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Mentoring Class Program for Problem-Solving Support in Pesantren-Based Junior High School

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative case study examined the implementation of the Mentoring Class program as a problem-solving support approach for students at SMP Bumi Cendekia Yogyakarta, a pesantren-based junior high school in Indonesia. Pesantren students face unique challenges including dual academic burdens, cultural adjustment difficulties, and distance from family support systems. Data were collected through non-participant observation, semi-structured interviews with school administrators, mentor teachers, and student mentees, and documentation analysis. Findings revealed that the program effectively supported student problem-solving development through structured weekly sessions, grade-appropriate materials aligned with institutional values, and small group configurations of 11-12 students per mentor. The quality of mentor-mentee relationships, characterized by trust and regular interaction, emerged as a critical factor in program success. Students demonstrated progressive development from external dependence on mentors toward internal self-regulation in problem solving over the academic year. Additionally, the group mentoring format fostered peer solidarity and reduced feelings of homesickness and isolation among students from diverse regional backgrounds. This study extends existing mentoring literature by documenting effective adaptation of structured mentoring interventions to pesantren-based junior high school contexts, validating the role of supportive relationships in addressing boarding school challenges, and revealing temporal progression in self-regulated learning development. Findings contribute valuable insights for educational practitioners seeking to implement support mechanisms in boarding school environments.

Keywords: *Adolescent Development, Boarding School, Mentoring Program, Pesantren Education, Problem Solving*

INTRODUCTION

Education constitutes a fundamental activity aimed at advancing human development. The interaction between teachers and students within the school learning process cultivates conditions that guide students toward self-actualization (Cuevas, 2024). Education represents a conscious effort to create a learning environment wherein students actively develop their potential to acquire spiritual and religious strength, self-control, personality development, intelligence, noble character, and essential skills required by themselves, their communities, their nation, and their country (Firman & Ndonga, 2024).

The developmental phase experienced by students entering junior high school marks the beginning of puberty or early adolescence. Beyond the onset of puberty, this period witnesses significant changes in brain function and other cognitive domains, particularly intellectual development. Each individual undergoes unique variations in intellectual transformation. Inhelder and Piaget (1958) emphasized that brain changes during puberty necessitate cognitive advancement. Individuals subsequently encounter problems, formal instructional demands, and exchanges or contradictions of opinion with peers, all of which are necessary for the development of formal operational reasoning (Fatmi & Henni Fitriani, 2025). Consequently, each individual must train and prepare themselves in problem-solving processes.

During junior high school, students experience a transitional phase from childhood to adolescence. Under certain conditions, an individual may appear withdrawn, morose, or isolated. Conversely, under different circumstances, the same individual may exhibit cheerfulness, vivacity, and enhanced self-confidence. These variations in psychological conditions require careful attention and vigilance, particularly when they lead adolescents into difficulties at school or in peer relationships. According to Marzano et al. (1988), problem solving represents a component of the thinking process characterized by the ability to resolve problems. The ability to solve problems faced by individuals constitutes a crucial skill that every student must possess (Luthfia, 2024). As students advance through grade levels, they increasingly encounter novel problems. In this context, what students require is the capacity to solve problems and identify solutions to these challenges.

Problem-solving ability represents a life skill involving processes of analysis, interpretation, reasoning, prediction, evaluation, and reflection on occurrences in daily life (Choudhar et al., 2022). This ability subsequently applies previously acquired knowledge to new situations or conditions involving higher-order thinking processes. Lu and Xie (2024) believed that problem-solving skills will influence and accompany individuals throughout their educational journey. From elementary to secondary education, the problems encountered will vary considerably. Some students choose to avoid their problems; however, such avoidance ultimately produces adverse effects on their academic continuity at school. For students willing to confront problems, this willingness indicates possession of problem-

facing skills, specifically the motivational component. Although this component may not yet be fully actualized, it demonstrates positive potential for developing other problem-solving skill components through practice.

