentoring junior *santri*, such as serving as *musyrif*, dormitory leaders, study-group facilitators, or student council representatives. They were identified by *pesantren* leaders as morally exemplary and capable of providing spiritual, social, and emotional guidance. This sample size aligns with phenomenological research practice, which emphasizes depth, contextual richness, and experiential insight over numerical representation (Smith et al., 2009).

Data collection employed three complementary methods designed to capture both the phenomenological depth and the community mentoring dynamics that characterize *pesantren* life. First, in-depth, semi-structured interviews lasting 45 to 90 minutes were conducted to document participants' experiences in mentoring, conflict mediation, bullying prevention, and navigating moral responsibility (Hunter et al., 2022). Second, participatory observation, situated within daily *pesantren* routines such as evening study sessions, dormitory supervision, and collective worship, allowed researchers to observe authentic mentoring interactions, identify community needs, and understand lived mentoring challenges as they unfolded in real time (Butler et al., 2024). Third, to contextualize these observations and interviews, institutional documents including mentoring guidelines, disciplinary regulations, organizational role charts, and student development manuals were analyzed (Huberman & Miles, 2014). Collectively, these methods produced a multilayered understanding of community mentoring and informed the foundation for subsequent community empowerment programs.

Data analysis followed the descriptive phenomenological procedures outlined by Moustakas (1994), enriched with a community-based interpretive lens (Moustakas, 1994). Researchers first engaged in bracketing to suspend personal assumptions about *pesantren* mentoring. Horizontalization was then applied to treat all participant statements as initially equal, facilitating the identification of authentic meaning units. These statements were then clustered into themes reflecting community mentoring practices, leadership roles, spiritual motivations, and violence prevention strategies. Textural descriptions captured *what* participants experienced, while structural descriptions detailed *how* these experiences occurred within the social, hierarchical, and spiritual structures of *pesantren* life. The analytic process culminated in an essential synthesis articulating community mentoring as a spiritual-pedagogical responsibility deeply shaped by *pesantren* culture.

Trustworthiness was rigorously ensured through Lincoln and Guba's (1985) validation criteria. Credibility was strengthened through member checking, where preliminary themes were shared with senior *santri* and *pesantren* leaders to ensure cultural resonance and accuracy (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Triangulation of interview, observation, and document data further enhanced analytical reliability. Peer debriefing with supervisors and colleagues supported dependability, while a complete audit trail documented all methodological decisions. Thick description provided rich contextual detail, enabling readers to assess the transferability of the findings to other settings. To reinforce the community service dimension, community feedback sessions were conducted at multiple stages to align interpretations with the lived realities and developmental needs of the *pesantren* community.

Ethical approval for the study was granted by the Ethics Committee of Institut Agama Islam Hasanuddin Pare. Informed consent was obtained from all participants and, when applicable, from the legal guardians of minors. Cultural and religious ethical principles shaped all aspects of the research process, including strict adherence to Islamic values of propriety, humility, respect, and confidentiality. Formal permissions were obtained from *pesantren* leaders (*kyai*) and administrators, ensuring that all research activities aligned with institutional norms and community expectations. These comprehensive ethical procedures positioned the research not only to

contribute positively to the *pesantren* community but also to lay a solid and respectful groundwork for future mentoring-based community empowerment initiatives.



Figure 1. A Participatory Phenomenological Approach to Developing a Peer Mentorship Model

## Results

### Overview of Emergent Phenomenological Structure

This study sought to uncover the lived experiences of senior *santri* as peer mentors in guiding juniors and preventing violence and bullying in Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*). Through a phenomenological method enriched by a community-engaged mentoring framework, the analysis generated a complex structure of meanings integrating pedagogical, spiritual, socio-emotional, and relational dimensions. These findings illuminate how peer mentorship functions within the *pesantren* community, not merely as a practical task but as a moral, spiritual, and pedagogical vocation profoundly embedded in the Islamic lifeworld of the *santri*.

Data were analyzed through Moustakas' phenomenological reduction, producing seven core themes: (1) Exemplary Leadership as Mentoring Foundation, (2) Transition from Authority to Empathy, (3) Islamic Values as Moral Framework, (4) Critical Reflection on Violent Traditions, (5) Dialogue as Transformative Instrument, (6) Peer Mentorship as Violence Prevention, and (7) Spirituality in Guidance. These themes collectively represent the lived horizon of senior *santri*'s mentoring experience, revealing how moral character, spiritual consciousness, empathetic engagement, and dialogical communication converge to form a culturally grounded model of violence prevention.

Each theme is presented below through three interrelated analytic layers: phenomenological essence, situated meaning within community mentoring, and illustrative verbatim accounts. The following table summarizes the thematic structure.

