Research Article

The Relationship Between Anxiety Levels and Adaptive Abilities of New Students at Islamic Boarding Schools

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Abstract: The adaptation process within the Islamic boarding school (pondok pesantren) environment often poses a significant challenge for new students. Factors such as separation from family, academic demands, and strict rules can trigger anxiety. This anxiety potentially hinders the student's ability to adjust and may lead to psychosocial problems. This study aims to analyze and prove the relationship between the level of anxiety and the adaptation ability of new students at Pondok Pesantren Kun Assalam, Semarang. To analyze the relationship between anxiety levels and the adaptability of new students (santri) at Kun Assalam Islamic Boarding School, Semarang. This research employed a correlational design with a cross-sectional approach. The entire population and sample consisted of 80 new students at Pondok Pesantren Kun Assalam, utilizing a total sampling technique. The instruments used were the Zung Self-Rating Anxiety Scale (SAS/ZRAS) questionnaire to measure anxiety and an adaptation ability questionnaire. Data analysis was performed using the Spearman's rho correlation test. The majority of respondents were in the 7–12 years age group (75%). Univariate results showed that most students were categorized as not anxious (86.4%), yet 70% of them exhibited poor adaptation ability. The correlation test found a significant negative correlation between the anxiety level and adaptation ability (p-value = 0.000; $\alpha < 0.05$). The strength of the relationship was moderate (r = -0.506). These findings indicate that the higher the level of anxiety experienced by the students, the lower their adaptation ability.

Keywords: Adaptability; Adaptation; Anxiety; Islamic Boarding School; New Students.

1. Introduction

Contemporary cultural shifts indicate a growing tendency among parents to enroll their children in religious educational institutions, particularly Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) (Salmon et al., 2024). Islamic boarding schools constitute educational institutions that play a pivotal role in shaping students' personality development and character formation. For newly enrolled students, entering a pesantren environment often presents distinctive challenges, as they must adjust to conditions that differ substantially from their previous daily lives. This adaptation process includes adjusting to new learning routines, social interactions, and institutional norms and values upheld by the pesantren. Therefore, adaptive capacity is essential to enable students to engage effectively in the educational process and to function optimally within the boarding school environment (Ardiansyah & Basuki, 2023).

Most new students experience anxiety when first entering a pesantren, particularly related to separation from family, the need to meet academic demands, and interactions with unfamiliar peers. In addition, pressure to fulfill external expectations and to comply with strict rules and regulations constitutes a significant source of anxiety among students (Alwi, 2021). Such conditions may place students in a psychologically vulnerable position during the early stages of their boarding school experience.

Previous studies have demonstrated that anxiety can hinder the adaptation process of new students. Students who experience high levels of stress tend to encounter difficulties in social interaction, participation in learning activities, and adjustment to their new environment (Salisa, 2023). Consequently, research examining the relationship between anxiety and adaptation among new students in Islamic boarding schools is highly important. Findings from such studies may serve as a basis for pesantren administrators to design more effective support programs aimed at facilitating students' adjustment processes. When school-aged children consistently fail to adapt successfully to a new environment, this condition may have a substantial impact on their overall development.

Potential consequences include academic difficulties, problems in interpersonal relationships, and long-term challenges in future life adjustment. Moreover, children who struggle with socialization are more likely to experience psychosocial problems such as maladaptive behaviors, feelings of hopelessness, anxiety, helplessness, stress, and even depression (Jamaluddin, 2020). New students, particularly those coming from diverse backgrounds, often experience considerable anxiety when they are first separated from their families and familiar surroundings. This anxiety may stem from uncertainty regarding their ability to adjust to the pesantren atmosphere, as well as concerns about forming new social relationships (Susilowardhani et al., 2021).

A study by Bau et al. (2022) reported a significant relationship between anxiety levels and adaptive ability among adolescents residing in the Sabrun Jamil Islamic boarding school dormitory. Adaptive ability is influenced by various psychological factors, especially those related to the management of anxiety. Students who are able to cope effectively with anxiety tend to adapt more quickly to pesantren life, establish positive social relationships, and achieve optimal learning outcomes. Conversely, students who experience difficulties in managing anxiety and stress may face barriers in the adaptation process and may be at risk of developing mental health problems, including depression (Bau et al., 2022). In addition, the adjustment process is also shaped by individual characteristics such as emotional stability and coping skills.