The problems faced by students attending formal schools differ from those encountered by students in pesantren-based schools. In pesantren-based schools, students bear responsibilities not only for mastering general academic subjects but also for acquiring religious knowledge taught at the pesantren (Musfah et al., 2021). In such institutions, santri (Islamic boarding school students) interact with numerous individuals from diverse regions, various family backgrounds, and different cultures, languages, and customs. Given this heterogeneous environment, psychological and social problems inevitably arise, including difficulties adapting to new environments, social disparities, stress or anxiety resulting from academic burdens, and other related issues (McIntyre et al., 2018). Studies examining Indonesian pesantren contexts have revealed specific challenges including difficulties adapting to new environments, social disparities, and stress resulting from dual academic burdens encompassing both general and religious education (Muflihun & Tohamba, 2021; Nisa & Abdullah, 2023). These findings underscore the necessity for structured support mechanisms that facilitate problem-solving skill development while addressing the unique psychological needs of boarding school students.

Recent research has demonstrated the significant impact of mentoring programs on student development and problem-solving capabilities. Pölczman et al. (2025) found that near-peer mentoring programs for medical students facilitated the development of critical soft skills, including problem-solving abilities, time management, and self-efficacy, with mentors experiencing substantial professional and personal growth through their participation. Similarly, few researchers emphasized that mentoring programs in higher education create crucial support systems fostering belonging and engagement, which positively impact student retention rates and academic performance (Jonnavithula & Bai, 2023; Khan et al., 2024). Furthermore, other researchers revealed that school-based group mentoring emerges as a well-suited method to promote students' positive development, particularly when addressing challenges faced by at-risk students (Chan et al., 2020; Kuperminc et al., 2020; Richardson, 2024).

The effectiveness of mentoring programs in developing problem-solving skills has been documented across various educational contexts. Xu et al. (2023) demonstrated that training in self-regulated learning strategies and problem-solving through mentoring programs provides students with necessary skills to think about their futures, regulate their actions, and persist through difficulties while facing school challenges successfully. Studies examining adolescent problem-solving development emphasize the critical nature of this skill during the secondary school period. Sharma et al. (2024) found that students trained in self-regulation strategies demonstrate improved motivation to engage in school and display greater efforts to

achieve better results, particularly when they learn to evaluate their resources and skills to solve problems independently or seek help appropriately. In pesantren-based educational settings specifically, Arifin and Baharun (2023) highlighted that students require special guidance mechanisms analogous to parental support when confronting problems, as the intensive boarding school environment creates unique psychological and social challenges. Research by Bahri (2024) further indicated that pesantren-based schools possess advantages in character development through their unique educational culture, yet face challenges including limited interpersonal skills and dependence on others in leadership development, necessitating innovative support programs.

Despite extensive research on mentoring programs and problem-solving development in various educational settings, significant gaps remain in understanding how structured mentoring interventions function within pesantren-based junior high schools. While existing literature has explored mentoring programs in higher education and general secondary education, limited empirical evidence documents the implementation and effectiveness of such programs specifically designed for early adolescent students in Islamic boarding school contexts (Chan et al., 2020; Jonnavithula & Bai, 2023; Khan et al., 2024; Pölczman et al., 2025; Richardson, 2024). Furthermore, although research acknowledges the unique challenges faced by pesantren students, systematic examination of innovative support programs addressing these challenges remains scarce (Arifin & Baharun, 2023; Bahri, 2024; Muflihun & Tohamba, 2021; Nisa & Abdullah, 2023). This study addresses these gaps by investigating a structured mentoring program specifically designed to support problem-solving development among junior high school students in a pesantren environment, contributing valuable insights into effective support mechanisms for boarding school contexts.

SMP Bumi Cendekia Yogyakarta represents a pesantren-based school implementing an international curriculum. Students or santri pursuing education at SMP Bumi Cendekia Yogyakarta originate from diverse regions spanning Sumatra, Kalimantan, throughout Java, and surrounding areas. As part of efforts to provide problem-solving support for student challenges, the school has established a program called Mentoring Class. Mentoring Class constitutes an activity participated in by students that incorporates education, sharing sessions regarding personal problems, and discussions concerning problem solving for existing issues under mentor guidance. This program presents significant research interest because few schools have implemented similar programs. Therefore, this study aimed to examine the implementation of the Mentoring Class program as a problem-solving support approach for students at SMP Bumi Cendekia Yogyakarta.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative approach with a case study design (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). Qualitative research methodology represents a research process conducted to understand specific events or phenomena through critical examination of problems to obtain appropriate solutions (Creswell & Poth, 2024). Rahardjo (in Ilhami et al., 2024) stated that a case study comprises a series of scientific activities conducted intensively, elaborately, and thoroughly regarding a program, event, or activity, whether at the individual level, a group of people, an institution, or an organization, to obtain in-depth knowledge about that event. The case study approach was selected because this research aimed to analyze in depth the Mentoring Class Program as an effort in problem-solving support at SMP Bumi Cendekia Yogyakarta, a pesantren-based school combining general education with Islamic boarding school activities.

