

THE ROLE OF AINUL YAKIN ISLAMIC BOARDING COMMUNITY IN ENHANCING THE SOCIAL FUNCTIONING OF CHILDREN WITH AUTISM: AN ISLAMIC EDUCATION PERSPECTIVE BASED ON HUMAN BEHAVIOR AND THE SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT (HBSE)

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Abstract

Children with autism often experience difficulties in communication, social interaction, and emotional regulation, which can negatively affect their social functioning. Environmental factors play a crucial role in shaping adaptive behavior, as supportive and structured environments can facilitate behavioral development. This study aims to examine the role of the Ainul Yakin Islamic Boarding Community as a therapeutic social environment in enhancing the social functioning of children with autism from the perspective of Human Behavior and the Social Environment (HBSE). This research employed a qualitative approach using a case study design. Data were collected through participatory observation, semi-structured in-depth interviews with caregivers, therapists, and institutional administrators, and document analysis of student development reports. The

findings indicate that the boarding community functions as an integrated environmental system that combines structured routines, emotional support, social interaction, and spiritual practices. These environmental components contribute to improvements in emotional regulation, social interaction, independence, and behavioral compliance. The findings also demonstrate that adaptive behavior development is influenced by continuous interaction between individual characteristics and environmental systems. From the HBSE perspective, the boarding community functions as both a microsystem and mesosystem that facilitates adaptive functioning through consistent environmental support. This study concludes that community-based caregiving environments can serve as effective intervention systems for improving the social functioning of children with autism. The Islamic boarding community model provides an alternative framework for environment-based social work practice that emphasizes environmental integration, structured caregiving, and holistic developmental support.

Keywords: *Autism, Social Functioning, Human Behavior and the Social Environment (HBSE), Islamic Boarding Community, Social Work.*

A. INTRODUCTION

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a neurodevelopmental condition characterized by persistent difficulties in social communication, social interaction, and patterns of restricted or repetitive behavior (Hirota & King, 2023). These challenges often affect an individual's ability to engage in meaningful social relationships, express needs effectively, and participate in everyday social activities. Recent global reports indicate that the prevalence of autism has increased steadily over the past decade, highlighting the growing need for effective intervention models that support social adaptation and functional independence (Lord et al., 2020).

Social functioning is widely recognized as a critical outcome indicator in autism intervention, as it reflects an individual's capacity to interact with others, perform daily roles, and adapt to environmental demands (Waizbard-Bartov et al., 2023). Contemporary developmental research emphasizes that social functioning in children with autism is not determined solely by neurological characteristics but is significantly influenced by environmental contexts, including family structure, social relationships, and institutional support (Pellicano & den Houting, 2022).

The Human Behavior and the Social Environment (HBSE) perspective provides a comprehensive framework for understanding autism by emphasizing the dynamic interaction between individual and environmental systems. This perspective aligns with ecological and social development

theories, which highlight the importance of environmental stability, structured interaction, and consistent caregiving in supporting adaptive behavior among children with developmental conditions (Coll et al., 2021).

Recent intervention studies increasingly emphasize the effectiveness of community-based and environment-centered approaches in improving the social functioning of children with autism (Blaisdell et al., 2023). Unlike clinic-based interventions, which often occur in isolated therapeutic settings, community-based approaches allow children to develop adaptive behavior through repeated social interaction and real-life experience. Such approaches have been shown to improve emotional regulation, social participation, and independence by embedding intervention within the child's natural environment (Paulus et al., 2021).

Despite these advances, service systems in many developing countries, including Indonesia, remain fragmented. Therapeutic services, education, and caregiving are often delivered separately, limiting the continuity and effectiveness of intervention (Rahman, 2024). This fragmentation may reduce the internalization of adaptive skills, as behavioral improvements achieved in therapeutic settings are not always sustained in everyday social environments. Recent research highlights the need for integrated, community-based caregiving systems that combine education, therapy, and social interaction within a consistent environmental structure (Divan et al., 2021).

