



Bridging the Distance: Interpersonal Communication in Parent-Child Relationships in Islamic Boarding Schools

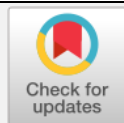
Ernita Arif * , and Rahmi Surya Dewi 

Universitas Andalas, Padang City, West Sumatra 25163, Indonesia.

* Corresponding Author: ernitaarif@soc.unand.ac.id

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine the forms of interpersonal communication between parents and children in fostering emotional closeness within the environment of Pondok Pesantren Sumatera Thawalib Parabek, Bukittinggi, West Sumatra. The research employed a qualitative approach using a case study method. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with parents and students at the Islamic boarding school. The findings indicate that interpersonal communication through digital media, including telephone calls, text messaging, video calls, sending packages, and direct visits, plays an important role in maintaining emotional bonds between parents and children. However, the quality of communication characterized by empathy and openness was found to be more influential than communication frequency. Religious values, Minangkabau local culture, and pesantren traditions also shape supportive communication patterns that emphasize respect for authority. Effective interpersonal communication can strengthen students' emotional stability during their educational experience in the pesantren. These findings are expected to contribute to the development of family communication literacy and provide practical insights for pesantren institutions in supporting healthy parent-child relationships.

Keywords: Children; Emotional Closeness; Interpersonal Communication; Islamic Boarding School; Parents



1. Introduction

Communication within the family is a crucial foundation in forming healthy relationships between parents and children, and it plays an important role in children's psychosocial development (Cole et al., 2024; Curran et al., 2023; Elsayed, 2024; Pan et al., 2025; Qin et al., 2025; Scruggs & Schrodt, 2021). Parental emotional involvement through communication can strengthen children's sense of attachment, security, and emotional reassurance, including when children live away from home (Huda et al., 2022). In this relationship, communication is not only about how often parents and children interact, but also about how messages are delivered, interpreted, and emotionally received. Openness, empathy, responsiveness, and reassurance are important elements that determine whether communication becomes meaningful for children. This becomes particularly important when parent-child interaction is no longer embedded in everyday face-to-face family routines, but is mediated by institutional rules and limited communication access.

This issue becomes more complex in pesantren, or Islamic boarding schools, where santri live in a residential education system and follow institutional rules that regulate their daily activities, social interaction, and access to communication. Communication then depends on intermediaries such as dormitory ustaz/ustazah or homeroom teachers, as well as limited media such as text messages, phone calls, or scheduled video calls. Unlike ordinary long-distance family communication, parent-child communication in pesantren is neither fully private nor spontaneous, nor is it directly controlled by parents and children. It is mediated by pesantren actors, structured by institutional schedules, and shaped by the collective life of the dormitory. Emotional closeness, which is usually built through daily interaction, must be maintained through available communication media and the meaning conveyed in messages (Elias et al., 2021). Therefore, communication in this setting cannot be reduced to the use of digital media or the frequency of contact. It needs to be understood as a mediated interpersonal process in which emotional support, parental authority, children's expression, and pesantren supervision intersect.

Pondok Pesantren Sumatera Thawalib Parabek, located in Bukittinggi, West Sumatra, is one of the oldest Islamic boarding schools and has a strong reputation for developing Islamic education rooted in character. Its boarding school system allows students to return home only during specific periods. In this context, santri are required to be emotionally independent but still need moral and psychological support from their parents, mediated through long-distance communication. The communication process is also influenced by religious values and Minangkabau cultural norms, which emphasize respect for parents and teachers, politeness, moral discipline, and spiritual guidance (Ginanto et al., 2021; Pabundu & Ramadhana, 2023). Moreover, communication management in the pesantren environment is often limited by rules that prohibit santri from carrying personal mobile phones and only allow communication through caregivers or dormitory ustaz/ustazah. At the same time, Minangkabau cultural values and pesantren traditions shape the tone, content, and moral expectations of communication. Respect for parents and teachers, politeness in speech, religious advice, and emotional restraint are not merely background values; they influence how parents express care and how children respond to parental messages (Hastasari et al., 2022). For this reason, Pondok Pesantren Sumatera Thawalib Parabek offers a distinctive case for examining how parent-child communication is practised within a setting where family affection, religious discipline, local culture, and institutional mediation operate together.

Although studies related to interpersonal communication in families have been widely conducted, most of them still focus on family contexts in daily life without physical limitations

(Cole et al., 2024; Hadori et al., 2020; Hall et al., 2021; Ma et al., 2024; Marah et al., 2025; Nurdini & Hernawati, 2023; Ochoa et al., 2024), while studies that specifically examine parent-child interpersonal communication in boarding-based Islamic education remain limited. Existing studies have provided important insights into parental involvement, family communication, children's emotional development, and school-family relationships. However, they have not sufficiently explained how emotional closeness is maintained when communication is restricted by institutional rules, mediated by teachers or dormitory supervisors, and conducted in limited privacy. This limitation is important because the pesantren setting produces a specific communication situation: children may speak to parents only at certain times, use devices owned by supervisors, communicate in the presence or knowledge of adults, and manage their emotions within a disciplined religious environment. The research gap addressed in this study, therefore, lies in understanding parent-child interpersonal communication not merely as the exchange of messages across distance, but as a socially, culturally, and institutionally mediated process within pesantren life.

This study does not treat communication frequency as the only indicator of parent-child closeness. Since this research uses a qualitative approach, it does not claim a causal hierarchy between frequency and quality. Rather, it explores how parents and santri give meaning to different forms of communication, including short phone calls, text messages, video calls, package delivery, and direct visits. The study examines how messages are constructed, mediated, delivered, and emotionally received within the pesantren communication system. Through this approach, communication is understood not only as verbal interaction but also as a symbolic and emotional practice through which parents remain present in their children's lives despite physical distance and institutional restrictions.

The urgency of this research also lies in the important role of communication in maintaining the psychological stability of santri, which can affect their academic development and overall well-being (Qin et al., 2025; Ye et al., 2024). Poor or limited communication between parents and children can contribute to feelings of loneliness or isolation in children, which in turn can affect their academic achievement and emotional development (Koivuhovi et al., 2025; Napier et al., 2025; Ochoa et al., 2024; Ye et al., 2024). In the pesantren setting, these risks are not solely due to physical separation from parents. They are also related to regulated access to communication, short communication duration, shared or supervised devices, limited privacy, and the need for children to adjust to disciplined collective life. These conditions may influence whether children feel free to express sadness, homesickness, anxiety, or personal problems to their parents. They may also affect how parents provide emotional support when pesantren actors mediate their access to children. Thus, understanding parent-child interpersonal communication in pesantren is important both academically and practically, particularly for strengthening emotional support systems in boarding-based education.

Therefore, this study aims to examine how interpersonal communication between parents and children is practised, mediated, and interpreted in maintaining emotional closeness at Pondok Pesantren Sumatera Thawalib Parabek. More specifically, this study aims to: (1) identify the forms of parent-child interpersonal communication used in the pesantren setting; (2) analyze how message quality, communication consistency, pesantren mediation, and religious-cultural values shape emotional closeness; and (3) develop a contextual model of mediated parent-child interpersonal communication in boarding-based Islamic education. The findings of this study are expected to contribute to the development of the family communication literature in the context of Islamic boarding education, enrich cultural and religious perspectives in interpersonal communication studies, and serve as a practical reference for pesantren and parents in designing

healthy, supportive communication patterns. The contribution of this study lies in showing that emotional closeness in pesantren is not produced solely by frequent contact or the availability of communication media, but rather through the interaction among parental initiative, institutional mediation, religious-cultural norms, and santri's emotional responses.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Interpersonal Communication in Parent-Child Relationships

Interpersonal communication refers to the process through which individuals exchange messages, meanings, emotions, and relational expectations in close social relationships. In parent-child relationships, interpersonal communication serves not only as a means of sharing information but also as a way to express affection, provide reassurance, build trust, and maintain emotional attachment. DeVito (2019) explains that effective interpersonal communication involves openness, empathy, supportiveness, positiveness, and equality. These elements are important because communication becomes meaningful not merely through the message itself, but through how the message is delivered, received, and emotionally interpreted by the communication partner.

In parent-child relationships, communication plays a central role in shaping children's emotional security and relational closeness. Previous studies show that family communication contributes to children's psychosocial development, emotional adjustment, and relational quality (Cole et al., 2024; Elsayed, 2024; Qin et al., 2025; Scruggs & Schrodt, 2021). Communication between parents and children also helps children interpret parental care, emotional availability, and moral guidance. Therefore, parent-child closeness is not produced only by physical co-presence, but also by the quality of interaction, the emotional tone of messages, and the child's perception of being supported.