Table 1. Thematic Structure of Senior Santri's Peer Mentorship Experience

Core Theme	Phenomenological Essence	Verbatim Participant Accounts
Exemplary Leadership as Mentoring Foundation	Embodied pedagogy in which moral and spiritual modeling replaces authoritative instruction; mentorship grounded in being rather than telling.	"We cannot advise others if we ourselves are not examples. If we want juniors to be diligent in congregational prayer, we must be the first to the mosque." (P4, 19 years)
Transition from Authority to Empathy	Transformation from coercive seniority toward relational influence rooted in understanding, patience, and respectful communication.	"I used to think that not being stern meant weakness. Now I understand that advising in a good way is actually more impactful." (P2, 21 years)
Islamic Values as Moral Framework	Mentoring as an act of worship ( <i>ibadah</i> ) guided by <i>rahmah</i> (compassion), <i>ukhuwwah</i> (brotherhood), and <i>amanah</i> (responsibility).	"Guiding juniors is part of worship. So when angry, it must be for correction, not because of personal emotion." (P3, 20 years)
Critical	Conscious reevaluation and	"We used to think being hit was

Reflection on Violent Traditions	rejection of historically normalized punitive practices through moral awareness.	normal, but now we realize it's not the right way.” (P5, 19 years)
Dialogue as Transformative Instrument	Moving from monologic command to dialogic engagement that recognizes the intersubjectivity of junior santri.	“When juniors break rules, I call and ask why first. Sometimes they have reasons we never considered.” (P8, 22 years)
Peer Mentorship as Violence Prevention	Mutual solidarity and shared lived experience create psychological safety, reducing structural and interpersonal violence.	“We listen more easily to seniors because they’ve been in our position. It feels more just and less lecturing.” (P7, 17 years – Junior Santri)
Spirituality in Guidance	Meaning-making rooted in Islamic spirituality transforms emotional strain into patience, sincerity, and resilience.	“When I intend everything for God, the tiredness diminishes. I consider anger a test of patience.” (P9, 20 years)

**Frequency Distribution of Emergent Themes**

A frequency-based content analysis was performed to determine the prevalence of each theme across interview transcripts, field observations, and institutional documents. This allowed triangulation between experiential narratives and behavioral enactment within mentoring practices.

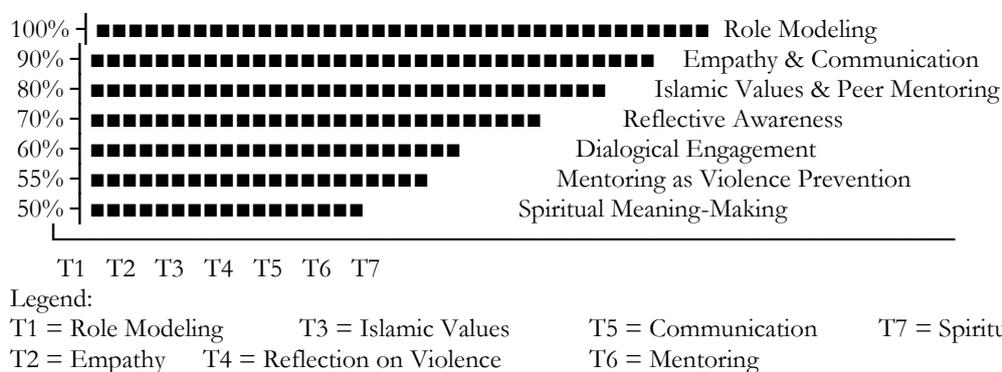


Figure 2. Distribution of Themes Based on Occurrence Frequency

These frequencies show that Exemplary Leadership (T1) and Empathy & Communication (T2) appeared in nearly all interviews and observation notes, confirming that exemplary conduct and empathetic relationality form the backbone of peer mentorship in pesantren. Islamic Values (T3) and Reflective Awareness of Violence (T4) also occurred prominently, indicating that moral-spiritual reasoning and critical consciousness play key roles in shaping nonviolent mentoring identities.

### ***Thematic Findings (In-Depth Phenomenological Expansion)***

#### **1. Exemplary Leadership as the Foundation of Mentorship**

The most dominant theme across all participants was the belief that effective mentorship begins with exemplary behavior. Senior santri consistently interpreted mentoring not as an act of authority, but as a form of embodied moral leadership. This finding reflects a cultural and spiritual axiom internalized within pesantren life: *“Character teaches louder than instruction.”*

Participants described how juniors observe seniors continuously during prayer routines, study sessions, dormitory interactions, and informal gatherings. Senior santri understood themselves as visible role models, whose consistency in worship, discipline, and interpersonal conduct directly shaped junior behavior.

