

Friendly Teaching Approaches and Teacher–Student Interactions in Islamic Education at Darul Qur’an Mafaza

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ABSTRACT

Education in the pesantren environment is not solely oriented toward the transmission of Islamic knowledge, but also places strong emphasis on the cultivation of adab, character formation, and the development of educational relationships between ustadz and santri. Although attention to warm and dialogical interactions has increased, empirical research on friendly teaching in pesantren is still limited. This study therefore examines its implementation in Islamic Religious Education at Pesantren Darul Qur’an Mafaza, focusing on practices, teachers’ strategies, and students’ perceptions. The focus of the analysis includes the various practices applied in the learning process, the pedagogical strategies employed by teachers, and students’ perceptions of the educational relationships that develop both inside and outside the classroom. The research adopts a qualitative approach with a case study design. Data were collected through classroom observations, in-depth interviews with PAI teachers, students, and pesantren leaders, as well as an analysis of relevant documentation. The collected data were then analyzed thematically through stages of data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. The findings indicate that the friendly teaching approach at Pesantren Darul Qur’an Mafaza is manifested through the use of polite and respectful language, dialogical communication, the provision of open spaces for questioning, and personal mentoring that remains grounded in adab and the pedagogical authority of the ustadz. Teaching strategies emphasize a balance between firmness and emotional warmth, both in formal learning activities and in informal interactions. Students perceive this approach as creating a comfortable, non-threatening learning atmosphere that encourages them to participate actively. At the institutional level, these practices are reinforced by the pesantren culture, which positions role modeling and harmonious relationships as fundamental pillars of education. The novelty of this study lies in conceptualizing the friendly teaching approach within the pesantren context as a pedagogical practice rooted in the values of ta’dib, rahmah, and ta’lim bi al-rifq, rather than merely as an adaptation of Western humanistic pedagogy. These findings affirm that relational warmth and the reinforcement of adab are not contradictory elements; instead, they mutually reinforce one another in fostering Islamic Religious Education that is humanistic, meaningful, and contextually grounded.



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A. INTRODUCTION

Education, in essence, is a consciously designed process to establish a learning environment and activities that enable the development of the students' full potential. The orientation of education is not limited to the attainment of knowledge alone, but also encompasses religious-spiritual reinforcement, self-control, personality formation, intelligence, morals, and the skills required for personal and social life (Makkawaru, 2019). Within the Indonesian context, the implementation of education falls under the constitutional responsibility of the state as regulated in Law Number 20 of 2003

concerning the National Education System, which emphasizes the importance of quality and equitable education for all citizens (Law No. 20 of 2003 on the National Education System).

Within the national education system, pondok pesantren occupy a strategic and historical position in the development of national education and character. Pesantren function not only as institutions for the transmission of Islamic knowledge but also as spaces for the cultivation of values, adab, and the comprehensive formation of the students' (santri) personality (Supriyanto, 2020). Educational practices in pesantren emphasize a balance between the cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains; thus, the quality of the relationship between ustadz and santri becomes a key factor in determining the success of the educational process (Supriyadi, 2024).

Along with the development of contemporary educational discourse, attention toward the quality of educative interaction between educators and students has increasingly strengthened. Various studies highlight the importance of pedagogical approaches that emphasize emotional proximity, warm communication, and relationships that are not purely hierarchical (Hatija, 2023). One approach relevant to this orientation is the friendly teaching approach, which is an instructional pattern emphasizing positive interpersonal relationships, mutual trust, and dialogical communication between teachers and students, without diminishing the teacher's pedagogical function as a mentor.