Parent-child interpersonal communication becomes more complex when parents and children are separated by distance. In such conditions, communication media such as phone calls, text messages, video calls, and periodic visits become important channels for maintaining emotional bonds. Elias et al. (2021) show that mediated family communication can sustain relational connection, although it cannot fully replace the emotional richness of face-to-face interaction. Similarly, Gruber et al. (2022) and Stieger et al. (2023) argue that digital communication supports long-distance relationships, but physical presence remains important for a deeper emotional connection. This suggests that mediated communication should be understood not only by its frequency but also by its emotional quality, relational meaning, and the context in which it occurs.

2.2. Family Communication, Emotional Closeness, and Communication Quality

Family communication is closely related to emotional closeness because it provides children with a space to express their feelings, receive advice, and experience parental attention. In family communication studies, emotional closeness is commonly associated with mutual trust, responsiveness, openness, and consistency of interaction. Hall et al. (2021) and Watts and Hovick (2023) show that family communication patterns influence how family members manage uncertainty, express identity, and maintain relational belonging. These findings indicate that family communication is not only instrumental, but also affective and symbolic.

For children living away from home, communication with parents can be an important source of emotional support. Messages that contain attention, prayers, motivation, and reassurance may help children feel remembered and valued. This is particularly relevant for adolescents, who are in a developmental stage that requires both autonomy and emotional support. Warm and

responsive communication may help children feel secure and connected, while limited or poor-quality communication may contribute to loneliness, emotional distance, or reduced confidence in facing academic and social challenges (Koivuhovi et al., 2025; Napier et al., 2025; Ye et al., 2024).

In this study, communication quality is not treated as a measurable variable in a quantitative sense, but rather as an analytical dimension for understanding the emotional meaning of parent-child interaction. Communication quality refers to the presence of empathy, reassurance, attention, advice, prayer, and emotional responsiveness in the messages exchanged between parents and santri. This dimension is closely related to communication consistency. In boarding-school settings, parents and children may not be able to communicate every day. In such situations, predictable communication routines can help children feel that their parents remain emotionally present. Thus, frequency and quality should be understood as complementary rather than competing dimensions. Frequency provides continuity, while quality gives emotional depth to the interaction.

2.3. Mediated Communication in Pesantren Settings

Pesantren, as an Islamic boarding school institution, creates a distinctive communication environment. Santri live in dormitories, follow structured daily routines, and are subject to institutional rules that regulate their access to personal communication devices. Unlike children who live at home and can communicate more freely with parents, santri often communicate through mediated channels controlled or facilitated by pesantren actors, such as homeroom teachers, dormitory supervisors, ustaz, or ustazah. Therefore, communication between parents and children in pesantren is not purely private or spontaneous. Institutional arrangements, supervision, schedules, and disciplinary norms shape it.

Previous studies on pesantren and boarding-school communication have shown that the boarding system influences children's independence, discipline, and family interaction (Ginanto et al., 2021; Hastasari et al., 2022; Pabundu & Ramadhana, 2023). However, these studies have not sufficiently explained how emotional closeness between parents and children is maintained when pesantren actors mediate communication. The presence of mediators may support communication by providing access, delivering messages, arranging phone use, or facilitating video calls. At the same time, mediation may also create limitations, especially in relation to privacy, emotional openness, and children's freedom to express personal problems.

This dual role of pesantren mediation is important for understanding parent-child communication in boarding-based Islamic education. On the one hand, pesantren rules protect discipline, reduce distraction, and maintain the educational environment. On the other hand, strict communication access may affect how children express homesickness, anxiety, or emotional difficulties. When students use a teacher's or dormitory supervisor's phone, they may feel helped because they can contact their parents, but they may also feel less free to speak openly. Thus, mediated communication in pesantren involves both support and constraint. This makes the pesantren setting different from ordinary long-distance family communication because the communication process is shaped not only by distance, but also by institutional authority and supervised access.

2.4. Religious and Cultural Values in Parent-Child Communication

Religious and cultural values also shape parent-child communication in pesantren. In Islamic boarding-school contexts, communication is closely connected to moral education, spiritual advice, respect for parents and teachers, and discipline in speech and behaviour. Religious messages such as prayers, reminders to worship, advice to be patient, and encouragement to seek

knowledge are not only doctrinal expressions. They also function as emotional support and relational reassurance. For santri, parental prayers and religious advice can be interpreted as signs of affection and continuing parental presence.

In the Minangkabau cultural context, respect for parents, teachers, and elders is also an important value that shapes communication practices. Children are expected to speak politely, listen carefully, and show respect when communicating with parents or teachers. These norms influence how santri respond to parental messages and how parents express care. Parents may not always express affection through direct emotional language, but through advice, reminders, prayers, and moral encouragement. Therefore, emotional closeness in this context is often expressed through culturally and religiously meaningful forms of communication.

This perspective is important because interpersonal communication in pesantren cannot be analyzed only as the technical exchange of messages through available media. It must also be understood through the values that shape the content, tone, and interpretation of communication. In this study, emotional closeness may manifest through respectful speech, religious advice, parental prayers, package delivery, or short, meaningful calls. These forms of communication show that affection can be expressed directly, indirectly, verbally, symbolically, and normatively. Thus, religious and cultural values are not merely background factors; they actively shape how parent-child communication is practised and interpreted.

2.5. Theoretical Framework of the Study

This study draws on interpersonal communication theory and family communication perspectives as its main theoretical foundations. Interpersonal communication theory helps explain how messages, empathy, openness, support, and responsiveness contribute to relational closeness. Family communication perspectives help explain how parents and children maintain emotional bonds, negotiate distance, and sustain a sense of belonging through communication practices. These perspectives are combined with the concept of mediated communication in pesantren to understand how communication is shaped by institutional rules, adult supervision, religious values, and local cultural norms.

Based on this framework, parent-child emotional closeness in pesantren is understood as the outcome of four interconnected elements. First, parental communication initiative refers to parents' efforts to maintain contact through phone calls, text messages, video calls, packages, and visits. Second, pesantren mediation refers to the roles of homeroom teachers, dormitory supervisors, ustaz, and ustazah in facilitating, regulating, and, at times, limiting access to communication. Third, message quality refers to the emotional, moral, and spiritual content of communication, including attention, empathy, advice, motivation, and prayer. Fourth, santri emotional response refers to how children interpret communication as care, support, reassurance, or continued parental presence.

These elements serve as the analytical basis for this study and provide the conceptual foundation for the interpersonal communication model developed in the findings. Communication is not viewed simply as the transmission of messages from parents to children, but as a relational process mediated by pesantren rules, shaped by religious-cultural values, and interpreted through santri's emotional experience. Therefore, the proposed framework helps explain why short calls, text messages, video calls, packages, and direct visits can carry strong emotional meaning even when communication access is limited. It also clarifies that emotional closeness in pesantren emerges from the interaction between parental initiative, institutional mediation, message quality, and children's emotional interpretation.

3. Research Methodology

3.1. Research Design

This study employed a qualitative case study approach. The qualitative approach was chosen because this study aims to explore in depth the interpersonal communication process between parents and children at Pondok Pesantren Sumatera Thawalib Parabek, Bukittinggi, with particular attention to how emotional closeness is maintained despite physical distance, limited communication access, and pesantren mediation. The case study method was selected because it allows the researcher to analyze in detail the communication practices, meanings, and relational dynamics occurring within a specific institutional setting—in this case, communication relationships in the context of pesantren-based education. This approach is relevant because the study focuses on a bounded case, namely parent-child interpersonal communication within one pesantren, rather than seeking broad statistical generalization.

Pondok Pesantren Sumatera Thawalib Parabek was chosen as the research site because it has distinctive characteristics in its educational patterns and regulated communication arrangements between santri and parents. The pesantren applies a boarding-based education system in which students live separately from their families and communicate with parents through supervised channels, including homeroom teachers, dormitory supervisors, ustaz, or ustazah. This design is appropriate because the study does not seek to generalize statistically, but to understand how interpersonal communication is practised, mediated, and interpreted within a particular boarding-school context.

3.2. Research Location

This research was conducted at Pondok Pesantren Sumatera Thawalib Parabek, Bukittinggi, West Sumatra. This pesantren is one of the oldest Islamic boarding schools in West Sumatra, with a long-standing educational tradition and a boarding-based education system. The students at this pesantren live in dormitories during the teaching and learning process, so communication with their families is mostly through long-distance channels. This research was conducted from October to December 2024. During this period, the researcher observed the pesantren's communication arrangements, including scheduled communication opportunities, the use of phones belonging to homeroom teachers or dormitory supervisors, parental visits, and other forms of parent-child contact. The site was selected because its dormitory-based system, restrictions on students' personal mobile phone use, and structured communication arrangements with parents provide a relevant context for examining mediated parent-child interpersonal communication.