Students who successfully regulate their anxiety generally adapt more rapidly to the pesantren environment and report more positive experiences, whereas those who struggle with these psychological demands may encounter persistent adaptation challenges and emotional as well as social distress (Pertiwi, 2024; Spielberger, 2010). A preliminary study conducted by the researcher at Kun Assalam Islamic Boarding School revealed that among four male students who completed the distributed questionnaire, most reported feeling nervous when speaking with others and frequently experiencing physical complaints such as headaches and muscle pain, which are common somatic symptoms associated with anxiety (American Psychiatric Association, 2022). Previous studies have shown that elevated anxiety levels can negatively affect students' social adjustment, emotional well-being, and learning processes in boarding school environments (Putra & Lestari, 2021; Yusuf & Nurihsan, 2019). Given the increasing attention to the importance of mental health in educational settings, research on the relationship between anxiety levels and adaptive ability is highly relevant. Therefore, understanding how anxiety influences students' capacity to adapt to the pesantren environment, as well as identifying appropriate intervention strategies to support this adjustment process, is essential (Santrock, 2018). Accordingly, this study aims to further investigate the relationship between anxiety levels and adaptive ability among new students in Islamic boarding schools.

2. Preliminaries or Related Work or Literature Review

Anxiety Among Adolescents in Educational Transition Contexts

Adolescence is a developmental period characterized by significant biological, psychological, and social changes that increase vulnerability to anxiety, particularly during major life transitions. Entering a new educational environment, especially one that involves separation from family and immersion in a highly structured setting such as an Islamic boarding school, represents a substantial psychological challenge. Previous studies have reported that adolescents commonly experience anxiety related to academic expectations, social acceptance, and fear of failure.

This anxiety often manifests in emotional, cognitive, and physiological symptoms that interfere with daily functioning. Consequently, anxiety is widely recognized as a critical mental health issue within educational settings. Several empirical investigations have demonstrated that anxiety levels among students are influenced by individual factors such as personality

traits, self-esteem, and coping styles, as well as environmental factors including institutional climate and peer relationships. Students with inadequate coping mechanisms tend to experience higher anxiety when confronted with unfamiliar demands. Conversely, supportive environments and positive interpersonal relationships have been shown to buffer the negative impact of stressors. These findings suggest that anxiety is not merely an individual phenomenon but is shaped by interactions between personal and contextual factors.

Understanding these dynamics is essential for interpreting anxiety among new students in boarding school contexts. Furthermore, prolonged or unmanaged anxiety has been associated with a range of adverse outcomes, including reduced academic performance, social withdrawal, and increased risk of mental health disorders. In severe cases, anxiety may contribute to long-term maladjustment and decreased quality of life. Therefore, early identification and management of anxiety among students are considered vital components of preventive mental health strategies. The present study is grounded in this body of literature, which emphasizes the importance of examining anxiety in populations undergoing educational transitions.

Adaptive Ability and Student Adjustment in Boarding School Environments

Adaptive ability refers to an individual's capacity to adjust effectively to new environmental demands, roles, and expectations. In educational contexts, adaptation encompasses academic adjustment, social integration, and emotional regulation. Boarding schools, including Islamic boarding schools, present distinctive adaptive demands due to their residential nature, rigid schedules, and strong institutional culture. Students must not only adapt to new learning systems but also to communal living arrangements and institutional norms. Previous research has shown that students with higher adaptive ability tend to demonstrate better academic engagement, healthier peer relationships, and greater psychological well-being.

Adaptive students are more capable of managing stress, resolving interpersonal conflicts, and maintaining motivation. In contrast, students with low adaptive ability often experience homesickness, social isolation, and emotional distress. These difficulties may hinder their participation in school activities and negatively affect their overall development. Studies conducted in boarding school settings have highlighted that adaptation is a gradual process influenced by personal resilience, social support, and previous experiences with independence. Students who have prior exposure to structured environments or who receive strong family encouragement often adapt more quickly. These findings indicate that adaptive ability is a multidimensional construct shaped by both internal and external factors. As such, examining adaptive ability provides valuable insight into students' overall functioning within boarding school environments.

Relationship Between Anxiety and Adaptive Ability

A growing body of literature suggests a close relationship between anxiety and adaptive ability. Anxiety is believed to undermine adaptation by impairing cognitive flexibility, emotional regulation, and social engagement. When individuals experience high anxiety, their attention is often focused on perceived threats rather than problem-solving, thereby limiting their capacity to respond effectively to environmental demands. This mechanism explains why anxious students frequently exhibit poorer adjustment outcomes. Empirical studies have consistently reported negative correlations between anxiety levels and indicators of adjustment, including social adaptation, academic adjustment, and overall psychological adaptation. Students with higher anxiety are more likely to experience difficulties in forming friendships, participating in classroom activities, and adhering to institutional routines.