Phenomenologically, this theme represents a shift in the meaning of leadership from external control to internal moral formation. The essence extracted from multiple interview points toward a deeply relational understanding of authority, one grounded in sincerity (ikhlas), responsibility (amanah), and consistency (istiqamah). The lived meaning of mentorship thus emerges not through verbal guidance but through the moral coherence of one's actions.

This form of leadership embodies what van Manen (2016) calls “pedagogical presence”, where the educator’s way of being becomes an ethical invitation rather than a coercive force. In the pesantren lifeworld, such presence is grounded in Islamic ethical consciousness, making exemplary conduct not merely an educational technique but a spiritual mandate (Van Manen, 2016).

Field observations also corroborated this theme. During evening prayer, senior santri who consistently arrived early were followed by groups of juniors who mirrored their behavior. When seniors maintained calm responses during conflict, juniors exhibited similar restraint. Thus, exemplary leadership serves as both the epistemic foundation of mentorship and the primary mechanism of behavioral transmission, aligning with Bandura’s (1977) social learning theory (Bandura, 2018).

#### **2. Transition from Authority to Empathy**

The second major theme reflects an evolving consciousness regarding the nature of authority. Senior santri described a personal transformation from perceiving authority as the right to command, toward viewing it as a responsibility for compassionate guidance. This shift emerged as participants recounted earlier assumptions that harshness was necessary to maintain discipline, a perspective inherited from older hierarchical traditions.

Through experience, reflection, and community dialogue, many participants realized that empathetic engagement produced more sustainable behavioral change. Empathy became a central pedagogical tool, enabling mentors to understand the emotional and situational context behind juniors’ behavior.

Several mentors described experiences where misbehavior initially triggered frustration, but empathetic questioning revealed underlying struggles with homesickness, academic difficulties, or interpersonal conflicts. Such insights prompted mentors to abandon punitive approaches and adopt relational strategies.

This shift aligns with Rogers’ (1969) humanistic educational principles emphasizing unconditional positive regard, and with Islamic ethics highlighting compassion and gentleness (rifq) (Rogers, 1969). The experiential meaning of empathy, therefore, reflects a convergence between modern psychological insights and Islamic moral theology.

Observational data supported this transformation. The research documented multiple instances in which senior santri addressed rule violations through calm dialogue rather than reprimand, resulting in more cooperative responses from juniors. Such relational patterns affirm the emerging identity of senior santri as empathetic guides rather than enforcers.

### 3. Islamic Values as the Moral Framework for Mentorship

Islamic values were central to the moral reasoning that shaped mentoring practices. Participants consistently articulated their responsibilities through theological concepts such as rahmah, ukhuwah, ta'dib, and amanah. These values infused the mentoring relationship with spiritual meaning, transforming guidance into an act of worship (ibadah).

The lived experience of mentorship thus becomes rooted in divine accountability, encouraging mentors to cultivate patience, restraint, sincerity, and moral courage. Rather than viewing mentoring as a hierarchical privilege, senior santri understood it as a trust (amanah) that requires compassion and fairness.

Islamic values also provided ethical boundaries, preventing mentors from acting out of anger or asserting dominance. Multiple participants described moments when recalling religious teachings prevented harsh reactions, especially during emotionally charged disciplinary situations.

From a phenomenological perspective, this theme reveals mentorship as a spiritually framed moral activity, where ethical self-regulation and intention (niyyah) play crucial roles. Islamic philosophical traditions, particularly Al-Ghazali's emphasis on uswah hasanah, resonate strongly with this lived orientation.

This spiritual grounding distinguishes pesantren mentoring from secular peer mentorship models, offering a culturally embedded ethical framework that guides nonviolent educational engagement.

### 4. Critical Reflection on Violent Traditions

Another significant theme was the participants' reflection on violence historically normalized in pesantren culture. Many senior santri reported having experienced physical or verbal punishment during their early years, which they initially considered "normal" or "necessary." Through personal maturation and engagement with contemporary educational values, they began to question these traditions.

This reflective awareness represents a generational shift from reactive reproduction of violent practices to conscious resistance. Participants expressed moral discomfort when witnessing or recalling older disciplinary methods, prompting them to adopt nonviolent alternatives based on Islamic compassion.

The phenomenon also reflects broader pedagogical consciousness influenced by exposure to modern character education and community engagement initiatives. Mentors began to understand violence as counterproductive to moral development and inconsistent with Islamic ethical values.