Conceptually, the friendly teaching approach is grounded in the humanistic education paradigm, which positions learners as active participants in the learning process. Carl Rogers argues that educational effectiveness is shaped by empathy, authenticity, and unconditional positive regard, all of which foster an emotionally secure learning environment (e.g., Rianto et al., 2025). In a similar vein, Paulo Freire's dialogical pedagogy underscores the importance of dialogue, participation, and non-authoritarian relationships in learning (Amalia et al., 2024); Pietersen, 2022). Within the setting of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) and pesantren, these ideas are embodied in the principles of *ta'dib* (Moral cultivation), *rahmah* (Compassion), and *ta'lim bi al-rifq* (Teaching with gentleness), where teacher student relationships are grounded in respect, compassion, and ethical direction. Accordingly, the friendly teaching approach in pesantren should be understood not simply as an adoption of humanistic pedagogy, but as a contextual practice deeply rooted in the traditions of Islamic education.

Within the pesantren environment, the friendly teaching approach is understood as a relational pattern between ustadz, santri, and kiai that continues to uphold *adab* (etiquette) while simultaneously building warmth, emotional proximity, and open spaces for dialogue (Abidin, 2024). This interaction model aligns with Islamic teachings on *tawadhu'* (humility), *rahmah* (compassion), and *ta'lim bi al-rifq* teaching with gentleness as emphasized in the hadith: '*Inna Allāha rafīqun yuḥibbu al-rifq*,' which means 'Verily, Allah is Gentle and loves gentleness' (HR. Muslim). (*Sahih Muslim 2593 - The Book of Virtue, Enjoining Good Manners, and Joining of the Ties of Kinship* - كتاب البر والصلة والآداب - Sunnah.Com - Sayings and Teachings of Prophet Muhammad (صلى الله عليه و سلم), n.d.). Culturally, this form of relationship is deeply rooted in the pesantren tradition of *ta'dib*, where respect for the teacher is consistently accompanied by affection and intimacy. This is consistent with Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas's explanation, as cited in Komaruddin Sassi's research, defining *ta'dib* as education that instills *adab*, compassion, respect for teachers, and harmonious relations (Sassi, 2018). This approach also corresponds with student-oriented educational ideas in contemporary Islamic educational discourse. Consequently, the friendly teaching approach in the pesantren

context is not merely an adoption of the Western humanistic paradigm, but rather a reinterpretation of the values of gentleness, compassion, and teacher ethics that have long been rooted in the treasury of Islamic education.

In Indonesia, the reinforcement of relational and affective values in education is also reflected in the policies of the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia through the development of the 'Curriculum of Love' (*Kurikulum Cinta*). This curriculum emphasizes empathy, compassion, tolerance, humanity, justice, and equality as the foundations of the learning process, particularly in Islamic educational institutions (Ifendi, 2025). Such policies further underscore the urgency of a humanistic and friendly teaching approach within the context of religious education.

Nevertheless, empirical studies specifically discussing the implementation of the friendly teaching approach within the pesantren environment, particularly in Islamic Religious Education (Pendidikan Agama Islam – PAI), remain relatively limited. Most previous research has focused more on formal school contexts or discussed pesantren in general without deeply examining the patterns of friendly educative interaction within the learning process (Mita Silfiyasari & Ashif Az Zhafi, 2020). While the development of child friendly pesantren has started to gain momentum, its realization within classroom practice continues to face obstacles, particularly due to the persistence of one way, traditional communication patterns (Muafiah et al., 2022). Consequently, there is a pressing need to explore how warm (friendly) interactions between ustadz and santri can be systematically incorporated into formal teaching practices without compromising the scholarly integrity of the pesantren tradition. In fact, pesantren possess a distinctive teacher–student (*ustadz–santri*) relationship characterized by a blend of scholarly authority and personal proximity, which has the potential to foster a unique form of the friendly teaching approach.

Pesantren Darul Qur'an Mafaza exhibits indications of a relatively warm relationship between ustadz and santri through various formal and informal activities, such as learning activities, playing sports together, communal dining, and casual discussions. However, it remains unclear whether and how these relational patterns constitute a friendly teaching approach in Islamic Religious Education (PAI). Therefore, this study aims to examine its implementation, teachers' strategies, and students' perceptions.