In addition to environmental structure, spiritual and value-based environments have been increasingly recognized as influential factors in behavioral development (Saran et al., 2023). Spiritual practices may contribute to emotional stability, self-regulation, and psychological well-being, particularly among individuals with developmental challenges. Emerging interdisciplinary research suggests that spiritual and meaning-oriented environments can support emotional resilience and behavioral adaptation by providing structure, consistency, and emotional security (Divan et al., 2021).

The Ainul Yakin Islamic Boarding Community represents a unique community-based caregiving model that integrates education, daily life routines, social interaction, therapeutic support, and spiritual practices within a unified residential environment. This model provides continuous social exposure and structured interaction, allowing children with autism to develop adaptive behavior gradually through habituation and environmental support. However, empirical research examining the role of integrated Islamic boarding community environments in supporting social functioning among children with autism remains limited.

Therefore, this study aims to examine the role of the Ainul Yakin Islamic Boarding Community in enhancing the social functioning of children with autism from the perspective of Human Behavior and the Social Environment (HBSE). This research contributes to the development of community-based social work practice by providing empirical evidence on how integrated environmental systems can support adaptive behavior and social functioning among children with autism.

B. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative approach using a case study design to examine the role of the Ainul Yakin Islamic Boarding Community in enhancing the social functioning of children with autism. A qualitative approach was chosen because it allows researchers to explore social phenomena in depth and to understand meanings, experiences, and interactions within their natural setting. Qualitative research focuses on interpreting participants' perspectives and examining complex social processes that cannot be adequately explained through quantitative measurement (Creswell & Poth, 2016).

The case study design was applied because this research focused on a specific institutional setting, namely the Ainul Yakin Islamic Boarding Community, which represents a unique model of community-based caregiving for children with autism. Case study research enables an in-depth investigation of contemporary phenomena within real-life contexts, particularly when the interaction between individuals and their environment plays a significant role in shaping behavior and development (Yin, 2018).

The focus of this study included three main aspects: the social functioning of children with autism, the caregiving patterns implemented within the boarding community, and the role of the institutional environment in shaping emotional regulation and social behavior. These aspects were examined from the perspective of Human Behavior and the Social Environment (HBSE), which emphasizes the dynamic relationship between individuals and environmental systems.

The data sources consisted of primary and secondary data. Primary data were obtained from children with autism residing in the Ainul Yakin Islamic Boarding Community, as well as caregivers, therapists, and boarding administrators involved in the caregiving process. Secondary data included institutional records, child development reports, activity documentation, and relevant literature. The use of multiple data sources allows researchers to gain

a comprehensive understanding of the research context and enhances the depth of qualitative inquiry.

Data collection techniques included semi-structured in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and documentation analysis. In-depth interviews were conducted to explore participants' experiences and perceptions related to behavioral changes and social functioning. Participatory observation was carried out by directly observing children's daily activities, including learning, social interaction, religious practices, and routine activities within the boarding community. Documentation analysis was used to support and verify findings obtained from interviews and observations. These techniques are widely used in qualitative research to capture rich and contextual data (Moleong, 2018).

Data analysis was conducted using an interactive analysis model consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. Data reduction involved selecting and organizing relevant data, while data display enabled systematic interpretation of patterns and relationships. The final stage involved drawing conclusions and verifying findings based on the analyzed data. This analytical process allows researchers to interpret social phenomena systematically and meaningfully (Moleong, 2018).

To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, several validation strategies were applied, including source triangulation, technique triangulation, member checking, and prolonged engagement. Triangulation was used to compare data obtained from multiple sources and methods, while member checking allowed participants to confirm the accuracy of the findings. Prolonged engagement helped researchers gain deeper contextual understanding. These procedures are essential in qualitative research to ensure credibility, dependability, and confirmability.

C. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The analysis of eight student progress reports at the Ainul Yakin Islamic Boarding Community revealed observable improvements in several dimensions of social functioning among children with autism. These improvements were reflected in emotional regulation, social interaction, independence, and compliance with structured routines. Overall, children demonstrated more adaptive behavior compared to their initial condition prior to residing in the boarding community.