Research participants were selected using purposive sampling technique and comprised the school principal, the guidance and counseling teacher or Character Education coordinator, the Vice Principal for Student Affairs, several teachers serving as mentors in the Mentoring Class program, and selected students (mentees) who actively participated in the program. Data collection was conducted through three primary methods: non-participant observation during Mentoring Class sessions, in-depth semi-structured interviews with all participant categories, and documentation analysis of program materials and relevant school documents. The researcher functioned as the primary instrument throughout the research process.

Data analysis followed an inductive approach involving processes of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Collected data were transcribed, coded, and categorized into emerging themes related to program implementation, problem-solving support mechanisms, and program outcomes. Credibility of findings was ensured through triangulation of data sources, member checking with participants, and prolonged engagement in the research setting.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The student population at SMP and Pesantren Bumi Cendekia Yogyakarta has experienced continuous growth year after year. Beyond attending school, students are required to reside in the pesantren and participate in the complete range of pesantren activities from morning until evening. The intensive schedule of school and pesantren activities, combined with daily interactions among students possessing diverse personalities, characteristics, habits, backgrounds, and regional origins, frequently triggers problems of both personal and collective nature.

According to Lewin (in Hotifah), field theory posits that individual behavior is shaped by the unity of the individual and the environment within the perspective of life space. This behavior is determined by situations faced by individuals, involving aspects of interconnection between self-facts and social situations. The

culture within the pesantren environment develops and integrates through relationships channeled via various models, symbolization, appreciation, organization, and daily transformation processes that can influence the psychological condition of santri.

In addition to conducting school activities, students at SMP Bumi Cendekia Yogyakarta must reside in the pesantren. Daily, they interact with the same peers and individuals, both at school and in the pesantren. The students' distance from their parents positions the Musrifah (dormitory supervisors) and school teachers as parental substitutes during their pesantren stay. When problems arise among students, they require special guidance from the Musrifah, analogous to the parental role at home. Consequently, the school established the Mentoring Class program as an alternative approach to monitor and support students in confronting their problems. The Mentoring Class activity serves as a more intensive support mechanism for students at school. Beyond the Musyrifah or pesantren administrators, students can communicate their problems to mentor teachers during Mentoring Class sessions. This Mentoring Class activity was adapted from the academic advisor system in higher education institutions that assists university students in resolving problems disrupting their academic progress.

Program Structure and Implementation

The Mentoring Class activity operates under the responsibility of the school and the guidance and counseling teacher or Character Education coordinator. The guidance and counseling teacher forms a mentor team by determining which teachers will serve as mentors in the Mentoring Class activity. The Mentoring Class procedure divides students into several groups according to their grade level, typically consisting of 11 to 12 students per group. The Mentoring Class incorporates material that must be delivered to mentees (students). Material delivered by mentor teachers to mentees is prepared by Character Education and distributed via WhatsApp group one day before the scheduled Mentoring Class session. Each mentor teacher can study the material before presenting it to students.

Material selected by Character Education is aligned with each grade level. For grade 7, the material addresses self-love; material for grade 8 concerns knowledge about friendship environments; and material for grade 9 involves implementing good practices. These good practices typically occur at the end of the semester while students await graduation. Good practices are conducted at institutions within Yayasan Bumi Aswaja located within the pesantren environment. Good practices performed include assisting in the Bumi Lestari kitchen and helping at the pesantren-owned laundry facility. Material in Mentoring Class is also frequently selected to address emerging issues at Bumi Cendekia, such as knowledge about excessive joking and bullying. In determining material, the guidance and counseling teacher adheres to the Nine Values of Bumi Cendekia,

encompassing honesty, responsibility, caring, humility, earnestness, sincerity, resilience, love for the homeland, and global citizenship.