Thus, the lived meaning of mentorship includes an internal struggle between inherited norms and new ethical understandings a transformative process that reshapes communal educational culture.

### 5. Dialogue as a Transformative Instrument

Dialogue emerged as a powerful pedagogical tool in mentoring relationships. Senior santri recognized that juniors were more receptive when approached through discussion rather than directive commands. Dialogical engagement enabled mutual understanding,

reduced defensiveness, and fostered relational trust.

Participants noted that asking questions such as “Why did this happen?” or “What are you struggling with?” often uncovered contextual factors that would otherwise remain hidden. This approach shifted mentorship from a monologic to an intersubjective mode, consistent with phenomenological pedagogy's emphasis on relational understanding.

In practice, dialogical mentoring was observed during conflict mediation, academic guidance, and emotional support scenarios. Juniors responded positively to seniors who listened attentively, validating their experiences and guiding them toward morally appropriate solutions.

This dialogical pattern supports [Noddings' \(2018\)](#) ethics of care, affirming the centrality of relational presence in moral education. [Noddings \(2018\)](#) It also resonates with [Wenger's \(1998\)](#) communities of practice, where learning occurs through meaningful participation and communication ([Wenger, 1998](#)).

#### 6. Peer Mentorship as Violence Prevention

Participants consistently described mentorship as a key mechanism for preventing violence and bullying. Because senior santri had lived through similar developmental and emotional stages, juniors perceived them as more approachable than teachers or administrators.

This relational proximity created a unique role for senior mentors as mediators, emotional supporters, and early detectors of conflict. Their lived experience enabled them to recognize subtle tensions and intervene before they escalated.

Junior santri (represented in one interview) confirmed that seniors' empathy and shared background reduced the sense of injustice often associated with hierarchical discipline. This dynamic supported psychological safety and contributed to a more harmonious dormitory environment.

Thus, peer mentorship operates as both a relational and structural form of violence prevention, grounded in mutual trust and cultural familiarity.

#### 7. Spirituality in Guidance

The final theme reflects how mentors locate emotional resilience, patience, and purpose within Islamic spirituality. Participants described mentoring as spiritually taxing yet deeply meaningful. When facing challenges, conflict, disrespect, or exhaustion, they turned to spiritual practices and beliefs for strength.

Spirituality framed difficulties as divine tests, transforming emotional struggles into opportunities for moral growth. This perspective nurtured patience, sincerity, and self-regulation, reducing the impulse toward punitive reactions.

The phenomenological essence here reveals mentorship as a spiritual journey, intertwining personal piety, emotional discipline, and pedagogical responsibility.

### ***Cross-Theme Structural Integration (Lifeworld Analysis)***

Beyond the individual themes, a structural analysis revealed an overarching experiential pattern: peer mentorship in pesantren is fundamentally a spiritual-pedagogical practice rooted in moral exemplarity and empathetic relationality.

The mentoring lifeworld is structured around:

1. Being a model before giving instructions
2. Guiding through compassion rather than authority
3. Understanding mentorship as worship
4. Rejecting inherited violent practices
5. Engaging dialogically with juniors
6. Promoting safety and solidarity
7. Drawing spiritual strength from Islamic values

These structures converge to form what this study identifies as spiritual-empathetic pedagogical competence a culturally grounded, phenomenologically emergent concept describing the moral, relational, and spiritual dispositions shaping effective mentoring in pesantren.

### ***Community-Engaged Findings***

The integration of a community-engaged mentoring model throughout this research manifested through participatory observation, reflective dialogue, and iterative feedback sessions has yielded findings that extend beyond theoretical contribution into the realm of practical community empowerment. These findings illuminate a pathway for transforming the informal, tacit knowledge of senior santri into structured, scalable, and culturally resonant programs for violence prevention in Islamic boarding schools. The participatory nature of the research design ensured that the insights generated were not imposed by external researchers but emerged organically from the lived realities of the pesantren community itself, thereby enhancing their relevance and potential for sustainable implementation.

The most immediate implication of this study is the critical need for structured peer-mentoring training within pesantren. While senior santri currently perform mentoring roles based on intuition, observation, and inherited tradition, the findings reveal that many of them yearn for more systematic guidance in how to fulfill their responsibilities effectively. They navigate complex relational dynamics, moral dilemmas, and emotional challenges without adequate preparation, often learning through trial and error at the expense of both their own well-being and that of their juniors. A structured training program, co-designed with input from kyai, ustadz, and senior santri themselves, could address this gap by equipping mentors with foundational skills in communication, conflict mediation, emotional regulation, and ethical decision-making. Such training would not replace the indigenous wisdom of pesantren culture but would rather complement and strengthen it, providing a pedagogical framework that honors tradition while responding to contemporary challenges.