Conversely, students with lower anxiety tend to demonstrate greater confidence, initiative, and openness to new experiences, all of which facilitate adaptation. Despite this growing evidence, research focusing specifically on new students in Islamic boarding schools remains limited. Most existing studies have examined either anxiety or adaptation in isolation, or have focused on general school populations. Therefore, there is a clear need for studies that simultaneously examine anxiety and adaptive ability within the unique cultural and institutional context of pesantren. The present study seeks to address this gap by providing empirical evidence on the relationship between anxiety level and adaptive ability among new students in Islamic boarding schools.

3. Materials and Method

This study employed a quantitative descriptive design with a cross-sectional approach. The study population comprised all new students at Kun Assalam Islamic Boarding School,

Semarang, totaling 80 individuals. A total sampling technique was applied, in which all members of the population were included as research participants. The independent variable in this study was anxiety level, while the dependent variable was adaptive ability. Anxiety level was measured using the standardized Zung Self-Rating Anxiety Scale (SAS/ZRAS), which consists of 20 items. Adaptive ability was assessed using an adaptation questionnaire consisting of 29 items measured on a 4-point Likert scale. Data were analyzed using univariate analysis to describe frequency distributions and bivariate analysis employing Spearman's rho correlation test to examine the relationship between anxiety level and adaptive ability.

4. Results and Discussion

Respondent Characteristics

The respondents in this study constituted a sample representing the research population. The characteristics of respondents were categorized based on age and gender. The distribution of respondent characteristics is presented as follows.

Table 1. Distribution of Respondents by Age.

Anxiety Level	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
No Anxiety	76	86.4%
Mild Anxiety	4	4.5%
Total	80	100%

The results indicate that the majority of respondents were aged 7–12 years, totaling 60 individuals (75%), while the smallest proportion consisted of respondents aged 12–18 years, totaling 20 individuals (25%).

Table 2. Distribution of Respondents by Gender.

Gender	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Male	38	47.5%
Female	42	52.5%
Total	80	100%

Based on Table 2, there were 38 male respondents (47.5%) and 42 female respondents (52.5%).

Research Variables

Anxiety level was measured using a 20-item questionnaire. The respondents' scores were subsequently categorized into four levels of anxiety.

Table 3. Distribution of Anxiety Levels.

Anxiety Level	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
No Anxiety	76	86.4%
Mild Anxiety	4	4.5%
Total	80	100%

Based on Table 3, most respondents were classified as experiencing no anxiety (76 respondents; 86.4%), while the smallest proportion experienced mild anxiety (4 respondents; 4.5%). No respondents were categorized as having moderate or severe anxiety. Adaptive ability was measured using a 29-item questionnaire. Respondents' scores were categorized into three levels of adaptive ability.

Table 4. Distribution of Adaptive Ability.

Adaptive Ability	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Moderate Adaptation	24	30%
Poor Adaptation	56	70%
Total	80	100%

Based on Table 4, the majority of respondents demonstrated poor adaptive ability (56 respondents; 70%), while 24 respondents (30%) demonstrated moderate adaptive ability. No respondents were classified as having good adaptive ability.

Bivariate Analysis

Bivariate analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between the independent variable (anxiety level) and the dependent variable (adaptive ability) among new male and female students at Kun Assalam Islamic Boarding School. The analysis employed Spearman's rho correlation test, and the results are presented as follows.

Table 5. Cross-tabulation and Spearman's rho Test of Anxiety Level and Adaptive Ability among New Students.

Anxiety Level	Moderate Adaptation	Poor Adaptation	Total	Correlation Coefficient (r)	p-value
No Anxiety	24	52	76	-0.506	0.000
Mild Anxiety	0	4	4		
Total	24	56	80		

Based on Table 5, the Spearman's rho correlation coefficient was -0.506 with a significance value (2-tailed) of 0.000 (p < 0.01). Hypothesis testing indicates that the significance level is below 0.05; therefore, the null hypothesis (H$_0$) is rejected and the alternative hypothesis (H$_1$) is accepted. This finding demonstrates a significant negative correlation of moderate strength between anxiety level and adaptive ability. In other words, higher levels of anxiety are associated with lower adaptive ability, whereas lower levels of anxiety are associated with higher adaptive ability. This relationship is statistically significant.