Based on these gaps, this study aims to examine the implementation of the friendly teaching approach in Islamic Religious Education at Pesantren Darul Qur'an Mafaza. Specifically, this research is directed at identifying the forms of the friendly teaching approach applied by the ustadz, the strategies used to build a warm and friendly learning atmosphere, and the students' perceptions of the resulting educative interaction patterns. Thus, this study is expected to provide a theoretical contribution to the development of humanistic Islamic pedagogy, as well as a practical contribution to strengthening learning practices within the pesantren environment.

B. METHODS

This research employs a qualitative approach with a case study design, as its primary focus is to gain a deep understanding of teaching practices using the friendly approach within the specific context of Islamic Religious Education at Pesantren Darul Qur'an Mafaza. Through a case study, the researcher can examine the phenomenon holistically, including uncovering the meaning behind behaviors, forms of interaction, and pedagogical processes that develop within a pesantren environment that possesses its own distinct social, cultural, and traditional character. This approach aligns with the

research objectives to describe how emotional proximity, warm communication, and dialogical interaction between ustadz and santri emerge in daily learning practices."

The study was conducted at Pesantren Darul Qur'an Mafaza, an Islamic boarding school known for implementing informal interactions between teachers and students, such as playing sports together, communal dining, and various dialogical activities. This location was selected because it shows strong indications of friendly teaching practices relevant for further investigation. Research participants were determined through a purposive sampling technique, involving the selection of informants based on considerations that meet the research needs (Suriani et al., 2023). The participants consisted of at least two PAI teachers who understand teaching strategies and interact intensely with students; active students who regularly attend PAI classes and are able to articulate their learning experiences; the pesantren leader (mudir) who has a deep understanding of the values, traditions, and educational policies of the pesantren; and the school principal involved in the supervision and evaluation of learning. Participants were selected based on criteria of direct involvement in PAI learning, willingness to be informants, and the ability to explain their experiences and views regarding teacher-student interactions.

Data collection was carried out through in-depth interviews, moderate participant observation, and documentation (Thalib, 2022). Semi-structured interviews were guided by an interview protocol covering key aspects of the friendly teaching approach, including interaction patterns, teaching strategies, and students' learning experiences. The interview and observation guidelines were developed based on relevant theoretical frameworks and were reviewed by experts to ensure content validity. Observations were conducted both during classroom learning and in non-formal interactions, such as casual discussions, sports activities, or other daily habits, to capture real practices that may not always emerge in interviews. Meanwhile, documentation served to strengthen and verify findings from the previous two techniques. Data analysis followed the Miles and Huberman model, starting with data reduction to sort and organize information from interviews, observations, and documentation according to research themes, followed by data display in the form of narrative descriptions. The final stage was drawing and verifying conclusions by identifying interaction patterns, teaching strategies, and student perceptions, and then validating the findings through repeated cross-source data comparison.

C. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Implementation of the Friendly Teaching Approach in Islamic Religious Education (Pendidikan Agama Islam – PAI) Learning at Pesantren Darul Qur'an Mafaza

The application of the friendly teaching approach in Islamic Religious Education (Pendidikan Agama Islam – PAI) at Pesantren Darul Qur'an Mafaza was documented during a classroom session on October 5, 2025. Throughout the lesson, the ustadz maintained communication that was both gentle and firm, while consistently facilitating dialogical interaction. Students were regularly given opportunities to ask questions, each of which was addressed with empathy, and additional individual guidance was provided when students encountered difficulties in comprehending the material.

Observations from the same session further revealed the emergence of a classroom climate characterized by a family like dynamic, effectively minimizing the psychological gap between teacher and students. The use of light humor, informal exchanges, and the provision of space for students to share their ideas were consistently evident within the

learning process. These elements collectively contributed to a warm and non-intimidating classroom environment.

Beyond formal instructional settings, teacher–student relationships were also reinforced through non-formal engagements such as shared meals, sports activities, and informal discussions outside class hours. These interactions appeared to strengthen students’ sense of comfort and involvement in the learning experience.