Beyond training, the findings underscore a significant opportunity to institutionalize empathy-based mentoring as a formal component of pesantren education. The phenomenological data consistently revealed that senior santri who had undergone a personal transition from authoritarian to empathetic approaches achieved more meaningful and sustainable outcomes in their mentoring relationships. Their juniors reported feeling more respected, understood, and motivated to change, suggesting that empathy is not merely a soft skill but a transformative pedagogical force. Institutionalizing this approach would involve embedding empathy-based principles into the formal expectations, evaluation criteria, and reward systems that shape senior santri behavior. It would require a shift in institutional discourse from emphasizing obedience and discipline toward valuing relational connection and mutual understanding. Pesantren leaders have a crucial role to play in this process by explicitly endorsing empathetic mentoring as aligned with Islamic values and by modeling such approaches in their own interactions with students.

The potential to reduce violence through dialogical engagements represents another significant finding with direct implications for community empowerment. The research documented numerous instances where senior santri successfully de-escalated conflicts, addressed rule violations, and supported struggling juniors through open, respectful dialogue rather than punitive measures. These dialogical engagements created spaces where junior santri felt safe to express their concerns, share their struggles, and seek guidance without fear of judgment or retaliation. The implications for violence prevention are profound: when conflicts are addressed through dialogue before they escalate, when emotional distress is recognized and supported rather than punished, and when junior santri experience their seniors as allies rather than enforcers, the conditions that breed violence and bullying are systematically undermined. Community empowerment programs can build on this insight by training senior santri in dialogical communication techniques, facilitating regular dialogue circles within dormitories, and creating feedback mechanisms that allow junior voices to be heard by pesantren leadership.

Perhaps the most profound finding with relevance to community service is the emergence of spiritually grounded leadership capacity among senior santri who engage in reflective, empathetic mentoring. The data revealed that when senior santri approach their mentoring responsibilities as a form of worship (*ibadah*) rooted in Islamic values of compassion (*rahmah*), brotherhood (*ukhuwwah*), and trust (*amanah*), they develop a depth of character and resilience that extends far beyond their mentoring roles. They learn to regulate their emotions not through external pressure but through internalized spiritual commitment. They develop patience in the face of frustration, sincerity in the face of ingratitude, and courage in the face of conflict. These qualities are the hallmarks of authentic leadership, and they emerge not from formal instruction but from the crucible of lived experience supported by reflective practice. Community empowerment programs can nurture this leadership capacity by creating spaces for senior santri to reflect on their experiences, connect their struggles to spiritual meaning, and receive recognition for their contributions to the community's well-being.

Collectively, these insights directly inform the design of community service programs within pesantren communities. A community service initiative grounded in these findings would not approach the pesantren as a passive recipient of external interventions but would instead engage the community as a partner in co-creating solutions that build on existing strengths. It would begin by listening to the experiences of senior santri, understanding their challenges, and validating their wisdom. It would facilitate dialogue among senior santri, juniors, *ustadz*, and *kyai* to build consensus around the values and practices that should guide mentoring relationships. It would provide training that is culturally grounded, practically relevant, and spiritually resonant. It would establish structures that support ongoing reflection, mutual learning, and continuous improvement. And it would celebrate and amplify the voices of senior santri who have already begun the journey toward more compassionate, effective mentoring, making their stories visible as models for others to follow.

In essence, the community-engaged findings of this research point toward a paradigm of empowerment that is neither top-down nor bottom-up but deeply participatory and relational. It recognizes that the capacity for transformation already exists within pesantren communities, waiting to be nurtured, supported, and connected. It honors the spiritual foundations that give pesantren education its distinctive character while embracing the possibility of growth and change. And it offers a vision of violence prevention that is not about imposing external standards but about helping communities live more fully into their own deepest values of compassion, justice, and mutual care that lie at the heart of the Islamic educational tradition.



Figure 3. Community-Service Program

## Discussion

The purpose of this discussion is to interpret the findings of this phenomenological study within the broader context of pedagogical competence, Islamic education, peer mentorship theory, and violence prevention in residential learning environments. By situating the lived experiences of senior *santri* within the conceptual and empirical frameworks outlined in the literature, this section demonstrates how the seven emergent themes contribute to both scholarly understanding and practical community empowerment in pesantren. The discussion also integrates insights from the community service activities carried out during the study, highlighting their significance in strengthening value-based mentoring capacities in Islamic boarding schools.