3.3. Research Subject

The participants of this research were parents and students (santri) at Pondok Pesantren Sumatera Thawalib Parabek. To obtain rich and relevant qualitative data, this study involved 10 parents and 10 students selected through purposive sampling. Purposive sampling was used because the study required participants who had direct experience of parent-child communication within the pesantren's regulated communication system. The selection of participants was based on the following criteria:

- 1) Parents who have children residing at Pondok Pesantren Sumatera Thawalib Parabek.
- 2) Students who have been living at the pesantren for at least one year.
- 3) Students aged 12 to 18, representing the adolescent age category.

The one-year minimum residence criterion was used to ensure that students had sufficient experience living in the pesantren and communicating with their parents in accordance with the institution's communication rules. Parents were selected because they had direct experience maintaining communication with their children while the children lived away from home. The parent participants included both mothers and fathers who communicated with their children through phone calls, text messages, video calls, package delivery, and direct visits. The santri participants were adolescent students who had experienced limited access to personal communication devices and had communicated with parents through pesantren-mediated channels. To protect participants' identities, all names used in the analysis were anonymized. Since several participants were minors, the study obtained permission from the pesantren, informed consent from parents or guardians, and assent from the students before data collection.

3.4. Data Collection Technique

To obtain in-depth and context-rich data, the data collection techniques used in this study were as follows:

1) In-Depth Interviews

Interviews were conducted separately with parents and students to explore their perceptions, experiences, and communication patterns. The interviews were conducted using a semi-structured interview guide to facilitate more flexible and in-depth information gathering. The interview questions focused on forms of communication, frequency and consistency of contact, emotional content of messages, perceived closeness, communication barriers, and the role of pesantren supervisors or homeroom teachers in mediating communication. Interviews with parents explored how they maintained emotional support, delivered advice, and interpreted limited communication with their children. Interviews with santri explored how they experienced communication with parents, how they interpreted parental messages, and whether the pesantren-mediated communication system affected their ability to express feelings. Interviews with students were conducted in a setting that ensured comfort, privacy, and voluntary participation.

2) Participant Observation

The researcher conducted observations at Pondok Pesantren Sumatera Thawalib Parabek to understand the social interactions among students, caregivers, and the pesantren environment, which may influence communication patterns with parents. Observation also focused on the communication facilities provided by the pesantren, the role of dormitory supervisors or homeroom teachers, visiting arrangements, and the institutional rules governing students' contact with their families. The observation also examined how communication access was organized, how supervisors facilitated or regulated students' communication with parents, and how institutional rules shaped the privacy and flexibility of communication. Field notes were used to record relevant interactions and contextual information.

3) Documentation

Data collection through documentation included messages sent by parents to their children, as well as communication-related materials that could provide insights into the communication patterns. Only communication materials that were voluntarily shared by participants and permitted for research use were examined. The documentation was used to support interview and observation data, particularly in identifying the tone, content, and emotional meaning of parent-child communication. Personal or sensitive information was removed to maintain

confidentiality. Recorded conversations or private messages were not used without explicit permission from the relevant participants.

3.5. Data Analysis Technique

The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis. The steps of data analysis were as follows:

1) Transcription

The researcher converted the results of interviews and observations into text for further analysis. Interview recordings, interview notes, and observation notes were organized by participant category and data source.

2) Coding

The researcher marked parts of the data that were relevant to the research focus, namely interpersonal communication, emotional closeness, communication media, pesantren mediation, and the factors that influence such communication. Initial codes were developed around communication forms, message content, emotional responses, communication consistency, pesantren mediation, privacy, and religious-cultural values.

3) Theme Development

The researcher grouped data categories into relevant themes to answer the research questions. The emerging themes included forms of communication, message quality, communication frequency, institutional mediation, religious and cultural values, and emotional responses of santri. Additional attention was given to themes related to privacy, supervised communication, children's freedom to express feelings, and the dual role of pesantren actors as both facilitators and regulators of communication.

4) Interpretation

The researcher interpreted the grouped data to identify patterns and meanings related to parent-child communication in the pesantren, and how emotional closeness is maintained. The interpretation was guided by the theoretical frameworks of interpersonal, family, and mediated communication in pesantren settings. The interpretation was conducted by comparing interview data, observation notes, and documentation to ensure consistency across data sources. This triangulation helped strengthen the credibility of the findings. The researcher also rechecked the consistency of codes and themes during the analysis to ensure that the interpretation remained grounded in participants' experiences.

3.6. Ethical Considerations and Trustworthiness

This study followed ethical principles in conducting research with parents and adolescent students. Before data collection, permission was obtained from the pesantren. Parents or guardians provided consent for the participation of santri, and santri were asked for their assent. Participants were informed about the study's purpose, the voluntary nature of their participation, and their right to withdraw from the research. Participants' identities were protected through anonymization, and sensitive personal information was removed from interview excerpts and documentation.

To ensure trustworthiness, the study applied data triangulation by comparing interview data, observation notes, and documentation. The researcher also maintained field notes to record contextual information during observation. The use of multiple data sources helped strengthen

the credibility of the findings and provided a more complete understanding of parent-child interpersonal communication in the pesantren setting.

4. Results

4.1. General Overview of the Research Location

Pondok Pesantren Sumatera Thawalib Parabek is an Islamic boarding school located in Banuhampu, Agam Regency, West Sumatra. Initially known as Madrasah Sumatera Thawalib Parabek, it was founded in 1910 by Sheikh Ibrahim Musa. The pesantren offers education at the madrasah tsanawiyah and aliyah levels, as well as Ma'had Aly. Students at the tsanawiyah and aliyah levels live in male and female dormitories, making the pesantren a fully residential educational environment.

This dormitory-based system is important for understanding parent-child communication in this study. Students' daily activities, learning routines, social interactions, and access to communication are organized through institutional rules. As students are not allowed to use personal mobile phones freely, communication with parents is mediated through homeroom teachers, dormitory supervisors, scheduled communication opportunities, parental visits, and other supervised arrangements. Therefore, the pesantren is not merely the physical location of the study, but also the institutional setting that shapes communication between parents and children.

The pesantren's values, including taqwa, himmah, ahlul ilmi wal ibadah, wara', amanah, lein, istiqamah, and birrun, emphasize piety, discipline, trustworthiness, gentleness, consistency, and care for others.

In practice, they shape how students are expected to speak, behave, respect teachers, and respond to their parents. Thus, interpersonal communication in this pesantren is shaped not only by distance and communication rules, but also by religious values, cultural expectations, and the disciplined environment of boarding-school life.

4.2. Forms of Interpersonal Communication between Parents and Children at Pondok Pesantren Sumatera Thawalib Parabek

This study identifies various forms of interpersonal communication between parents and children at Pondok Pesantren Sumatera Thawalib Parabek, particularly within the pesantren's policy that restricts students' use of personal mobile phones. The findings show that parent-child communication is maintained through several channels, including phone calls via homeroom teachers or dormitory supervisors, text messages, video calls, package delivery, and direct visits. These forms of communication function not only as channels for exchanging information but also as emotional mechanisms that help maintain closeness between parents and children despite physical separation.

The pesantren's prohibition on students bringing personal mobile phones creates a specific communication pattern. Parents and children cannot communicate freely at any time, but depend on access facilitated by pesantren actors. This condition makes communication more structured, supervised, and sometimes limited in duration. At the same time, the findings indicate that such mediation does not automatically weaken parent-child closeness. Instead, the emotional meaning of communication depends on how messages are delivered, how children interpret them, and how pesantren supervisors facilitate access between students and parents.

Across the data, communication was meaningful for santri when it contained emotional support, prayers, advice, motivation, and expressions of parental attention. Short phone calls, text messages, video calls, packages, and visits were interpreted by students as signs that their

parents remained present in their lives. However, the findings also show that mediated communication involved certain limitations, particularly in relation to privacy, short communication time, and children's freedom to express personal feelings. Thus, the forms of communication identified in this study need to be understood not only as media of contact, but also as relational practices shaped by parental care, pesantren mediation, and santri's emotional responses.