The findings suggest that the friendly teaching approach fosters an inclusive and participatory learning environment without diminishing teacher authority. The integration of dialogical communication, emotional support, and relational closeness indicates that learning extends beyond cognitive dimensions to include supportive interpersonal dynamics. This pattern is consistent with humanistic pedagogical views, where educators play a crucial role in cultivating emotionally secure and participatory learning spaces (Amini et al., 2025). Moreover, the strengthening of teacher–student relationships through non-formal interactions aligns with pesantren-based studies that emphasize relational proximity as a key factor in developing a positive learning climate and improving educational effectiveness (Robingun Suyud El Syam, 2023).

Teacher Strategies and Student Perceptions of the Friendly Teaching Approach at Pesantren Mafaza

Findings from interviews with Islamic Religious Education (Pendidikan Agama Islam – PAI) teachers at Pesantren Mafaza indicate that instructional strategies are intentionally designed to foster a warm and supportive classroom environment. This is evident in the consistent use of gentle language, the provision of open dialogical spaces, and individualized guidance aimed at strengthening students’ self-confidence. Ustazah Fina noted that when students feel reluctant to ask questions, she reassures them that “a question will open their insight and should not be feared.” She further integrates discussion based activities and ice breaking sessions, proportioning “85% for core learning and 15% for relaxation” to sustain engagement.

In a similar vein, Ustaz Amru highlighted the role of dialogical communication by allowing students to articulate their perspectives during classroom discussions. He characterized his approach as democratic, encouraging active participation and reducing students’ fear of making mistakes. These accounts are supported by classroom observations, which demonstrate the consistent application of gentle yet firm communication, interactive dialogue, and personalized mentoring in the teaching process.

Students’ responses suggest that these strategies foster a positive learning experience. Several described their relationship with teachers as “familial,” while others noted that the classroom environment feels “comfortable, not tense, and easy to understand.” They also expressed greater confidence in asking questions, as teachers are viewed as friendly and approachable. Moreover, students pointed out that humor, games, and informal interactions contribute to a more engaging and enjoyable learning process.

From an institutional standpoint, the Mudir stressed that teacher–student relationships should be grounded in respect, exemplarity, and mutual trust, reinforced through dialogical and personal communication. He emphasized that such relationships are fundamental in shaping students’ character and integrity. Likewise, the school principal explained that academic supervision evaluates not only learning outcomes but also the quality of teacher–student interaction, given that relational closeness is seen as essential for effective character formation.

These findings demonstrate that the friendly teaching approach at Pesantren Darul Qur’an Mafaza operates through the integration of dialogical communication, emotional

warmth, and structured pedagogical practices. This pattern indicates that teacher authority is not weakened, but instead articulated through respectful and interactive engagement. This result aligns with the view that a warm and supportive learning environment can strengthen student participation and self-confidence (Hawati et al., 2025). In addition, it reinforces the argument that teacher authority may be sustained through relational and dialogical means rather than solely hierarchical models (Sartika & Husni, 2025). At the institutional level, the focus on role modeling, trust, and supervision reflects the broader pesantren educational framework, in which leadership holds a pivotal role in shaping relational culture and educational quality (Sari et al., 2024).

Table 1. Summary of Teacher Strategies and Student Perceptions

Theme	Category	Empirical Evidence (Excerpt)
Dialogical Communication	Open discussion	"Students are encouraged to speak and share ideas."
Emotional Support	Reducing fear	"A question will open insight and should not be feared."
Classroom Strategy	Ice breaking	"85% learning, 15% relaxation."
Teaching Approach	Democratic interaction	Teacher encourages dialogue and participation
Student Perception	Comfortable learning	"Class is comfortable and not tense."
Relationship Pattern	Familial closeness	"The relationship feels like a family."
Institutional Support	Role modeling & trust	Leader emphasizes dialogue and supervision

Table 1. Summary of Teacher Strategies and Student Perceptions

This table summarizes the main findings of the study by presenting key themes, their corresponding categories, and representative empirical evidence derived from interviews and observations. It is intended to provide a clearer overview of how the data were organized and interpreted in the analysis