In terms of emotional regulation, documentation indicated a gradual reduction in emotional dysregulation behaviors such as tantrums, excessive crying, and resistance to routine changes. Several children showed increased ability to remain calm and accept guidance from caregivers. For example, Child A1 showed reduced frequency of crying and demonstrated improved adaptability when transitioning between activities. Similarly, Child A4 demonstrated improved emotional control when waiting for their turn, although occasional assistance was still required. These observations indicate increased emotional stability within the boarding community environment.

Improvements were also evident in social interaction. Children demonstrated increased responsiveness to verbal prompts, greater engagement in shared activities, and increased participation in routine group activities. Some children began to imitate peer behavior, including participating in collective activities such as mealtime routines and structured group tasks. For instance, Child A3 began sitting with peers during meals, while Child A6 demonstrated increased responsiveness when spoken to by caregivers. These changes reflect increased social engagement at a functional level.

In addition, improvements in independence were observed. Several children became increasingly capable of performing daily activities independently, including eating, organizing personal belongings, and following daily schedules. Child A2 demonstrated the ability to dress independently with minimal assistance, while Child A7 showed increased initiative in preparing personal items without prompting. These findings indicate progress in adaptive functioning and increased independence.

Compliance with structured routines also improved. Children demonstrated increased ability to follow schedules, respond to caregiver instructions, and participate in organized daily activities. For example, Child A5 showed improved ability to follow classroom routines and respond to structured instructions. These findings indicate that children developed greater behavioral predictability and environmental adaptation.

Overall, the findings demonstrate measurable improvement in emotional regulation, social interaction, independence, and behavioral compliance among children with autism residing at the Ainul Yakin Islamic Boarding Community.

Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that the Ainul Yakin Islamic Boarding Community provides an environmental system that supports the

development of social functioning among children with autism. Improvements observed in emotional regulation, social interaction, independence, and behavioral compliance indicate that environmental structure plays a critical role in shaping adaptive behavior. These findings reinforce the ecological perspective that human behavior develops through continuous interaction between individual characteristics and environmental conditions.

The improvement in emotional regulation observed in this study suggests that structured environments contribute significantly to emotional stability. Children with autism often experience difficulties in emotional regulation due to neurological differences that affect sensory processing and behavioral response. However, consistent routines and predictable environmental structures provide emotional security and reduce anxiety. This finding is consistent with previous research indicating that emotional regulation in autism is strongly influenced by environmental stability and caregiver consistency (Elhai & Rozgonjuk, 2020). The structured daily routine implemented at the boarding community provides predictability, which helps children regulate emotional responses more effectively.

Improvement in social interaction observed in this study reflects the importance of environmental exposure in facilitating social development (Tang et al., 2025). Children with autism typically experience challenges in initiating and maintaining social interaction, but repeated exposure to social interaction opportunities enables gradual development of social competence. Social learning theory emphasizes that behavior develops through observation, imitation, and reinforcement. The boarding community provides continuous opportunities for children to observe peer behavior and engage in structured social interaction. This finding aligns with previous research demonstrating that environmental exposure and social learning opportunities contribute significantly to the development of social functioning in children with autism (Dargue et al., 2022).

Independence development observed in this study also highlights the role of environmental structure in improving adaptive functioning (Matthews et al., 2021). Independence reflects an individual's ability to perform daily tasks and adapt to environmental demands. Structured caregiving systems provide repeated opportunities for skill development, which enhances functional independence (Nguyen et al., 2020). This finding is consistent with research indicating that adaptive functioning can improve when individuals with autism are provided with structured environmental support and consistent caregiving. The boarding community environment allows children

to develop independence gradually through repeated engagement in daily activities.

Compliance with structured routines observed in this study further demonstrates the importance of environmental structure in behavioral adaptation. Children demonstrated increased ability to follow routines, respond to instructions, and participate in structured activities (Peters, 2025). Predictable routines help individuals understand environmental expectations and reduce behavioral uncertainty. Environmental predictability has been identified as a critical factor in improving behavioral stability among children with autism (Divan et al., 2021).

From the Human Behavior and the Social Environment (HBSE) perspective, these findings illustrate the interaction between individual neurological characteristics and environmental systems. HBSE emphasizes that behavior is not determined solely by individual biological characteristics but emerges through interaction with environmental systems. The Ainul Yakin Islamic Boarding Community functions as a microsystem that directly influences children's daily experience and behavioral development. Continuous environmental exposure allows children to develop adaptive behavior through repeated interaction.