The findings reveal that senior *santri* conceptualize mentoring not merely as a functional responsibility but as a moral-spiritual vocation intertwined with Islamic values, empathy, exemplary leadership, and dialogical engagement. This aligns with the study's theoretical foundations and expands the field's understanding of how spiritual-pedagogical competence emerges, develops, and is enacted within pesantren communities.

### *Integrating Findings with Pedagogical Competence in Islamic Education*

The first major domain for discussion centers on the evolution of pedagogical competence within Islamic educational traditions. Findings from this study affirm and extend the conceptualization presented in the literature review. Classical Islamic scholars such as Al-Ghazali emphasized that the *murabbī* the holistic educator should be an exemplar of moral and spiritual integrity Al-Ghazali (1997). This resonates directly with the most dominant theme in the findings: Exemplary Leadership as the Foundation of Mentorship.

Senior *santri* consistently described how their influence depended on the coherence of their actions, spiritual discipline, and moral character. This supports the argument advanced by Rahman (2019), who highlights that *tarbiyah* integrates knowledge, ethics, and spiritual nurturing as an inseparable whole (Rahman, 2019). The participants' lived experiences extend this view by showing how *murabbī-like* qualities emerge even at the peer level, not only in teachers (*ustadz*) or kyai.

This constitutes a meaningful contribution to pedagogical theory in Islamic contexts. While much research has examined the teacher's role, few studies have demonstrated how pedagogical competence is socially distributed within pesantren communities, especially through senior-junior structures. By illuminating how senior *santri* enact pedagogical presence through discipline, punctuality, compassion, and emotional self-regulation, the findings broaden the conceptual boundaries of pedagogical competence beyond the formal teaching role.

Vygotsky's (1978) theory of socially mediated learning is particularly applicable here. The mentoring environment of pesantren inherently functions as a "Zone of Proximal Development"

(ZPD), where juniors learn through observation, imitation, and mutual participation (Vygotsky, 1978). As Bandura's (1977) social learning theory emphasizes, much learning in social contexts occurs through modeling. This was vividly evident as junior *santri* mirrored the conduct, prayer habits, and emotional responses of their seniors (Bandura, 1977).

Thus, the phenomenological findings reinforce and elaborate on the theoretical position that pedagogical competence in pesantren is fundamentally relational, embodied, and deeply tied to Islamic ethical consciousness. Senior *santri* are not merely enforcers of rules; they serve as ethical models whose behavior serves as the curriculum through which junior students internalize religious and moral values.

### ***Empathy, Emotional Intelligence, and the Transition from Authority to Relational Leadership***

The second major theme Transition from Authority to Empathy reveals how senior *santri* are shifting from traditional discipline toward empathetic, relational mentorship. This transformation has strong theoretical grounding in contemporary educational psychology. Goleman's (2019) framework of emotional intelligence emphasizes the importance of self-awareness, empathy, and relationship management in effective leadership (Goleman, 2019).

The participants' narratives consistently demonstrated growing emotional maturity, recognition of juniors' struggles, and appreciation of gentle guidance (*ri'iq*), all of which directly reflect core components of emotional intelligence. This aligns with findings by Tzani-Pepelasi et al. (2019), who reported that empathy-driven peer mentorship fosters greater student solidarity and reduces aggression (Tzani-Pepelasi et al., 2019).

Moreover, this shift indicates a gradual departure from the authoritarian aspects of pesantren seniority systems historically associated with harsh discipline. Participants described how their earlier perceptions of authority were shaped by fear, rigid hierarchy, or personal ego. However, through reflection and mentoring discussions supported by community service, these perceptions evolved into a relational understanding of leadership emphasizing compassion, dialogue, and moral accountability.

This transformation is congruent with Schön's (1983) notion of the reflective practitioner. Senior *santri* became reflective practitioners by reinterpreting their experiences and adopting nonviolent, supportive mentoring approaches. Their narratives embody Mezirow's (2018) transformative learning theory, in which critical reflection leads to shifts in meaning-making structures (Mezirow, 2018).

Thus, the findings show that empathic mentorship is not merely a technique but a developmental process one that strengthens pedagogical competence, enhances community relations, and reduces the likelihood of bullying.

### ***Islamic Values as the Moral-Spiritual Foundation of Peer Mentoring***

The third theme, Islamic Values as the Moral Framework, represents a core contribution of this research to Islamic educational studies. Findings reveal that mentoring in pesantren is not approached as a procedural or administrative task; rather, it is conceptualized as an extension of worship (*ibadah*), moral responsibility (*amanah*), and spiritual consciousness.

This aligns with classical Islamic ethical teachings from Al-Ghazali (1997), Al-Attas (2018), and contemporary scholars of *tarbiyah Islamiyah*. The lived experience of senior *santri* demonstrates how Islamic moral values permeate every mentoring interaction (Al-Ghazali, 1997). For example, participants reported avoiding punitive responses out of fear of violating ethical boundaries or of

acting out of personal anger rather than divine intention (*niyyah*).