Synthesis of Findings and Practical Implications

Drawing on data from observations and interviews, the implementation of the friendly teaching approach at Pesantren Darul Qur'an Mafaza reveals a consistent pattern marked by the use of polite language, dialogical and inclusive communication, and relational closeness cultivated through non formal interactions beyond the classroom. Together, these aspects illustrate a balance between the firmness of adab and emotional warmth. Importantly, this pattern extends beyond individual practices and is rooted in an institutional culture shaped by the pesantren's vision. In this regard, the friendly teaching approach can be interpreted as a pedagogical model that places interpersonal relationships at the core of knowledge transmission. These findings are in line with prior studies indicating that positive teacher-student relationships (TSR) are closely linked to higher academic achievement, increased motivation, and improved student well-being (Emslander et al., 2023).

Nevertheless, several challenges were also identified. Variations in pedagogical sensitivity among teachers persist, with some tending to confine relational closeness to informal contexts. Moreover, a number of students expressed concerns about maintaining proper boundaries between intimacy and adab, particularly in non-formal settings. Such

conditions indicate that implementing the friendly teaching approach requires a careful equilibrium between warmth and discipline. Within this framework, humanistic strategies must remain anchored in ethical principles that preserve the proportional authority of the teacher while balancing openness and structure (Handayani & Hamami, 2022).

In the context of Islamic Religious Education (Pendidikan Agama Islam – PAI), these results offer significant pedagogical implications. The friendly teaching approach allows religious material often regarded as abstract or demanding to be conveyed in a more dialogical, reflective, and contextually grounded manner. When teachers employ supportive and open communication, the internalization of values such as *akhlak*, *aqidah*, and worship practices becomes more accessible and meaningful. Consequently, this approach functions as a bridge between curricular expectations and students' emotional and psychological needs, reinforcing the notion that effective religious education must integrate cognitive, affective, and relational dimensions (Nasirudin & Putra, 2024).

Another implication relates to the strengthening of *adab* and *pesantren* culture. The friendly teaching approach promotes respect grounded in awareness rather than fear, and encourages discipline through emotional connection instead of rigid hierarchy (Zulqarnain, 2017). This model of interaction enables students to express themselves without feeling that ethical boundaries are compromised. Overall, these findings confirm that warmth and *adab* are not opposing elements, but rather mutually reinforcing when built upon trust. This aligns with the perspective that *adab* is most effectively cultivated within a supportive environment centered on role modeling (Asad, 2022).

D. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

This study aimed to examine the implementation of the friendly teaching approach in Islamic Religious Education (Pendidikan Agama Islam – PAI) at *Pesantren Mafaza*, particularly in terms of teacher strategies, student perceptions, and the nature of teacher-student interactions. The findings demonstrate that the implementation of the friendly teaching approach is formed through a relational pattern that is warm, communicative, and firmly grounded in the framework of *pesantren adab*. Teachers utilize gentle language, provide a safe space for students to ask questions, and integrate various classroom management techniques such as ice-breaking, simple games, and structured dialogue to maintain learning engagement. Students perceive this approach as a form of psychological proximity that fosters the courage to ask questions, creates a sense of comfort, and cultivates self-esteem within learning interactions. This combination of strategies results in a teaching pattern capable of balancing teacher authority with the emotional and cognitive needs of students, thereby contributing directly to the effectiveness of Islamic Religious Education (Pendidikan Agama Islam – PAI) learning.

Furthermore, this study reveals that the friendly teaching approach in the *pesantren* context not only encourages a more inclusive learning process but also strengthens the internalization of *adab* values through communicative role modeling rather than mere formal oversight mechanisms. These findings offer practical implications for the development of Islamic Religious Education (Pendidikan Agama Islam – PAI) curricula oriented toward dialogical relationships, as well as for *pesantren* administrators in formulating pedagogical training programs sensitive to the students' emotional dimensions. Nevertheless, this research is limited in scope as it covers only one *pesantren* with relatively uniform participant characteristics. Therefore, future research is suggested to encompass *pesantrens* with more diverse cultures, utilize deeper

ethnographic approaches, or examine how friendly teaching plays a role in fostering students' moral resilience and social intelligence.

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