4.2.1. Communication Through the Homeroom Teacher's or Dorm Supervisor's Phone

At Pondok Pesantren Sumatera Thawalib Parabek, communication between parents and children is facilitated through the mobile phones of homeroom teachers or dormitory supervisors, as students are not allowed to bring personal phones. This arrangement makes the homeroom teacher or dormitory supervisor an important mediator in parent-child communication. This communication is scheduled but can also take place at any time if there is an urgent need or a specific condition that requires emotional support from the parents. Each week, students are scheduled to contact their parents using the phone of a supervisor or homeroom teacher, usually on weekends or outside learning hours. Although it was conducted for a limited time, this communication holds significant emotional value for both students and parents.

The findings indicate that the emotional value of this communication lies not only in the opportunity to speak, but also in the content and tone of the conversation. For students, the opportunity to hear their parents' voices provides reassurance, reduces homesickness, and strengthens their sense of being remembered by the family. For parents, the call becomes a way to check the child's condition, provide moral support, and reduce anxiety caused by physical separation. The conversations are not only informative but also contain emotional support, advice, and motivational reinforcement, thereby strengthening interpersonal closeness.

The conversations usually include several recurring themes. First, parents and children ask about health, daily activities, and the child's adjustment to life in pesantren. This routine checking-in signals parental care and helps students feel that their daily experiences remain important to the family. Second, some students use the call to share feelings about friendships, academic activities, homesickness, or adaptation to dormitory life. Third, parents provide motivation and emotional support through simple but meaningful expressions, such as reminding children to study well, take care of their health, and remain patient. Fourth, prayers and religious advice are frequently included in the conversation. In the pesantren context, such advice is not merely instructional, but also functions as emotional reassurance and moral support.

However, the mediated nature of this communication also creates certain limitations. Because students use the phone of a homeroom teacher or dormitory supervisor, the conversation is not always fully private. The limited time available and the presence or awareness of other students waiting for their turn may affect how openly santri express their feelings. Some students may choose to share general information rather than personal problems because the communication setting is supervised or semi-public. Therefore, this form of communication contains both support and constraint: it enables contact with parents, but it may also shape what can be said and how freely children can speak.

In addition to scheduled times, communication is also allowed at any time if a student feels the need to talk to their parents, for instance, when they are ill, facing academic stress, or feeling emotionally unsettled. Homeroom teachers and dormitory supervisors demonstrate empathy and openness by providing students with access to communication without always having to wait for the weekly schedule. This flexibility shows that pesantren actors do not act only as rule

enforcers but also as emotional facilitators, helping maintain parent-child closeness within the boundaries of institutional discipline.

Communication via a homeroom teacher's or supervisor's phone is therefore more than a practical communication tool. It functions as a meaningful emotional space in building interpersonal closeness between parents and children. The conversations encompass news, confiding, advice, prayers, and motivation, all of which create a sense of safety, affection, and continuous support despite the physical distance. At the same time, this communication remains shaped by institutional mediation, limited privacy, and regulated access. This structured yet flexible system reflects how parental care, pesantren mediation, and students' emotional needs intersect in the everyday communication practices of boarding-school life.

4.2.2. Text Messages through the Homeroom Teacher's or Supervisor's Phone

In addition to direct communication via voice or video calls, many parents also use text messages, particularly WhatsApp messages, sent to the homeroom teacher's or dormitory supervisor's phone number as a form of indirect communication with their children. This form of communication is indirect because the message does not reach the child immediately via a personal device. Instead, it passes through pesantren actors who receive, filter, and deliver the message to the student. This method is often chosen when parents do not have the opportunity to speak directly or want to send brief information, reminders, prayers, and emotional support to their children. Unlike phone calls or video calls, text messages do not require both parties to be available at the same time. This makes them a practical channel for communication within the pesantren's regulated system.

The pesantren facilitates this communication by providing parents with the official phone numbers of homeroom teachers or supervisors at the beginning of the academic period. Through these numbers, parents can send messages that will later be delivered to the students by the supervisors, either verbally or by showing the message directly. This arrangement makes text messaging an important form of mediated communication, but it also means the message's privacy depends on how the supervisor manages its delivery. The content of the messages generally falls into three main categories.

First, parents send practical information about pocket money, financial transfers, or other daily needs. Although these messages appear administrative, they also carry emotional meaning because they show that parents continue to pay attention to the child's everyday life.

Second, parents send prayers, motivation, and advice. These messages often include reminders to study seriously, maintain health, pray regularly, and remain patient in pesantren life. For students, such messages function as moral and emotional reinforcement, especially when they face academic pressure, homesickness, or adjustment difficulties.

Third, parents share family updates, such as the condition of family members or important news from home. These updates help students feel connected to family life even when they are physically separated.

The delivery of these messages depends on the homeroom teacher or dormitory supervisor serving as a communication mediator. After receiving the message, the supervisor usually delivers its content verbally to the student or shows it directly on the phone screen. In some cases, if the message is personal, the supervisor allows the student to read it directly. In this sense, the supervisor acts not only as a technical intermediary but also as a gatekeeper of communication. This role can help ensure that messages reach students, but it may also influence how private, immediate, and emotionally open the communication feels to the child.

The students expressed that although they do not hear their parents' voices directly, text messages still bring comfort, encouragement, and a sense of being cared for. Many of them look forward to messages from home, especially on days like before exams or when they feel emotionally drained. This finding shows that emotional closeness is not always produced through direct conversation; it can also be maintained through short mediated messages that carry care, reassurance, and family connection.

However, text-message communication also has limitations. Because messages pass through homeroom teachers or dormitory supervisors, students may not always receive them immediately. In addition, sensitive or personal matters may be difficult to communicate through this channel because the message is mediated by an adult outside the family. For this reason, text messages are effective for maintaining routine emotional contact and practical support, but they may be less suitable for deeper personal disclosure. Thus, text messaging in this pesantren context functions as both an emotional bridge and an institutionally mediated form of communication.

4.2.3. Video Calls Coordinated by the Pesantren

The pesantren facilitates communication via regular and video calls through a flexible yet supervised arrangement. In the practice of interpersonal communication between parents and children at Pondok Pesantren Sumatera Thawalib Parabek, communication via telephone, whether regular voice or video calls, is not limited to a single mode of interaction. This means the santri are free to choose whether to communicate with their parents via voice or video call, depending on their comfort and emotional state at the time. This flexibility shows that communication in the pesantren is not limited to one mode of interaction but is adjusted to students' conditions and the availability of supervised communication access.

The pesantren provides each homeroom teacher and dormitory supervisor with a mobile phone and a special number specifically intended for communication between santri and parents. Additionally, santri are allowed to use the personal numbers of the ustaz/ustazah supervisors, as long as they are used within the context and time that have been determined. This provides santri with the flexibility to access communication without requiring them to own personal phones. However, this flexibility remains embedded within the pesantren's supervision system. Students do not communicate via private devices; they do so through access mediated by teachers or dormitory supervisors.

One female dormitory supervisor explained:

"The pesantren facilitates us with a special phone, so the santri can use it when the time comes. If they want to video call, that is allowed. If they want a regular voice call, that's fine too. We try to be flexible because we understand that they need communication with their family."

This statement shows that pesantren actors not only regulate communication, but also recognize the emotional need of santri to remain connected with their families.

From the santri's perspective, video calls are one of the preferred forms of communication because they provide visual interaction that gives a more real sense of closeness. Through video calls, santri can see their parents' facial expressions, which brings a sense of calm, comfort, and deeper emotional motivation. This visual contact helps reduce homesickness and strengthens the feeling that parents remain present despite physical distance. Parents also benefit from this flexibility. They can not only hear their child's news but also see the child's condition and facial

expression directly. This helps ease worries, especially for parents whose children have just entered the pesantren. Seeing their child directly, parents may feel more confident that their child is safe, healthy, and emotionally stable.

The visual dimension of video calls gives this form of communication a stronger emotional quality than ordinary voice calls. Seeing parents' faces allows students to feel a more immediate sense of presence, while parents can assess their child's emotional state through visual cues. In this sense, video calls serve not only as a communication medium but also as a form of emotional reassurance for both parties.

However, video calls remain part of a mediated communication system. Since students use phones provided by homeroom teachers or dormitory supervisors, the communication may not be fully private. The limited time available, the presence of other students waiting for access, and the awareness that the device belongs to a pesantren actor may influence how openly santri express personal problems. Therefore, video calls provide a stronger emotional connection than ordinary voice calls, but they do not eliminate the limitations of supervised communication.

