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Decision-Making, Self-Adjustment, and Istikamah as Correlates of Islamic Boarding School Readiness

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Abstract

Transition to Islamic boarding school requires cognitive, adaptive, and value-based readiness. This study examined decision-making, self-adjustment, and istikamah in relation to boarding-school readiness among 111 male prospective santri at Al-Kautsar Islamic Boarding School, Pekanbaru. A quantitative correlational design was employed using modified Action-State Orientation, Decision Styles Questionnaire, Attitudes About Reality Scale, and Spheres of Control measures. Decision-making ($r = .492$), self-adjustment ($r = .654$), and istikamah ($r = .375$) were positively associated with readiness (all $p < .001$). The simultaneous model was significant, $R = .665$, $R^2 = .443$, $F(3,107) = 28.346$, $p < .001$. Self-adjustment showed the strongest bivariate association. The findings support multidimensional admission-readiness assessment that addresses decision processes, adaptive capacities, and consistency of religious values rather than relying solely on willingness to enroll.

Keywords: *decision-making; readiness; self-adjustment*

1. Introduction

Islamic boarding schools (*pondok pesantren*) are not merely places of learning that move academic activity from home to school, but residential educational environments that change students' daily patterns of life. Prospective santri must face separation from their families, more structured rules, dense schedules of activities, communal living, demands for independence, and adjustment to the authority and culture of the pesantren. Studies of new santri show that the early phase of living in a pesantren can be accompanied by homesickness, difficulty feeling at home, rule violations, difficulty building relationships, and a need for adequate social support (Rahmi et al., 2023; Vamelia & Yasmin, 2023; Hasanah, 2024; Endi et al., 2026). Therefore, readiness before entering a pesantren deserves to be understood as a psychological issue that precedes the adjustment process after santri formally live in the dormitory.

The concept of readiness essentially refers to a state that enables individuals to respond to the demands of a situation in a directed manner. In the context of boarding education, readiness cannot be regarded merely as the wish to enroll or parental consent. Readiness also includes action orientation, the ability to make decisions, and preparedness to face possible failure or discomfort. Kuhl's (1984) action control framework helps explain that individuals differ in their ability to turn intentions into action, to maintain decisions, and to remain action-oriented when confronted with negative experiences. Applying this framework to the pesantren context allows readiness to enter a pesantren (*kesiapan mondok*) to be understood as a psychological capacity that links initial intentions to the demands of the life that will be undertaken.

The pre-research phenomenon in the thesis on which this article is based shows that the process of choosing a pesantren does not always originate entirely from the prospective santri. Some prospective santri appear to follow the decision or persuasion of their parents, while others have personal reasons such as following the example of relatives, being attracted to pesantren activities, deepening their religious knowledge, or

learning languages. This pattern is relevant to findings that adolescents' educational decision-making is influenced by internal and external factors, including self-concept, self-efficacy, perceptions of parental expectations, and the way individuals manage the consequences of their choices (Islamadina & Yulianti, 2017; Prabowo et al., 2019; Hidayati, 2020). In the pesantren setting, Sani and Frieda (2015) also showed a relationship between self-concept and the decision to become a santri. Thus, the quality of the decision-making process potentially relates to how ready a prospective santri is to accept the consequences of his choice.

Alongside decision-making, self-adjustment is a resource closely tied to the success of the transition to a boarding environment. Self-adjustment includes the ability to perceive reality adequately, manage pressure, maintain a functional self-concept, express emotions appropriately, and build interpersonal relationships (Haber & Runyon, 1984). Research on santri shows that self-regulation, self-acceptance, religiosity, self-efficacy, social support, and attachment to parents are related to adjustment in pesantren (Muzdalifah et al., 2019; Nabila & Laksmiwati, 2019; Ulpa et al., 2020; Maula & Affandi, 2022; Pamuji et al., 2023; Triyuliasari & Mubarok, 2024; Yusriani et al., 2025). These studies have mostly observed santri who have already entered a pesantren. Research that treats adjustment capacity as an asset before prospective santri formally begin boarding life is still rarer.