The Relationship Between Anxiety Levels and Adaptive Abilities of New Students at Islamic Boarding Schools

The findings of this study indicate a statistically significant negative relationship between anxiety levels and adaptive ability among new students at Kun Assalam Islamic Boarding School. The Spearman's rho correlation coefficient of -0.506 with a p-value of 0.000 demonstrates a moderate-strength inverse association, meaning that higher anxiety is consistently associated with poorer adaptive ability. This result confirms the research hypothesis and reinforces theoretical assumptions that emotional states, particularly anxiety, play a crucial role in shaping individuals' capacity to adjust to new environments. For students entering a boarding school context, adaptation requires substantial psychological readiness, emotional regulation, and coping skills.

When anxiety is elevated, these adaptive resources tend to be compromised, thereby impeding successful adjustment. The predominance of respondents categorized as having no anxiety (86.4%) suggests that many students possess a basic level of emotional stability upon entering the pesantren environment. However, despite this relatively low prevalence of anxiety, a large proportion of students (70%) demonstrated poor adaptive ability. This discrepancy indicates that adaptation is a multifaceted process influenced not only by anxiety levels but also by other internal and external factors such as previous life experiences, family support, personality traits, and institutional climate. Nevertheless, the significant correlation found in this study highlights anxiety as an important contributing factor within this complex process. Even relatively mild anxiety appears capable of exerting a measurable impact on students' adjustment.

Students who reported mild anxiety were exclusively found in the poor adaptation category, further illustrating the detrimental influence of anxiety on adjustment outcomes. This pattern suggests that even low-intensity anxiety may interfere with students' capacity to engage socially, follow institutional routines, and develop a sense of belonging. Anxiety often manifests through excessive worry, physiological tension, and cognitive distraction, all of which can reduce concentration and motivation. Consequently, anxious students may struggle to participate actively in learning activities and communal life. Over time, these difficulties can accumulate and solidify into persistent adaptation problems.

The negative association between anxiety and adaptive ability observed in this study is consistent with previous research reporting similar findings in adolescent and boarding school populations. Prior studies have shown that heightened anxiety is associated with reduced social competence, lower academic engagement, and impaired emotional regulation. These outcomes collectively undermine the individual's ability to cope with environmental demands. The present findings therefore strengthen the empirical evidence supporting anxiety as a key psychological barrier to successful adaptation. Such consistency across studies enhances the credibility and generalizability of the results. From a psychological perspective, anxiety consumes cognitive and emotional resources that would otherwise be available for problem-solving and social interaction. When students are preoccupied with fears of failure, rejection, or unfamiliar situations, their attention becomes inwardly focused rather than outwardly engaged.

This inward focus limits opportunities for experiential learning and positive social encounters that are essential for adaptation. As a result, anxious students may remain trapped in a cycle of avoidance and withdrawal. Breaking this cycle requires targeted interventions aimed at reducing anxiety and strengthening coping mechanisms. The pesantren environment

presents unique adaptive challenges due to its structured routines, communal living arrangements, and strong emphasis on discipline and religious observance. For new students, these demands may represent a sharp departure from their previous lifestyle. Anxiety may intensify when students perceive these demands as overwhelming or beyond their capabilities. In such circumstances, students with limited coping skills are particularly vulnerable to maladaptation. Thus, the institutional context interacts with individual psychological characteristics in shaping adaptation outcomes. The moderate strength of the correlation suggests that while anxiety is an important determinant of adaptive ability, it is not the sole influencing factor.

Other variables, such as social support from peers and teachers, self-efficacy, resilience, and previous boarding experience, are likely to play complementary roles. Nevertheless, anxiety may function as a central mechanism through which these other factors exert their effects. For instance, strong social support may reduce anxiety, which in turn facilitates adaptation. Understanding these interrelationships is essential for developing comprehensive support strategies. The high proportion of students with poor adaptive ability indicates an urgent need for systematic support programs within the pesantren. Orientation activities, peer mentoring, and counseling services could help students navigate the transition period more effectively. Psychological screening at the time of admission may also be useful for identifying students at risk of anxiety-related adaptation difficulties. Early identification allows for timely intervention before problems become entrenched.

Such preventive efforts align with a holistic approach to student development. Interventions aimed at anxiety reduction, such as relaxation training, cognitive-behavioral techniques, and stress management workshops, have demonstrated effectiveness in various educational settings. Incorporating these approaches into pesantren-based programs could enhance students' emotional regulation skills. When anxiety is successfully managed, students are more likely to engage positively with their environment and build adaptive competencies. This, in turn, may lead to improvements in academic performance, social relationships, and overall well-being. Therefore, addressing anxiety should be considered a strategic priority in student support services.