Flexibility in communication type is a significant aspect of the interpersonal communication system at the pesantren, as it not only facilitates efficient communication but also adapts to the emotional needs of santri and parents. The availability of both voice and video calls indicates that the pesantren's communication system seeks to balance institutional discipline with emotional support. Thus, video calls show how the pesantren communication system attempts to balance discipline, supervision, and emotional support for santri.

4.2.4. Package Delivery as a Form of Symbolic and Emotional Communication

Besides verbal communication through phone calls, text messages, and video calls, package delivery from parents to children also serves as a form of symbolic and emotional communication. Although it does not involve direct conversation, this form of communication reflects parental attention, affection, and emotional involvement in the child's life at the pesantren. In this study, packages are understood not merely as material objects, but as carriers of relational meaning between parents and santri.

Packages from parents are usually sent via an expedition service or a travel agent to the pesantren's official address. Upon arrival, these packages are received by security officers at the front guard post. After that, the name of the santri receiving the package is recorded, and information about the package's arrival is conveyed to the santri through the dormitory supervisor or directly when the santri goes to the security post. This distribution mechanism shows that even non-verbal and symbolic forms of parent-child communication remain mediated by the pesantren's institutional system.

The contents of the packages vary, including snacks, personal belongings, books, clothing, and other daily necessities. However, the emotional value is stronger when parents include small handwritten letters or prayers, which make the santri feel cared for and help them remain emotionally connected. Although these items have practical value, their emotional meaning is often more important for santri. Packages become more meaningful when parents include handwritten notes, prayers, or personal messages. Such additions transform the package from a material delivery into an expression of parental presence, care, and emotional support. These items and written notes represent parental presence in a situation where direct physical interaction is limited.

For the santri, the package is not just an item sent from home; it becomes a substitute for the parents' physical presence. In many cases, when santri feel homesick or under academic pressure, receiving a package from home provides emotional support. The timing of the package

also shapes its emotional meaning. Packages received before examinations, during illness, or when students feel homesick may provide stronger emotional support because they arrive at moments when students need reassurance. The meaning of the package is therefore shaped not only by its contents, but also by the timing, intention, and emotional memory attached to it.

In the context of interpersonal communication, parental package delivery is a symbolic act that conveys love, support, and the strengthening of family values. Even without explicit words, the message conveyed to the child can be understood as a sign that the parents remain attentive and emotionally present. Package delivery also shows that interpersonal communication in pesantren is not limited to spoken or digital interaction. Care can be communicated through material and symbolic forms. Food, clothes, books, handwritten notes, and prayers may communicate affection more quietly, but still meaningfully. These objects help maintain emotional closeness because they allow students to feel that their parents continue to care for their daily needs and emotional condition despite physical distance.

However, package delivery also remains part of the pesantren's mediated communication system. Parents cannot deliver items directly to the dormitory without following institutional procedures, and students receive packages through security officers or dormitory supervisors. This process shows that symbolic communication between parents and children is supported, recorded, and regulated by pesantren actors. Thus, package delivery serves both as a personal expression of parental affection and an institutionally mediated form of family communication.

Package delivery is therefore an important and highly valued form of interpersonal communication in the pesantren environment. Although not conducted through direct verbal exchange, this type of communication has strong symbolic value in conveying love, care, and emotional support from parents to children. Thus, package delivery extends the meaning of interpersonal communication beyond speech and digital media, showing that emotional closeness can also be maintained through material and symbolic expressions of care. Packages help bridge emotional distance by making parental attention visible and tangible in the everyday life of santri.

4.2.5. Visit as a Form of Direct Communication

Besides communication through electronic and mediated channels, direct visits from parents to the pesantren also serve as an important form of interpersonal communication between parents and children. At Pondok Pesantren Sumatera Thawalib Parabek, these visits are scheduled and regulated as part of the institution's communication policy. Unlike phone calls, text messages, or video calls, direct visits allow parents and children to interact face to face without technological mediation, although the timing and duration of the visit remain regulated by the pesantren. This means that direct interaction is emotionally more open than mediated communication, but it still takes place within the boundaries of pesantren rules, visiting schedules, and supervision.

The pesantren schedules Parental visits. On the day of the visit, parents may take their children out of the dormitory for a limited time, with a curfew until 17:00 WIB. After that, the santri must return to the dormitory to continue pesantren activities. This arrangement shows that the institution supports direct communication, but it still takes place within the boundaries of pesantren discipline and supervision. The pesantren, therefore, supports direct family communication while continuing to regulate the time, place, and duration of interaction.

During the visit, parents and children usually engage in simple yet meaningful activities, such as eating together at cafes or restaurants around Bukittinggi, walking or sitting together in public spaces, shopping for the santri's personal needs, and sharing feelings through more open

and relaxed conversations. These activities become important moments to strengthen emotional bonds, as the santri feels heard, cared for, and still part of family life despite living far from home. The visit, therefore, provides a relational space where parents and children can express affection, concern, advice, and emotional reassurance more freely than in mediated communication. Through direct visits, santri can express feelings, share difficulties, receive advice, and experience parental affection through physical presence, eye contact, and shared activities.

This monthly visit is not only a way to relieve longing but also functions as emotional support for the santri. Santri who previously felt stressed due to pesantren routine or homesickness usually become calmer and more motivated after meeting with their parents. For parents, visits also provide an opportunity to observe their child's physical and emotional condition more directly. This is particularly important because mediated communication may not always allow parents to understand the child's feelings or situation fully. The pesantren also supports this activity because it recognizes that a healthy family relationship can strengthen the emotional stability and learning spirit of the santri. Supervisors and homeroom teachers usually remind santri to keep the visiting time and return on time. Thus, visits are positioned as a negotiated form of direct interpersonal communication: emotionally open for families, but institutionally structured by the pesantren.

Monthly visits by parents to the pesantren are one of the most direct and emotionally significant forms of interpersonal communication because they allow face-to-face interaction without intermediaries. Activities like eating together, walking, and casual conversation are important ways to strengthen emotional closeness, provide psychological support, and maintain family bonds. Although conducted only once a month, these visits have a significant impact on the mental health and motivation to learn of the santri at the pesantren. The findings suggest that direct visits complement mediated communication by restoring physical presence and providing a more direct emotional encounter between parents and children. While phone calls, text messages, video calls, and packages help maintain everyday emotional connection, visits renew the parent-child bond through shared time, direct conversation, and embodied expressions of care. In this sense, visits serve not only as a moment to relieve longing but also as an important mechanism for sustaining emotional stability, trust, and a sense of belonging among santri.

4.3. Factors Affecting the Effectiveness of Interpersonal Communication

Research findings show that several factors influence the effectiveness of interpersonal communication between parents and children at Pondok Pesantren Sumatera Thawalib Parabek, particularly within a communication system regulated and mediated by pesantren actors. These factors include the quality of messages, the consistency of communication, and the role of religious and Minangkabau cultural values in shaping the content and manner of parent-child interaction. The findings also show that pesantren mediation itself affects communication and provides access while imposing. These factors do not work separately. Instead, they interact in shaping how parents express care, how santri receive emotional support, and how closeness is maintained despite limited communication access.

4.3.1. The Quality of the Message Delivered

The quality of the message parents deliver plays an important role in shaping the emotional closeness between parents and santri. In this study, message quality refers to the presence of affection, empathy, reassurance, motivation, prayer, and moral advice in parent-child communication. Messages that are not merely informative but also affectionate, supportive, and

spiritually meaningful can strengthen emotional bonds, even if delivered through brief, mediated communication. One student revealed:

“Even though we can only talk for a short time, I feel calm and loved when my mother says she always prays for me every day and mentions my name in her prayers.”

This statement shows that emotional closeness is not determined solely by the length of communication, but by the meaning contained in parental messages. A short conversation may still have strong emotional meaning when it contains reassurance, prayer, and parental attention. Many parents take advantage of the short opportunity to convey prayers, hopes, and spiritual support. Messages like “keep praying, study sincerely, and do not forget to pray for your parents” are considered expressions of affection and a sense of parental presence that continues by santri.

One parent of a student said:

“I cannot talk long with my child, also don’t want to be rude to his friends who are waiting in line, but we routinely call, or the child calls to make sure the children are healthy, and no problems are happening.”

The quote indicates that parents are aware of the limited communication time and the presence of other students waiting to access it. As a result, they tend to prioritize messages that are concise yet emotionally meaningful, such as asking about health, offering reassurance, and providing prayer-based support. Thus, message quality becomes important not because it replaces frequency, but because it gives emotional depth to limited communication.