The third relevant aspect in pesantren education is istikamah. In a psychological-religious context, istikamah can be understood as consistency in holding to guiding values and keeping behavior from easily deviating from the goals one believes in. Budi and Mahpur (2014) describe the istikamah of santri as a dynamic that can rise and fall because of intention, the influence of important figures, environmental atmosphere, fatigue, and social distractions. This thesis research operationalizes istikamah through two aspects, namely steadfastness in religious guidance and steadfastness in self-protection. Although this construct is not identical to religiosity, recent findings that religiosity is related to santri adjustment (Triyuliasari & Mubarok, 2024) strengthen the argument that religious value orientation can be one of the psychological resources in the pesantren transition.

Research on pesantren life after students enter has developed quite rapidly, especially regarding self-adjustment, homesickness, social support, self-regulation, and self-efficacy. However, there is a gap in the pre-entry phase: whether the readiness of prospective santri before boarding is already related to how they make decisions, estimate their adaptive capacity, and maintain a religious value orientation. This gap is important because interventions after adjustment problems arise tend to be reactive. Identifying readiness from the time of registration allows pesantren to develop more preventive orientation, transition counseling, and family support (Alabed, 2017; Barrett, 2019; Cockerham, 2016).

Based on this framework, this study aims to examine the relationships of decision-making, self-adjustment, and istikamah with readiness to enter a pesantren among prospective santri of Al-Kautsar Islamic Boarding School, Pekanbaru. Four hypotheses are proposed: (H1) decision-making is positively related to readiness to enter a pesantren; (H2) self-adjustment is positively related to readiness to enter a pesantren; (H3) istikamah is positively related to readiness to enter a pesantren; and (H4) decision-making, self-adjustment, and istikamah simultaneously relate to readiness to enter a pesantren. The novelty of the study lies in testing these three domains at the prospective-santri phase, before boarding life begins, so that the focus is

not on adaptation success that has already occurred, but on the psychological readiness to enter the pesantren system.

2. Method

2.1 Design and Participants

The study used a quantitative correlational design with a cross-sectional approach. The main data collection was conducted on 10–12 April 2021 at the registration site of Al-Kautsar Modern Islamic Boarding School, Pekanbaru. The participants numbered 111 prospective santri, all of whom were male. The research sample consisted of prospective santri who had registered and were graduates of elementary school/Islamic elementary school (SD/MI) or equivalent, or junior high school/Islamic junior high school (SMP/MTs) or equivalent. Based on the description of the procedure in the thesis, recruitment took place among registrants available at re-registration with the application of subject criteria; its implementation is therefore more appropriately categorized as non-probability convenience sampling with purposive criteria, not pure random sampling.

2.2 Procedure and Ethics of Participation

The questionnaire was administered directly to prospective santri at the registration site. Written instructions explained the purpose of the study, emphasized that the answers would not affect admission decisions, stated that there were no right or wrong answers, and guaranteed the confidentiality of personal data. Participants ticked a statement that they understood the research information and were willing to participate before completing the questionnaire. The thesis document does not state an ethics committee approval number; therefore, this information needs to be supplied at the submission stage if the researchers have evidence of institutional ethical approval.

2.3 Instruments

Readiness to enter a pesantren was measured using a modification of the Action-State Orientation (ASO) scale referring to Kuhl (1984). The construct was adapted to the context of prospective santri and covers three dimensions: action orientation related to performance (AOP), action orientation to decision (AOD), and action orientation related to failure (AOF). After a trial with 30 prospective santri, 23 items were retained, consisting of six AOP items, eight AOD items, and nine AOF items. Responses were given on four categories of agreement. In the main research sample, the internal reliability of the scale was Cronbach's alpha = .877.

Decision-making was measured using a modification of the Decision Styles Questionnaire (DSQ) by Leykin and DeRubeis (2010), with the aspects grouped as person, task, and solution. After the trial, 14 items were used: two person items, five task items, and seven solution items. Responses used four categories from strongly disagree to strongly agree, with reverse scoring for unfavorable items. Internal reliability in the main sample was alpha = .728.

Self-adjustment was measured with a modification of the Attitudes About Reality Scale (AAR) by Unger et al. (1986), which in this study was mapped onto five aspects based on Haber and Runyon (1984): perception of reality, stress coping, self-concept, emotional expression, and interpersonal relationships. A total of 27 items were used after the trial: six items on perception of reality, six on stress coping, three on

self-concept, five on emotional expression, and seven on interpersonal relationships. Internal reliability was alpha = .848.