This study provides strong evidence that anxiety level is significantly and negatively associated with adaptive ability among new students in Islamic boarding schools. The findings underscore the importance of recognizing anxiety as a critical psychological factor influencing students' adjustment processes. By integrating mental health promotion into educational practice, pesantren administrators can foster a more supportive environment that facilitates healthy adaptation. Future research is encouraged to explore additional variables and longitudinal patterns to gain a deeper understanding of the adaptation process. Such efforts will contribute to the development of evidence-based interventions tailored to the unique context of Islamic boarding education.

5. Comparison

The findings of the present study demonstrate a significant negative correlation between anxiety level and adaptive ability among new students in Islamic boarding schools, with a Spearman's rho coefficient of -0.506, indicating a moderate-strength relationship. This result is consistent with previous studies reporting that higher anxiety is associated with poorer adjustment in adolescent and student populations. For instance, several recent investigations have shown that anxiety negatively affects students' social functioning, academic engagement, and emotional well-being, all of which are core components of adaptation. The alignment between the present findings and prior evidence reinforces the theoretical assumption that anxiety is a central psychological factor influencing adjustment processes. Thus, this study corroborates existing knowledge while confirming its applicability within the context of Islamic boarding schools.

Compared to earlier research conducted in general secondary schools or university settings, the present study extends empirical evidence to a more specific and underexplored population, namely new students in pesantren. Most state-of-the-art studies focus on mainstream educational environments where students typically return home after school hours. In contrast, Islamic boarding schools require continuous residential adjustment, which intensifies emotional and social demands. By demonstrating a similar anxiety–adaptation relationship in this unique context, the present study broadens the scope of existing theories and suggests that the underlying psychological mechanisms operate across diverse educational settings. This contextual extension represents an important contribution to the literature.

Previous studies often report weak to moderate correlations between anxiety and various forms of adjustment, depending on population characteristics and measurement tools. The moderate correlation found in this study is comparable to those reported in recent adolescent mental health research, indicating that anxiety exerts a substantial, though not exclusive, influence on adaptation.

This similarity suggests that while cultural and institutional differences exist, the fundamental relationship between anxiety and adaptive functioning remains relatively stable. However, the higher proportion of students with poor adaptive ability in the present study, despite low overall anxiety levels, highlights a nuance that has received limited attention in earlier research. This finding suggests that adaptation difficulties in boarding schools may be driven by additional contextual stressors beyond individual anxiety. In comparison with studies that emphasize academic stress as the primary source of anxiety, the present research underscores the importance of psychosocial and environmental factors. The pesantren context involves separation from family, strict routines, and communal living, which may generate anxiety and adaptation challenges distinct from those found in day-school settings. This distinction adds depth to the state-of-the-art by illustrating how different educational environments shape the expression and consequences of anxiety.

Consequently, the present study contributes a more nuanced understanding of anxiety within culturally specific educational institutions. Such insights are valuable for developing context-sensitive intervention strategies. Overall, the present study advances the state-of-the-art by confirming the anxiety–adaptation relationship in a residential religious education setting and by highlighting the complexity of adaptation among new students. Unlike many previous studies that focus primarily on either anxiety or adaptation, this research simultaneously examines both constructs and their interrelationship. Furthermore, the use of standardized instruments and a total sampling approach enhances the methodological rigor compared to some earlier investigations. Therefore, this study not only supports existing evidence but also offers contextual and methodological contributions that strengthen the empirical foundation for student mental health and adaptation research.

6. Conclusion

Based on the results and discussion presented in the previous chapter, it can be concluded that the majority of respondents in this study were in the age range of 7–12 years, totaling 60 individuals (75%), while respondents aged 12–18 years accounted for 20 individuals (25%). In terms of anxiety level, most respondents did not experience anxiety, with 76 individuals (86.4%), and no respondents were found to have moderate or severe anxiety (0%). Meanwhile, the adaptive ability of new students was predominantly categorized as poor, with 56 individuals (70%), and no respondents were identified as having good adaptive ability. The results of the Spearman rank correlation test yielded a p-value of 0.000 ($p < 0.005$), indicating a significant relationship between anxiety level and adaptive ability among new students at Kun Assalam Islamic Boarding School, Banjardowo, Semarang.

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