4.3.2. Consistency of Communication

The consistency of communication also affects the perception of emotional closeness. Although communication cannot be done every day, a consistent schedule, such as once a week or once every two weeks, has helped maintain the connection between child and parent. Many parents say that they adjust their schedule to call at the time set by the pesantren. In this context, consistency does not necessarily mean daily contact, but rather predictable and reliable communication that gives children a sense of being remembered and cared for.

One mother said:

“We know the children are not allowed to hold phones, so we already know which days we can call. I always set aside time that day, so my child knows that I am waiting and care about them.”

This statement shows that parents adjust their communication practices to the pesantren’s rules. By setting aside time according to the permitted schedule, parents create a predictable routine for the child. For santri, this routine produces emotional anticipation because they know when their parents are likely to contact them.

The students also recognize the importance of this routine communication. Some of them reported feeling safer and more appreciated when they knew their parents tried to call regularly, even for just 5–10 minutes.

"I am happy if my parents call on Friday because that day is a holiday, that is our usual time to talk. It feels like we are still close, even though we don't meet."

This finding suggests that regularity creates emotional anticipation. Students not only value the act of communication itself, but also the certainty that their parents will make time for them. Consistent communication, therefore, becomes a relational routine that helps preserve emotional closeness despite limited access. Therefore, communication consistency becomes a relational routine that helps preserve family bonds despite limited access and physical distance.

4.3.3. The Role of Religious and Cultural Values in Communication

Religious values and local Minangkabau culture provide a strong framework in shaping communication patterns between parents and children. In the pesantren environment, religious values emphasize praying for one another, maintaining proper manners toward parents, and respecting teachers. This is reflected in the messages parents deliver to children, which often include moral advice, calls to remain patient and obedient, and expressions of spiritual love. Parents often use communication opportunities not only to ask about health or daily activities, but also to remind children to pray, be patient, maintain discipline, and continue learning sincerely.

One mother said:

"When we talk over the phone, I remind my child to keep spirits up and stay healthy. We know the child misses home; we miss it too. But we always strengthen the child to stay consistent and pray for each other."

The statement shows that communication between parents and children is not separated from religious language and moral guidance. Parental messages often combine emotional support with reminders to be patient, disciplined, prayerful, and committed to learning. Parents express affection not only through direct emotional words, but also through prayer, advice, and reminders to remain patient and committed to pesantren life. For santri, such messages can provide comfort because they connect family affection with religious meaning.

Besides that, Minangkabau customary values that emphasize respect for parents and teachers also shape how children respond to their parents' messages. Many students admit they are more careful with their attitude and choice of words when talking to parents over the phone, as a form of respect.

"When I talk with my parents through the ustazah's phone, I try to speak well and politely because we are taught to respect parents. Even though it's only for a short time, it is enough to cure the feeling of missing my parents."

This finding indicates that interpersonal communication in the pesantren is shaped not only by emotional needs, but also by normative expectations. Religious teachings and Minangkabau cultural values encourage students to communicate politely, listen carefully, and respond respectfully. These values make parent-child communication more than an exchange of information; it becomes a space for expressing affection, moral responsibility, obedience, and family belonging. Religious teachings and Minangkabau cultural values, therefore, influence not

only what parents and children say, but also how they say it and how the message is emotionally interpreted.

4.3.4. Pesantren Mediation and Communication Constraints

In addition to message quality, consistency, and religious and cultural values, the pesantren's mediation system also affects the effectiveness of parent-child communication. Communication often depends on the availability of phones owned by homeroom teachers, dormitory supervisors, ustaz, or ustazah. This arrangement helps students maintain contact with parents, but it also creates certain limitations.

The main limitations are time and privacy. Since many students may need to use the same communication facility, conversations are often brief. Students may also be aware that other friends are waiting or that communication is taking place through a device owned by an adult supervisor. This situation may affect how freely santri express personal problems, sadness, homesickness, or anxiety. As a result, some students may focus on general topics such as health, study, and daily activities, while deeper emotional issues may remain unspoken.

However, pesantren mediation does not function only as a restriction. Homeroom teachers and dormitory supervisors also play an important role in facilitating communication, delivering messages, arranging access, and allowing flexibility in urgent or emotionally difficult situations. Therefore, the effectiveness of interpersonal communication in this setting depends not only on parents and children, but also on how pesantren actors manage communication access with sensitivity to students' emotional needs.

Overall, the effectiveness of parent-child interpersonal communication in this pesantren is shaped by the interaction between message quality, communication consistency, religious-cultural values, and institutional mediation. These factors explain why limited communication can still maintain emotional closeness, while also showing that supervised communication may restrict privacy and emotional openness. Thus, communication in this context is both supportive and constrained: it connects children with their parents, but the rules, schedules, and mediation of the pesantren also shape it.

4.3.5. Support from the Pesantren System

The pesantren also plays an important role in creating a healthy communication space between parents and children. Although students are not allowed to have personal phones, the pesantren provides certain times and communication channels so communication can be maintained. This facility, although limited, helps maintain the continuity and structure of family communication. The findings show that the pesantren does not merely restrict communication, but also regulates and facilitates it so that contact between parents and children remains possible within the boundaries of institutional discipline. In this sense, the pesantren functions not only as a regulator of student discipline, but also as a mediator that enables parent-child communication to continue under supervised conditions.

One pesantren caretaker stated:

"We understand the importance of communication between children and parents, so we facilitate a weekly phone time. Usually, we give students the freedom to call or contact parents outside study hours. Usually, children are used to using the ustazah's or ustad's phone as long as the usage is clear."

This statement indicates that communication access is negotiated between institutional rules and students' emotional needs. The pesantren provides supervised communication channels, but also allows flexibility when students need to contact their parents outside regular schedules. This flexibility is especially important when students are ill, emotionally unsettled, homesick, or facing academic pressure. In this way, dormitory supervisors, homeroom teachers, and caregivers serve as communication gatekeepers and emotional facilitators. They not only enforce communication rules but also help students remain emotionally connected to their families when support is needed.

Students and parents both appreciate this system. They feel supported by the pesantren policy that allows periodic communication, which also strengthens trust between the family and the pesantren. For parents, the existence of a structured communication system reduces anxiety because they know that their children can still be reached when necessary. Parents also know who to contact when they need information about their child's condition. In this way, the communication system strengthens trust between parents and the pesantren because families see that the institution provides channels for emotional and informational contact.

For students, the availability of mediated access creates a sense of security because they are not fully disconnected from family support. Even though they cannot use personal phones freely, they know that communication with parents remains possible through teachers, supervisors, or scheduled arrangements. This sense of possible access is important because it reduces the feeling of isolation and helps students adapt to dormitory life.

However, the support provided by the pesantren system also contains limitations. Because communication takes place through institutional channels, access depends on the availability of supervisors, phones, schedules, and pesantren rules. Students may also feel less free to discuss personal or sensitive matters when adults outside the family mediate communication. Thus, the pesantren system supports parent-child communication, but it also shapes the limits of privacy and emotional openness.

Thus, the pesantren system becomes an important institutional factor that supports the continuity and effectiveness of interpersonal communication. It provides the structure that makes communication possible while also regulating when and how it occurs. The findings show that parent-child closeness in the pesantren setting is not maintained solely by parents and children, but also depends on how pesantren actors manage communication access with sensitivity, flexibility, and attention to students' emotional needs.

4.4. Interpersonal Communication Model Between Parents and Children in Building Emotional Relationships

This model describes the flow and dynamics of interpersonal communication formed between parents and children (santri) in the context of dormitory-based education at Pondok Pesantren Sumatera Thawalib Parabek. Based on the findings, this study develops a contextual model of interpersonal communication between parents and children in the pesantren setting. The model explains how emotional closeness is built and maintained when parent-child communication occurs under conditions of physical separation, limited access to personal communication devices, and institutional mediation. The model is not intended to present a linear or causal process, but to show the interaction among several elements that shape emotional communication between parents and santri.

The model consists of five interconnected components: parental communication initiative, pesantren mediation, communication forms, santri emotional responses, and parent-child emotional closeness. These components show that emotional closeness in the pesantren context

is not produced only by frequent contact between parents and children. Rather, it emerges from the interaction between parental care, mediated access, message quality, religious-cultural meaning, and the way santri interpret communication from home.

First, parental communication initiative refers to parents' efforts to remain emotionally present in their children's lives despite physical distance. Parents maintain contact through voice calls, video calls, WhatsApp messages, package delivery, and direct visits. These forms of communication carry not only practical information, but also prayers, advice, motivation, concern, and emotional reassurance. Through these initiatives, parents attempt to show that their children are still remembered, supported, and included in family life.