Mentoring Class is conducted once weekly, specifically on Wednesdays after learning activities conclude. Mentor teachers and mentees (students) form gatherings in classrooms, classroom terraces, or around the school environment deemed comfortable by each group. Mentor teachers deliver material to mentees (students) first. After material delivery, mentor teachers invite students to ask questions, respond, or share stories regarding problems they are experiencing. This flexible arrangement of meeting spaces reflects the program's emphasis on creating comfortable and safe environments for student expression, which research has identified as crucial for effective mentoring relationships (Schenk et al., 2020).

Mentor-Mentee Relationship and Problem-Solving Support

Each mentor teacher supporting 11 to 12 students is expected to understand the personal problems of each mentee (student). The developmental process experienced by students correlates with the learning process. Therefore, every teacher should understand the complete developmental process of each student. When a teacher monitors student development, the teacher can provide appropriate services and guidance to students with approaches suited to their developmental stage, and the teacher can anticipate the potential emergence of problems affecting particular students' learning processes. The relatively small group size enables mentors to establish individualized relationships with each mentee, facilitating deeper understanding of their unique challenges and developmental needs.

When a student or mentee experiences a problem, the mentor teacher can guide and support the student in performing problem solving for the problem faced, thereby providing the student with a framework for confronting the problem. Problems faced by students typically revolve around school issues, pesantren matters, relationships with peers, learning difficulties, or other personal problems. If a mentee still experiences difficulty confronting the problem, or if the problem requires follow-up action, the mentor teacher will subsequently communicate the problem to the guidance and counseling teacher. The guidance and counseling teacher will then provide further direction regarding that student's problem. This tiered support system ensures that students receive appropriate levels of intervention based on the complexity and severity of their problems.

The quality of mentor-mentee relationships emerged as a critical factor in program success. Students reported feeling more comfortable sharing personal problems with their mentor teachers compared to other school personnel. This comfort level stemmed from the regular, structured interaction provided by weekly Mentoring Class sessions, which allowed trust and rapport to develop gradually over time. Several students explicitly mentioned that having a designated mentor gave them confidence that someone understood their situation and could provide guidance without judgment. This finding aligns with research emphasizing the

importance of relationship quality in mentoring contexts, where trust and perceived support significantly influence mentoring outcomes (Feng et al., 2024; Schenk et al., 2020).

Program Outcomes and Student Development

Mentoring Class exerts positive influence on students. Students can establish closer relationships with their mentor teachers and feel secure having someone who can listen to their complaints. Students find it easier to communicate problems they are experiencing. Through this activity, students gradually develop independence in solving problems they face, whereby these problem-solving skills prove highly useful as provisions for real life in the future. The success of Mentoring Class activities in supporting student problem solving depends significantly on the quality of mentor teachers. Mentor teachers serve as primary facilitators for students in the process toward problem resolution.

Observations during Mentoring Class sessions revealed distinct patterns in how students approached problem solving over the course of the academic year. At the beginning of the year, students predominantly waited for mentors to provide direct solutions to their problems. However, as the mentoring relationship developed, students increasingly demonstrated initiative in analyzing their problems, considering alternative solutions, and evaluating potential consequences before seeking mentor input. This progressive shift from dependence to independence in problem-solving approaches suggests that the program successfully fostered self-regulated learning strategies among students. Several mentors reported that by the second semester, their role had evolved from problem-solver to facilitator, with students more frequently seeking validation of their own problem-solving strategies rather than requesting direct solutions.

The program also demonstrated positive effects on students' emotional wellbeing and social integration within the pesantren community. Students who actively participated in Mentoring Class reported reduced feelings of homesickness and isolation compared to the beginning of the academic year. They attributed this improvement to having a reliable support system through their mentor teacher and fellow mentees in their group. The group format of Mentoring Class created opportunities for peer support, as students discovered that others faced similar challenges. This peer solidarity appeared particularly valuable in the pesantren context, where students from diverse regional and cultural backgrounds initially struggled with feelings of not belonging. Multiple students mentioned that hearing peers share similar difficulties normalized their experiences and reduced anxiety about their own adjustment challenges.

The findings of this study both support and extend previous research on mentoring programs in educational settings. Consistent with the previous studies (Jonnavithula & Bai, 2023; Khan et al., 2024; Pölczman et al., 2025), this study demonstrated that structured mentoring programs create crucial support systems

that positively impact student development. However, this research extends these findings by documenting the effectiveness of teacher-led mentoring specifically within a pesantren-based junior high school context, where students face unique dual academic burdens and boarding school challenges. While Pölczman et al. (2025) focused on near-peer mentoring in medical education and examined higher education contexts, this study reveals that adult mentor-led programs can be equally effective when adapted to early adolescent developmental needs and boarding school environments. The success of the Mentoring Class program particularly resonates with Feng et al. (2024) findings that mentor-mentee compatibility and relationship quality serve as primary determinants of mentoring effectiveness, as evidenced by students' reported comfort levels and willingness to share personal problems with their designated mentors.