The boarding community also functions as a mesosystem by integrating multiple environmental components, including caregiving, education, social interaction, and spiritual development. This integration creates a consistent environmental system that supports adaptive development. Previous research emphasizes that integrated environmental systems provide more effective support for behavioral development compared to fragmented intervention models.

The spiritual dimension represents a distinctive feature of the Ainul Yakin Islamic Boarding Community. Spiritual routines provide structure, repetition, and emotional comfort, which contribute to emotional stability and behavioral regulation. Spiritual environments provide meaning, consistency, and emotional support, which facilitate behavioral adaptation. This finding suggests that spirituality can function as an environmental resource that supports emotional and social development.

The findings of this study also highlight the importance of community-based intervention. Unlike clinical interventions, which occur in limited settings, community-based environments provide continuous opportunities for behavioral development. Continuous exposure to structured

environmental support allows children to develop adaptive functioning more effectively.

Overall, this study demonstrates that social functioning among children with autism is strongly influenced by environmental conditions. The Ainul Yakin Islamic Boarding Community provides a structured, supportive, and integrated environmental system that facilitates adaptive development. These findings support the HBSE perspective, which emphasizes that human behavior is shaped through continuous interaction between individuals and their environment. This study contributes to the development of community-based social work intervention models that focus on environmental support systems rather than solely individual intervention.

D. CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the analysis and discussion regarding the role of the Ainul Yakin Islamic Boarding Community in enhancing the social functioning of children with autism from the perspective of Human Behavior and the Social Environment (HBSE), several conclusions can be drawn. Children with autism residing at the Ainul Yakin Islamic Boarding Community demonstrated positive development in various aspects of social functioning, particularly in emotional regulation, social interaction, independence, and compliance with rules. These improvements were reflected in the decreased frequency of tantrums, increased responsiveness to verbal cues, greater participation in shared activities with peers, and enhanced ability to perform daily living activities independently or with minimal assistance. The caregiving pattern implemented at the boarding community is integrated in nature, combining habituation, emotional support, structured routines, and spirituality within daily life. This caregiving approach creates a stable, secure, and accepting environment, enabling children with autism to learn and adapt gradually according to their individual capacities. Furthermore, the Ainul Yakin Islamic Boarding Community serves as a therapeutic social environment that facilitates social learning, reinforces adaptive behavior, promotes independence, and supports the internalization of social and spiritual values. This role positions the boarding community not merely as a residential facility, but as an environmental system that actively shapes the behavior and social functioning of children with autism. From the HBSE perspective, the social functioning of children with autism at the boarding community represents the result of dynamic interaction between individual and environmental factors. The boarding environment functions as a mediating system that optimizes

children's developmental potential despite neurological limitations. This finding confirms that autism does not solely determine low social functioning; rather, social functioning is strongly influenced by the quality of the caregiving environment. Overall, this study demonstrates that the Ainul Yakin Islamic Boarding Community model is relevant and effective as an alternative community-based social work practice for children with autism.

Based on these conclusions, several recommendations can be proposed. The management of the Ainul Yakin Islamic Boarding Community is encouraged to maintain and strengthen the existing integrated caregiving model, particularly in ensuring consistency in habituation practices and structured daily routines. Continuous capacity development for caregivers and therapists through regular training on autism, emotional regulation, and environment-based interventions is also essential. Strengthening the documentation system for monitoring children's developmental progress is recommended to ensure systematic data recording and effective evaluation. In the context of social work practice, professionals are encouraged to develop environment-based intervention strategies that focus not only on individual treatment but also on modifying caregiving systems and community environments. The Islamic boarding community model as a therapeutic social environment may serve as a reference or be adapted in other community contexts. In addition, social workers are expected to play an active role as service coordinators, facilitating collaboration among caregivers, therapists, educators, and families. For academic purposes, future research is recommended to involve a larger number of participants and integrate both qualitative and quantitative approaches through mixed-methods research designs. Longitudinal studies are also needed to examine the long-term sustainability of social functioning development among children with autism, particularly within community-based caregiving environments.

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