The literature emphasizes that Islamic pedagogy centers on the moral formation of the educator before the learner (Al-Ghazali, 1997). The present findings not only confirm this but also show how spirituality acts as an internal regulatory mechanism. When faced with conflict or disrespect, mentors often reframed the situation as a test of patience or as an opportunity to cultivate *ikhlas* (sincere intention).

This moral-spiritual orientation distinguishes pesantren mentorship from Western peer mentoring models. While programs like MVP emphasize ethical reasoning and leadership, they do not include a transcendent moral dimension. Thus, this study introduces the concept of spiritual pedagogical competence, which integrates spiritual meaning-making, ethical exemplarity, and empathetic leadership in a culturally grounded manner.

### ***Reflective Awareness and the Rejection of Violent Traditions***

A fourth major theme, Critical Reflection on Violent Traditions, exposes how senior *santri* are renegotiating historical norms of harsh discipline and toxic seniority. Many participants acknowledged that they once accepted violence as a natural or deserved component of pesantren life, as earlier cohorts had normalized such practices.

This finding aligns with research by Bruno et al. (2020), which highlights resistance to reflective mentoring in cultures with strong hierarchical traditions (Bruno et al., 2020). The present study extends this line of inquiry by showing how reflective awareness can emerge organically when mentors are given structured spaces, such as community service activities, for critical dialogue.

Furthermore, this reflective shift indicates a broader cultural transition within pesantren. As educational leaders increasingly emphasize compassion, ethical discipline, and mental well-being, senior *santri* are becoming agents of cultural transformation rather than perpetrators of harmful traditions.

This aligns with the broader movement in global educational discourse toward nonviolent pedagogy and ethics of care (Noddings, 2018). In the context of pesantren, this represents a significant step toward reconciling traditional norms with contemporary understandings of child protection and humane education.

### ***Dialogue and Intersubjectivity as Foundations of Transformative Mentorship***

The fifth theme, Dialogue as Transformative Instrument, positions dialogical engagement as central to the senior-junior mentoring relationship. Dialogue fosters intersubjective understanding, reduces miscommunication, and allows mentors to recognize juniors as moral agents with unique experiences.

This reflects Wenger's (Wenger, 1998) social learning theory, in which meaningful learning emerges through participation in shared practices and conversations. The findings also affirm Noddings' (Noddings, 2018) ethics of care, wherein authentic dialogue is essential for forming caring, supportive educational communities.

Participants often described how dialogical questioning revealed underlying emotional or contextual factors behind rule violations. This increased empathy, reduced harshness, and promoted fairness. Dialogue thus serves as a mechanism for humanizing the mentoring relationship, aligning perfectly with Islamic ethical norms and humanistic education principles.

The community service sessions reinforced this theme by modeling dialogical pedagogy, participants engaged in reflective discussions, scenario-based dialogue, and collective meaning-making. These activities strengthened mentors' capacity to apply dialogical strategies in their daily interactions.

### ***Peer Mentorship as a Systemic Mechanism of Violence Prevention***

The sixth theme, Peer Mentorship as Violence Prevention, provides strong evidence supporting global anti-bullying research. Programs such as [Olweus \(Olweus, 1993\)](#), the Buddy Approach ([Tzani-Pepelasi et al., 2019](#)), and MVP ([Butler et al. 2024](#)) all emphasize that peer mentors play a crucial role in promoting safety.

1. In the pesantren context, senior *santri* are uniquely positioned:
2. They live in the same dormitories,
3. share similar cultural and religious training,
4. and understand the emotional landscape of adolescence.
5. Their proximity and credibility allow them to detect early signs of conflict and mediate tensions before they escalate. Junior *santri* reported feeling more comfortable confiding in seniors than in teachers, confirming the relational trust underlying peer mentorship.

Thus, the findings show that peer mentorship is not merely an interpersonal dynamic but a structural mechanism for violence prevention. This insight is crucial for designing community service-based interventions that leverage the inherent strengths of pesantren communities.

### ***Spirituality in Guidance: Integrating Moral Meaning with Emotional Regulation***

The seventh and final theme Spirituality in Guidance highlights how mentors derive strength, patience, and emotional regulation from Islamic spirituality. Participants frequently interpreted conflicts as spiritual tests, reframing emotional challenges as opportunities for self-cultivation.

This spiritual orientation serves as a coping mechanism and a source of pedagogical wisdom. It reduces impulsive reactions, enhances emotional intelligence, and aligns disciplinary actions with Islamic ethics.