Istikamah was measured through a modification of Spheres of Control (SOC) by Paulhus (1983), adapted to the research context and formulated into two aspects, namely steadfastness in guidance and steadfastness in self-protection. After the trial, 15 items were retained, consisting of seven steadfastness-in-guidance items and eight steadfastness-in-protection items. The scale used four response categories of agreement and obtained alpha = .715. Because the modification of the SOC construct into istikamah is a conceptual adaptation quite far from the original construct, the istikamah results should be read as preliminary findings that require further construct validation in subsequent research.

2.4 Data Analysis

The analysis included descriptive statistics, internal reliability, Pearson correlations between each independent variable and readiness to enter a pesantren, and testing of the simultaneous model with multiple linear regression. The significance level was set at .05. The article interprets the correlation coefficients as r values, not as percentages of contribution. For the simultaneous model, R, R^2, adjusted R^2, F, degrees of freedom, and p are reported. Partial regression coefficients are not available in the thesis report; therefore, the article makes no claims about the unique contribution of each predictor after they are controlled together.

3. Results

3.1 Participant Characteristics

All participants were male (N = 111). The majority came from Pekanbaru City (55.9%), were elementary school graduates (63.1%), were the eldest child (42.3%), planned to stay in the pesantren until graduation (64.0%), and had relatives who were pesantren alumni (57.7%). Details of the main characteristics are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. *Characteristics of Research Participants*

Characteristic	n	%
Sex: male	111	100.0
Origin: Pekanbaru City	62	55.9
Origin: Pelalawan Regency	18	16.2
Origin: other regions	31	27.9
Graduated from: elementary school (SD)	70	63.1
Graduated from: Islamic elementary school (MI/SD-IT)	25	22.5
Graduated from: junior high school (SMP/MTs/SMP-IT)	16	14.4
Birth order: only child	9	8.1
Birth order: eldest	47	42.3
Birth order: middle	23	20.7
Birth order: youngest	32	28.8
Boarding plan: undecided	15	13.5
Boarding plan: three years	25	22.5
Boarding plan: until graduation	71	64.0

Characteristic	n	%
Has relatives who are pesantren alumni	64	57.7
Has no relatives who are pesantren alumni	47	42.3

3.2 Variable Description and Reliability

Descriptively, 54.1% of the prospective santri were in the ready category and 36.9% in the very ready category; only 9.0% were in the less ready category. Decision-making was mostly in the strong category (64.0%), self-adjustment was mostly strong (57.7%), and istikamah was mostly in the istikamah category (54.1%). All instruments showed adequate internal reliability, with alpha ranging from .715 to .877.

Table 2. *Descriptive Statistics and Instrument Reliability*

Variable	Items	Min	Max	M	SD	α
Readiness to enter pesantren	23	48	92	70	7	.877
Decision-making	14	20	52	36	6	.728
Self-adjustment	27	57	103	80	8	.848
Istikamah	15	29	57	43	5	.715

3.3 Hypothesis Testing

Pearson correlations showed that all independent variables had positive and significant relationships with readiness to enter a pesantren. Decision-making correlated moderately with readiness ($r = .492$, $p < .001$). Self-adjustment showed the largest correlation ($r = .654$, $p < .001$), whereas istikamah showed a lower positive correlation ($r = .375$, $p < .001$). Thus, H1, H2, and H3 were supported by the data.

In the simultaneous test, the model containing decision-making, self-adjustment, and istikamah was significant in explaining variation in readiness to enter a pesantren, $R = .665$, $R^2 = .443$, adjusted $R^2 = .427$, $F(3,107) = 28.346$, $p < .001$, with a standard error of estimate = 6.698. The model explained 44.3% of the statistical variance in readiness to enter a pesantren, while the remaining 55.7% was related to other factors not included in the model. H4 was thus supported.

Table 3. *Relationships Between Variables and Simultaneous Model*

Analysis	Coefficient	p	Interpretation	Decision
Decision-making – readiness	r = .492	< .001	Positive, moderate	H1 supported
Self-adjustment – readiness	r = .654	< .001	Positive, strong	H2 supported
Istikamah – readiness	r = .375	< .001	Positive, low-to-moderate	H3 supported
Simultaneous model	$R = .665$; $R^2 = .443$	< .001	$F(3,107) = 28.346$	H4 supported

Note. The r values are correlation coefficients, not percentages of contribution. The percentage of variance in the simultaneous model is based on $R^2 = .443$.