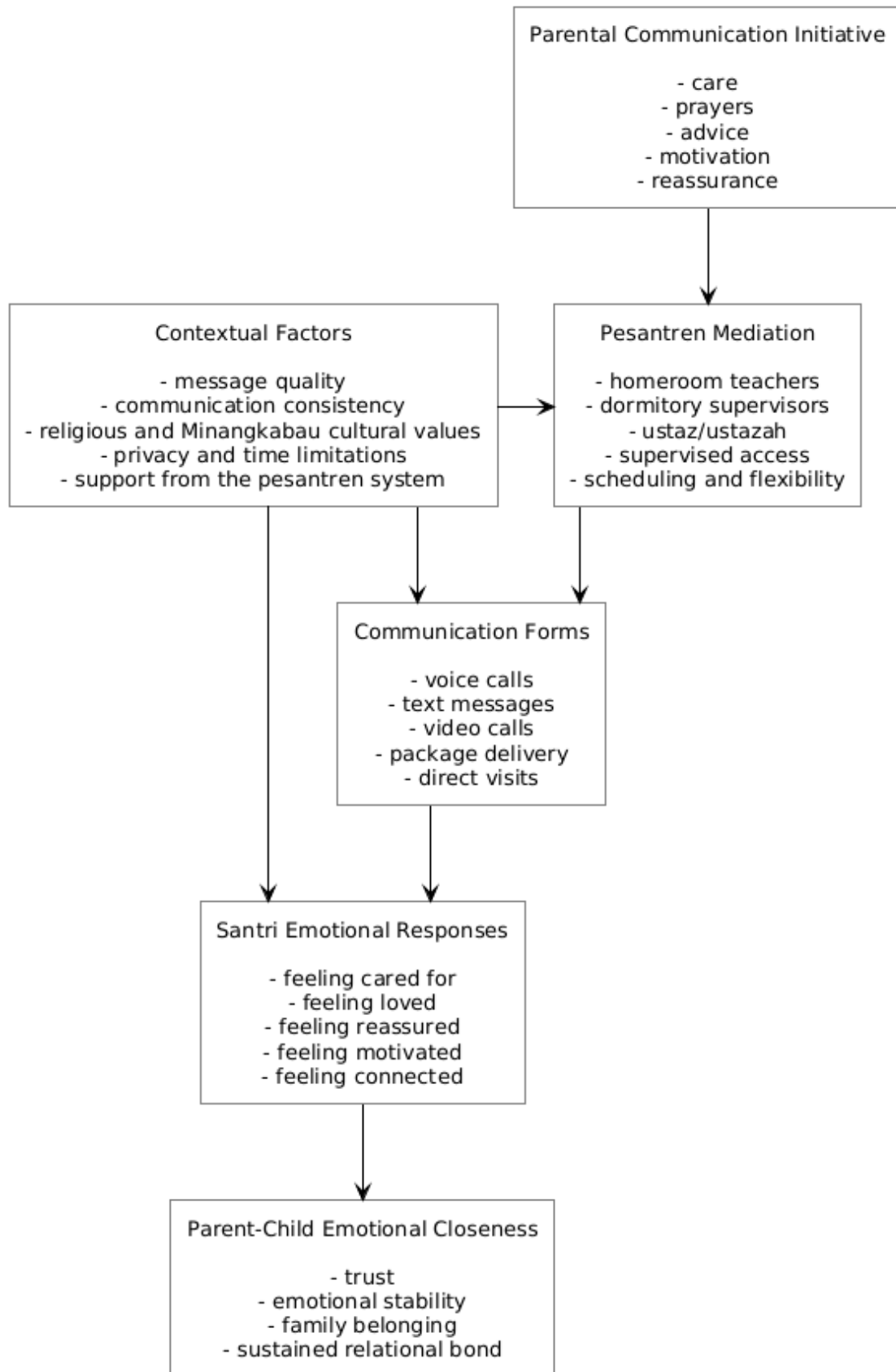
Second, homeroom teachers, dormitory supervisors, and caregivers act as communication mediators. They provide access to phones or video calls, forward text messages, monitor communication in accordance with pesantren rules, and offer flexibility when students face urgent or emotionally difficult situations. Their role is important because parent-child communication in the pesantren does not occur through private access, but through supervised institutional mediation. In this model, pesantren mediation refers to the role of homeroom teachers, dormitory supervisors, ustaz, ustazah, caregivers, and institutional rules in organizing parent-child communication. These actors provide access to phones, facilitate video calls, forward text messages, manage package delivery, regulate visiting schedules, and allow flexibility in urgent or emotionally difficult situations. Their role is central because communication in the pesantren does not occur through fully private or spontaneous access, but through supervised and structured institutional arrangements.

Third, communication forms refer to the media and practices through which parents and santri maintain contact. These include voice calls, text messages, video calls, package delivery, and direct visits. Each form has a different emotional function. Voice calls allow children to hear parental reassurance; text messages maintain brief but meaningful contact; video calls provide visual presence; packages make parental care visible and tangible; and visits restore physical presence through direct interaction. Together, these forms create a layered communication system that combines verbal, visual, material, symbolic, and face-to-face expressions of care.

Fourth, santri emotional responses refer to how students interpret and emotionally receive communication from their parents. The findings show that santri do not receive communication only as information. They interpret calls, messages, packages, and visits as signs of affection, parental presence, moral support, and family belonging. These responses include feeling cared for, feeling loved, becoming calmer, feeling motivated, and feeling less isolated from the family. However, the model also recognizes that supervised communication may limit privacy and influence how freely santri express sadness, homesickness, anxiety, or personal problems.

Fifth, parent-child emotional closeness is the relational outcome of this process. Emotional closeness is reflected in mutual trust, students' sense of being supported, their comfort in maintaining contact with parents, and their emotional stability while living in the pesantren. This closeness is maintained not only through the availability of communication media but also through the interaction among parental initiative, pesantren mediation, communication quality, and santri's emotional interpretation.

Therefore, the model shows that interpersonal communication in the pesantren setting is both supportive and regulated. It supports parent-child closeness by providing channels for care, advice, prayer, and emotional reassurance. At the same time, it remains regulated by pesantren rules, schedules, supervision, and limited privacy. This dual character is central to understanding parent-child communication in boarding-based Islamic education. This model is presented in Figure 1.



Source: Processed by researchers (2024)

Figure 1. Contextual Model of Mediated Interpersonal Communication Between Parents and Santri in Building Emotional Closeness

Source: Processed by researchers (2024)

5. Discussion

Effective interpersonal communication between parents and children has been proven to be an important means in maintaining emotional closeness despite distance. The findings of this study show that interpersonal communication between parents and santri at Pondok Pesantren Sumatera Thawalib Parabek is not merely about maintaining contact across distance. It is a mediated relational process shaped by pesantren rules, available communication facilities, the role of homeroom teachers and dormitory supervisors, religious values, Minangkabau cultural norms, and the emotional responses of santri. This finding extends previous studies on family communication, which emphasize that strong parent-child relationships are built through consistent, attentive, and supportive interaction (Lwin et al., 2021; Napier et al., 2025; Pariera & Turner, 2020; Tania et al., 2024). In the pesantren context, however, such interaction does not occur freely or privately. It is organized through institutional schedules, supervised devices, and adult mediation. Therefore, emotional closeness in this setting is not produced only by communication frequency, but by how limited communication is made meaningful through care, reassurance, prayer, advice, and symbolic expressions of parental presence.

This research confirms that quality communication, including expressions of love, attention, and spiritual support, can create a sense of security and emotional closeness between parents and children, even when communication frequency is limited. These results reinforce DeVito's (2019) view that effective interpersonal communication bridges feelings and thoughts between the communicator and the communicatee. However, the findings also show that these elements operate differently in a regulated boarding-school environment. Openness, for example, does not always mean unrestricted self-disclosure because santri often communicate through phones owned by homeroom teachers or dormitory supervisors. Empathy and support are also expressed through short yet emotionally dense messages, such as prayers, reminders to maintain health, sincere advice to study, and reassurance that parents continue to remember their children. Thus, in restricted communication settings, message quality becomes important not as a replacement for frequency, but as a means of adding emotional depth to brief, mediated interaction.

The findings also highlight the dual role of pesantren mediation. On the one hand, homeroom teachers, dormitory supervisors, ustaz, and ustazah facilitate parent-child communication by providing phone access, forwarding messages, coordinating video calls, managing package delivery, and allowing flexibility in urgent or emotionally difficult situations. Their role helps prevent santri from being emotionally disconnected from their families. On the other hand, mediation also creates limits. Because communication takes place through institutional devices and under supervised arrangements, santri may not always feel fully free to express sadness, homesickness, anxiety, or personal problems. This condition shows that pesantren mediation is both enabling and constraining. It enables communication by providing access, but it also shapes the boundaries of privacy and emotional openness.