From a phenomenological perspective, this spiritual meaning-making shapes the mentors' lived world (*lifeworld*), infusing their pedagogical responsibilities with purpose and moral coherence. It also demonstrates the unique contribution of Islamic education to the broader peer mentorship literature, where spirituality is rarely examined as a pedagogical asset.

### ***Community Engagement as a Catalyst for Pedagogical Transformation***

One of the most significant contributions of this study is the integration of community service as both a methodological approach and a pedagogical tool, fundamentally reshaping the relationship between research and community empowerment. Rather than positioning community service as an ancillary component of the research process, this study deliberately embedded community engagement into the fabric of data collection and intervention, creating a dynamic interplay between understanding and action. In this design, the community service workshop functioned in two interconnected ways: as a data-collection setting where the lived experiences of senior *santri* emerged organically through dialogue and participation, and as an intervention that simultaneously strengthened mentors' capacity for empathy-based, spiritually grounded mentorship. This dual function ensured that the research process itself contributed to the transformation it sought to understand.

During the community service activities, senior santri engaged in structured exercises designed to deepen their awareness and refine their practice. Group reflection sessions provided spaces for sharing experiences and challenges with peers who understood the complexities of pesantren life. Scenario simulations allowed participants to confront realistic moral dilemmas such as responding to rule violations, mediating peer conflicts, or supporting emotionally distressed juniors in a safe environment where they could experiment with different approaches and learn from one another. Discussions on moral dilemmas prompted participants to articulate the values guiding their decisions, to question inherited assumptions, and to connect their mentoring practices more consciously to Islamic principles of compassion, justice, and responsibility. These activities did not merely impart new knowledge; they provoked deeper awareness of their roles, responsibilities, and personal shortcomings, creating moments of self-recognition that many participants described as transformative.

The theoretical grounding of this community service framework draws from established traditions of participatory learning and community empowerment. The approach aligns with Chambers' (1983) foundational work on participatory learning, which emphasizes that genuine understanding emerges when researchers step back from positions of authority and create conditions for communities to articulate their own knowledge, priorities, and solutions. Chambers' critique of top-down development interventions resonates strongly with the ethos of this study, which sought not to impose external models of mentorship but to surface and strengthen the indigenous wisdom already present within the pesantren community.

This participatory orientation transformed the research in profound ways. When senior santri engaged in dialogue about their mentoring experiences, they were not merely providing data for researchers to analyze; they were simultaneously reflecting on their practice, learning from peers, and internalizing the very competencies that the study sought to identify. The spiritual-pedagogical competencies that emerged from the phenomenological findings, *exemplary leadership*, *empathetic engagement*, *dialogical communication*, and *spiritually grounded resilience*, were not abstract concepts extracted from passive interviews. They were living realities that participants recognized in themselves and others, discussed in community, and practiced in the safe space of the workshop before carrying them back into the daily life of the pesantren. In this sense, community service did not merely accompany the study as a parallel track; it transformed the study from within, enabling participants to internalize and embody the spiritual-pedagogical competencies identified by the research.

## Conclusion

The community-engaged mentoring program implemented in this study demonstrates that the Community mentoring process plays a decisive role in developing senior santri's capacity to prevent violence and bullying in pesantren. Through a series of structured community service activities, participatory observation, reflective dialogue, mentoring simulations, and value-based discussions, the senior santri experienced a clear transformation in how they understand and enact their role as peer mentors.

The Community mentoring process strengthened four critical competencies: (1) moral modeling, where senior santri internalized the importance of leading through exemplary conduct (*uswah hasanah*); (2) empathetic communication, characterized by the shift from punitive authority to relational guidance grounded in listening and understanding; (3) reflective awareness, enabling mentors to critically examine and move away from previously accepted forms of verbal or physical harshness; and (4) spiritual integration, where mentoring was reframed as an act of worship (*ibadah*) and moral trust (*amanah*), enhancing sincerity and emotional regulation.

These changes were not merely individual but collectively shaped through continuous feedback loops between facilitators, pesantren leaders, and participants. The community service activities served as a catalyst, helping senior santri articulate challenges, co-develop solutions, and embody nonviolent forms of leadership aligned with Islamic values. As a result, the mentoring environment in the pesantren became more dialogical, compassionate, and psychologically safe for junior santri.

Overall, this community service initiative confirms that effective violence prevention in pesantren arises from well-designed, community-rooted mentoring processes. Strengthening senior santri's spiritual-pedagogical competence through sustained Community mentoring provides a practical, culturally appropriate, and sustainable model for character formation and moral education.

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