4. Discussion

This study shows that readiness to enter a pesantren among prospective santri is related to three different yet complementary psychological domains: how decisions are made, the capacity to adjust, and consistency with guiding religious values. The three bivariate hypotheses were supported, and the simultaneous model

explained 44.3% of the variance in readiness to enter a pesantren. This finding extends the focus of the pesantren literature, which has so far mostly examined problems after santri begin living in the dormitory. By moving the point of observation to the registration period, readiness can be treated as a target of preventive assessment before homesickness, difficulty feeling at home, rule conflicts, or relationship difficulties develop into more serious problems (Rahmi et al., 2023; Vamelia & Yasmin, 2023; Hasanah, 2024; Endi et al., 2026).

Descriptively, most prospective santri were in the ready or very ready category. This profile can be read together with the characteristics of the sample: 64% had planned to stay in the pesantren until graduation and 57.7% had relatives who were pesantren alumni. Exposure to figures who have lived in a pesantren can provide a concrete picture of pesantren life, while a plan to stay until graduation may reflect a relatively more established goal orientation. Nevertheless, the thesis's difference-test data did not show significant differences in readiness by alumni-relative category or by planned duration of boarding. This means that simple demographic information is not sufficient to replace psychological assessment of individual readiness.

The relationship between decision-making and readiness to enter a pesantren was at a moderate level (r = .492). This finding is plausible because the decision to enter a pesantren is not only the result of rational judgment, but can arise from the interaction of personal desires, parental expectations, information about the school, religious considerations, and the experiences of those close to the adolescent. Adolescents can accept external direction but still need an internal process to understand the consequences of that choice. Research on educational decision-making shows that self-efficacy, self-concept, and perceptions of parental expectations are related to the process of choosing an education (Islamadina & Yulianti, 2017; Prabowo et al., 2019; Hidayati, 2020). In this study, the task aspect was the most prominent aspect of decision-making, indicating the importance of how prospective santri obtain information, weigh options, and settle on a decision. The implication is that the santri admission process should ideally give prospective santri room to state their own reasons, hopes, and worries, not merely verify the guardian's approval.

Self-adjustment had the strongest bivariate correlation with readiness to enter a pesantren (r = .654). This finding reinforces the view that readiness to enter a pesantren is closely tied to the ability to imagine and manage the demands of a new environment. Among the aspects of self-adjustment, emotional expression was the most prominent in the thesis data, followed by interpersonal relationships and stress coping. This pattern is important because the boarding transition involves separation from home, intensive relationships with peers, interaction with caregivers, and different schedules and rules. The literature consistently shows that santri adjustment is related to self-regulation, self-acceptance, self-efficacy, social support, independence, and parental attachment (Muzdalifah et al., 2019; Nabila & Laksmiwati, 2019; Ulpa et al., 2020; Maula & Affandi, 2022; Pamuji et al., 2023; Triyuliasari & Mubarok, 2024; Yusriani et al., 2025). Thus, self-adjustment is not merely a post-entry outcome, but can also be viewed as a pre-transition asset.

These findings are also in line with homesickness research. Rahmi et al. (2023) and Vamelia and Yasmin (2023) showed that the experience of being away from home is a relevant phenomenon among new santri, while Endi et al. (2026) showed that adjustment and social support are related to the level of homesickness. From an intervention perspective, readiness screening should be followed by an orientation program that trains coping with homesickness, help-seeking skills, emotion regulation, interpersonal problem solving,

and a realistic introduction to pesantren routines. This strategy is more constructive than regarding difficulty feeling at home solely as a lack of steadfastness or discipline.

Istikamah was also positively related to readiness to enter a pesantren, although its strength was lower (r = .375). Conceptually, this result shows that consistency with religious guidance and the ability to protect oneself can be a source of orientation when prospective santri prepare to enter religious education. Budi and Mahpur (2014) emphasize that istikamah is influenced by intention, influential figures, environmental atmosphere, and internal conditions such as fatigue and laziness. Recent findings on religiosity and santri adjustment also show that religious resources can interact with adaptation processes (Triyuliasari & Mubarok, 2024). However, the lower relationship compared with self-adjustment carries an important message: readiness to enter a pesantren should not be reduced to a measure of religiosity or steadfastness of values alone. Prospective santri with a strong religious orientation still need adequate emotion regulation, social skills, and coping strategies.