The progressive development of student independence in problem solving observed in this study strongly corroborates Xu et al. (2023) research on self-regulated learning strategies. Xu et al. (2023) demonstrated that training in self-regulated learning and problem-solving through mentoring provides students with skills to regulate their actions and persist through difficulties. This study extends these findings by documenting the temporal progression of this skill development, showing that students move from external dependence on mentors toward internal self-regulation over the course of an academic year. Furthermore, the study supports Sharma et al. (2024) findings regarding improved motivation and effort among students trained in self-regulation strategies. The observation that students in later stages of the program sought validation of their own solutions rather than direct answers exemplifies the self-evaluation and help-seeking behaviors that Sharma et al. (2024) identified as markers of effective self-regulation. This progression contradicts approaches that provide immediate solutions to student problems, instead validating the scaffolded support model where mentors gradually transfer problem-solving responsibility to mentees.

The positive outcomes regarding emotional wellbeing and social integration documented in this study align with and extend research by Arifin and Baharun (2023); Bahri (2024); Muflihun and Tohamba (2021); Nisa and Abdullah (2023) pesantren-based educational contexts. These scholars highlighted the unique psychological and social challenges faced by pesantren students, including adaptation difficulties, social disparities, and stress from dual academic burdens. This study demonstrates that structured mentoring interventions can effectively address these challenges, thereby filling the gap in innovative support mechanisms for pesantren contexts that previous research acknowledged but did not fully examine. The reduction in homesickness and isolation reported by mentees validates Arifin and Baharun (2023) assertion that pesantren students require guidance mechanisms analogous to parental support. Moreover, the peer solidarity fostered through group mentoring addresses Bahri (2024) identified challenge of limited interpersonal skills development in pesantren settings. The finding that

students from diverse backgrounds developed mutual understanding through shared problem-solving experiences suggests that mentoring programs may serve as effective tools for addressing the cultural heterogeneity challenges (Muflihun & Tohamba, 2021; Nisa & Abdullah, 2023). However, this study also reveals a dimension not emphasized in previous pesantren research: the critical role of structured, regular support mechanisms in facilitating not only individual problem solving but also collective social integration in boarding school environments.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the implementation of the Mentoring Class program as a problem-solving support approach for junior high school students at SMP Bumi Cendekia Yogyakarta. Findings revealed that the program effectively addressed the unique challenges faced by pesantren-based school students through structured weekly mentoring sessions, grade-appropriate materials grounded in institutional values, and small group configurations facilitating individualized attention. The program successfully created safe spaces for students to express personal and academic concerns while receiving guided support from dedicated mentor teachers. Evidence demonstrated that the quality of mentor-mentee relationships, characterized by trust, regular interaction, and non-judgmental guidance, emerged as a critical determinant of program effectiveness in fostering student problem-solving capabilities.

The study contributes to existing literature by documenting how structured mentoring interventions can be effectively adapted to pesantren-based junior high school contexts, extending previous research predominantly focused on higher education and general secondary school settings. Findings support and extend current understanding of self-regulated learning development, demonstrating temporal progression from external dependence to internal self-regulation as students engage with consistent mentoring support. Furthermore, results validate the critical role of supportive relationships in addressing psychological and social challenges unique to boarding school environments, including homesickness, cultural adjustment difficulties, and dual academic burdens. The group mentoring format proved particularly valuable in fostering peer solidarity and social integration among students from diverse regional and cultural backgrounds.

Future research should examine the long-term sustainability of problem-solving skills developed through mentoring programs and investigate factors influencing mentor quality and effectiveness in pesantren contexts. Additionally, comparative studies examining variations in mentoring program implementation across different pesantren-based schools would provide valuable insights into adaptable best practices. Educational practitioners in boarding school contexts should consider implementing structured mentoring programs as integral components of student support systems, ensuring adequate mentor training and

ongoing quality monitoring to maximize program benefits for student development and wellbeing.

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