This point is important because previous studies on long-distance or mediated family communication often emphasize the role of media in sustaining relational connection (Elias et al., 2021; Gruber et al., 2022; Stieger et al., 2023). The present study adds that, in pesantren, the issue is not only the availability of media but also who controls access to it, when communication is allowed, how long it can take place, and whether children feel free to speak. Voice calls, WhatsApp messages, and video calls are useful for maintaining emotional connection, but their emotional effectiveness depends on the institutional context in which they are used. A phone call may provide comfort, but it may also be shaped by limited time, the presence of other students waiting, and the awareness that the device belongs to a pesantren actor. Therefore, mediated

communication in pesantren must be analyzed as a social and institutional practice, not simply as the use of digital technology.

Religious values embraced in the pesantren environment also play an important role in shaping family communication patterns. As suggested by Hidayat et al. (2024) and Schrodtt (2021), religious institutions such as pesantren not only play a role in formal education but also shape the moral and spiritual orientation of communication. Communication conveyed in the form of prayers, advice, and hopes, inserted in brief messages, is symbolic and full of meaning. Islamic values that uphold manners, politeness, and respect for parents strengthen the foundation of this emotional closeness and make communication a means of fostering children's spirituality in the pesantren environment. In this study, prayers and religious advice are not merely religious expressions. They function as emotional support, moral guidance, and relational reassurance. Spiritual language becomes part of the way parents express affection. Parents may not always express their emotions directly, but they communicate love through prayers, advice, and reminders to maintain worship and good character. For santri, these messages are interpreted as signs that their parents remain emotionally present despite physical separation.

The Minangkabau cultural context adds another important dimension. In this culture, respect for parents and teachers becomes part of customary values deeply embedded in society. As Watts and Hovick (2023) explain, family communication patterns are strongly influenced by prevailing social and cultural value systems. In the Minangkabau context, this is reflected in how children respond to parents' messages with great respect, as well as in how parents deliver messages laden with gentleness and moral values. The findings show that politeness, emotional restraint, and respectful speech are not only cultural norms but also communicative practices that shape how affection is expressed. Parents tend to communicate care through advice, prayer, and reminders, while children respond through respectful listening and careful speech. This shows that emotional closeness is not always expressed through open emotional disclosure. It may also be expressed through respectful listening, careful speech, obedience, prayer, and moral attentiveness. Therefore, parent-child communication in pesantren reflects the intersection of family affection, religious morality, local culture, and institutional discipline.

Although communication is routine, challenges still arise due to limited time and available communication channels. These limitations align with the findings of Gruber et al. (2022) and Stieger et al. (2023), which show that although communication technologies such as telephones and video calls have facilitated long-distance communication, limitations in physical interaction remain obstacles in building optimal emotional closeness. However, the existence of facilities and support from the pesantren, such as scheduled regular communication times, becomes an important solution in bridging the emotional distance between parents and children. The findings also show that symbolic and material forms of communication are important in maintaining emotional closeness. Package delivery, for example, extends interpersonal communication beyond verbal and digital interaction. Snacks, clothes, books, handwritten notes, and prayers included in packages become tangible expressions of care. These items help santri feel remembered and supported, especially when they experience homesickness, illness, or academic pressure. Direct visits also complement mediated communication by restoring physical presence. Through eating together, walking, shopping, and relaxed conversation, parents and children can communicate more openly than through supervised calls or mediated messages. Thus, emotional closeness is sustained through a combination of verbal, visual, material, symbolic, and face-to-face communication.

At the same time, the findings caution against viewing pesantren communication arrangements only as supportive. While the pesantren provides access to communication and

facilitates parent-child contact, its rules also structure what can be said, when it can be said, and how freely it can be expressed. This is the study's main critical point. Communication in pesantren is emotionally meaningful because it connects santri with their parents, but it is also institutionally bound. The emotional support system, therefore, depends not only on parents' willingness to communicate, but also on how pesantren actors manage access, protect privacy, and respond to students' emotional needs. A rigid communication policy may reduce opportunities for emotional disclosure, whereas a flexible, sensitive policy can strengthen trust among santri, parents, and the pesantren.

Communication adjustments in religious and cultural contexts show that, although communication channels are limited, quality can still be maintained and even strengthened through approaches grounded in values, empathy, and emotional warmth. The main contribution of this study lies in showing that parent-child interpersonal communication in pesantren is a mediated relational process. Emotional closeness is produced through the interaction of parental initiative, pesantren mediation, communication forms, religious-cultural meanings, and santri's emotional responses. This finding broadens the understanding of family communication by showing that emotional bonds can be sustained not only through frequent, direct interaction but also through structured, supervised, symbolic, and value-based communication in boarding-based Islamic education. However, the study also shows that such communication must be carefully managed so that institutional discipline does not undermine children's privacy, emotional openness, and their ability to seek support from their parents.

6. Conclusion

Based on the research results, it can be concluded that interpersonal communication between parents and children at Pondok Pesantren Sumatera Thawalib Parabek is maintained through both mediated and direct communication, including voice calls, text messages, video calls, package delivery, and direct visits. These communication forms not only function as channels for exchanging information, but also as emotional mechanisms through which parents express care, prayer, advice, motivation, and reassurance. Voice calls and video calls provide more immediate emotional contact, while text messages and package delivery carry symbolic meanings that help santri feel remembered, supported, and emotionally connected to their families.

Several factors influencing the effectiveness of interpersonal communication between parents and children include message quality, communication consistency, religious and Minangkabau cultural values, and facilitation from the pesantren system. The findings show that emotional closeness is not maintained solely through frequent contact, but through meaningful, consistent, and emotionally supportive communication. Although routine communication is carried out, the biggest challenge is the limited time and opportunity for direct conversation. However, the pesantren provides structured communication access, such as scheduled phone use and supervised communication through homeroom teachers or dormitory supervisors, which helps reduce the emotional distance between parents and children. At the same time, the communication process is strongly shaped by institutional mediation. Homeroom teachers, dormitory supervisors, ustaz, and ustazah play an important role in facilitating communication access, but supervised communication also creates limitations related to time, privacy, and children's freedom to express personal feelings.

The main contribution of this study lies in showing that parent-child interpersonal communication in pesantren is a mediated relational process. Emotional closeness is produced through the interaction between parental initiative, pesantren mediation, communication forms,

religious-cultural meanings, and santri's emotional responses. Therefore, parent-child communication in boarding-based Islamic education should not be viewed only as a private family matter, but also as part of the emotional support system that helps students adapt to pesantren life.

This study also has practical implications for Islamic boarding schools more broadly. Future studies may examine the effectiveness of different communication media in maintaining parent-child emotional closeness, compare communication patterns across different pesantren, or explore the perspectives of teachers and dormitory supervisors as key mediators in parent-child communication.

This study has several limitations. It focuses on one pesantren and involves a limited number of parents and santri, so the findings cannot be generalized to all Islamic boarding schools. The study primarily focuses on the perspectives of parents and students, while those of homeroom teachers, dormitory supervisors, and pesantren managers are not explored in depth. Future studies may compare communication patterns across different pesantren, examine the role of supervisors as communication mediators more closely, or analyze how different communication policies affect students' emotional well-being.

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8. Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest related to the research, writing, or publication of this article. All stages of the study were conducted independently and without any personal, financial, or institutional interests that could influence the findings or interpretation of the data.

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About the Authors

- 1) **Ernita Arif** obtained her Bachelor's degree (S1) in 2002, Master's degree (S2) in 2007, and Doctoral degree (S3) in 2014 from IPB University, Indonesia. She is currently a lecturer in the Communication Science Study Program at Andalas University, Indonesia. Her academic interests include interpersonal communication, family communication, development communication, public relations, pesantren communication, and communication management.
Email: ernitaarif@soc.unand.ac.id
- 2) **Rahmi Surya Dewi** obtained her Bachelor's degree (S1) from IAIN Imam Bonjol Padang, Indonesia, in 1999, and her Master's degree (S2) and Doctoral degree (S3) from Padjadjaran University, Indonesia, in 2004 and 2018, respectively. She is currently a lecturer in the Communication Science Study Program at Andalas University, Indonesia. Her academic interests include interpersonal, intercultural, and political communication, media studies, critical media literacy, and qualitative communication research.
Email: rahmisuryadewi@soc.unand.ac.id