Interpretation of the istikamah construct needs methodological caution. The istikamah scale in this study is a modification of Spheres of Control (Paulhus, 1983), which was then mapped onto steadfastness in guidance and steadfastness in protection. This adaptation produced adequate internal reliability (alpha = .715), but reliability does not in itself prove construct validity. For the development of the article and further research, the istikamah scale needs to be evaluated through content validity by Islamic psychology experts, exploratory factor analysis, confirmatory factor analysis, and convergent–discriminant validity with constructs such as religiosity, grit, self-control, and commitment. Psychometric strengthening is important so that the term istikamah does not merely function as a religious label for general self-control.

The simultaneous model yielded R = .665 and R^2 = .443, showing that the combination of the three variables is substantially related to readiness to enter a pesantren. Even so, R^2 cannot be interpreted as evidence that the three variables cause 44.3% of readiness, because the research design is correlational and cross-sectional. In addition, this article does not report the unique contribution of each variable in the regression because the table of partial coefficients is not available in the thesis report. Therefore, the statement that self-adjustment is the most important variable is limited to the fact that self-adjustment has the largest bivariate correlation, not that it is the strongest independent predictor after the other variables are controlled.

The remaining 55.7% of variance indicates other factors worth investigating. The pesantren literature points to the role of peer and parental support, self-efficacy, self-regulation, self-acceptance, family attachment, and the condition of the pesantren environment (Afifah & Saloom, 2018; Muzdalifah et al., 2019; Fitri & Setiowati, 2020; Ulpa et al., 2020; Maula & Affandi, 2022; Pamuji et al., 2023; Triyuliasari & Mubarok, 2024). Institutional factors such as pesantren climate, rule structure, quality of dormitory care, facilities, and access to communication with the family may also influence the transition experience (Alabed, 2017; Barrett, 2019). Future research models would be stronger if they integrated individual, family, and institutional factors simultaneously.

Practically, the findings support developing a two-stage readiness assessment for entering a pesantren. The first stage is a brief screening at registration to identify prospective santri with low readiness or decision ambivalence. The second stage is a follow-up assessment that explores the reasons for choosing the pesantren, expectations of dormitory life, strategies for coping with difficulty feeling at home, the ability to

build relationships, and family support. The assessment results should not be used to automatically reject prospective santri, but as a basis for determining the intensity of orientation and mentoring. With this approach, readiness assessment becomes part of developmental support, not a selection tool that stigmatizes.

The study has several limitations. First, all participants were male and came from one pesantren, so generalization to female santri, mixed pesantren, salaf pesantren, or other regions should be limited. Second, the cross-sectional design does not permit causal inference and does not prove that readiness actually predicts continued boarding or adaptation after entry. Third, all data came from self-report and are therefore exposed to social desirability bias, especially since measurement took place during the admission process. Fourth, several instruments underwent major modification, and the reported validity mainly consisted of item correlations and Cronbach's alpha; evidence of factor structure is not yet available. Fifth, recruitment based on the availability of registrants reduces representativeness. Future research should use a longitudinal design from registration through at least one semester, involve male and female santri from several pesantren, and link initial readiness to outcomes such as homesickness, rule violations, well-being, achievement, and santri retention.

5. Conclusion

Decision-making, self-adjustment, and istikamah were each positively related to readiness to enter a pesantren among prospective santri of Al-Kautsar Islamic Boarding School, Pekanbaru. Self-adjustment showed the strongest bivariate correlation, followed by decision-making and istikamah. Simultaneously, the three variables formed a significant model and explained 44.3% of the variance in readiness to enter a pesantren. The findings affirm that readiness to enter a pesantren is a multidimensional construct that includes the firmness of the choosing process, adaptive capacity, and consistency of values. Pesantren are advised to use readiness assessment as a basis for orientation and early mentoring, while future research needs to test the construct validity of the instruments and to conduct longitudinal tracking of santri adaptation after entering the dormitory.

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