

ATTACHMENT-BASED ISLAMIC PEDAGOGY: A RELATIONAL FRAMEWORK FOR EMOTIONAL REGULATION AND LIFE SKILLS DEVELOPMENT AMONG AUTISTIC STUDENTS IN PESANTREN

Nurul Azizah¹, Ummu Jauharin Farda¹, Jihan Avie Yusrina², Erna Dwi Nugraini³, Linda Indiyarti Putri¹

¹Universitas Wahid Hasyim, Jl. Menoreh Tengah X, Semarang, Central Java, Indonesia

²Universitas Ivet Semarang, Jl. Pawiyatan Luhur IV, Semarang, Indonesia

³Universitas Borneo Tarakan, Jl. Amal Lama, Kota Tarakan, North Kalimantan, Indonesia

*Corresponding Email: nuza_azizah@unwahas.ac.id

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ABSTRACT

Despite the growing emphasis on inclusive education, limited attention has been given to how attachment-based relationships within pesantren (Islamic boarding schools) support the emotional and adaptive development of autistic learners. This study explores how attachment-based caregiving contributes to emotional regulation and life skills development among students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) at pesantren in Indonesia. To achieve this, the research employed a qualitative case study design, and data were collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis involving ten autistic students, five caregivers, and the boarding school supervisor. Data credibility was ensured through source and method triangulation, and thematic analysis supported by Quirkos software was used to analyze the data. The findings reveal that secure attachment, characterized by caregivers' responsiveness, affection, and consistency, serves as a secure base and safe haven that facilitates emotional regulation and adaptive social behaviors. Furthermore, structured religious and communal activities further promote important life skills, including self-awareness, empathy, critical thinking, problem-solving, and leadership. Based on these insights, the study proposes Attachment-Based Islamic Pedagogy (ABIP) as a relational framework that integrates secure attachment with the core values of *ta'dib* and *tarbiyah bi al-rahmah*. Collectively, these findings highlight the significant potential of faith-based residential education to strengthen inclusive Islamic educational practices and better support children with special needs.

Keywords: Attachment-Based Islamic Pedagogy, Autism Spectrum Disorder, Emotional Regulation, Inclusive Islamic Education, Life Skills, Pesantren

INTRODUCTION

Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) frequently experience difficulties in recognizing, regulating, and expressing emotions, which in turn hinder the development of adaptive and independent life skills (Conner et al., 2019; Kose et al., 2025; Martínez-González et al., 2022; Yon-Hernández et al., 2023; Volkmar et al., 2014). These challenges often limit their participation in daily activities and social interactions, thereby necessitating educational environments that support not only cognitive development but also emotional and functional competencies (O'Connor et al., 2026; Pearson et al., 2025). Recent evidence indicates that many autistic individuals in Indonesia continue to encounter difficulties in performing basic daily activities, including self-care and religious practices (Firdaus et al., 2024; Suwarno & Chasanah, 2021). Consequently, the provision of inclusive educational settings capable of fostering emotional regulation and life skills has become an increasingly important issue in both special and faith-based education (Barr & White, 2026). As one of the oldest and most influential

Islamic educational institutions (Himawati et al., 2022), pesantren possess significant potential to provide holistic support for children with special needs through structured communal life and character-oriented education (Ghufron & Nasir, 2019; Maula et al., 2022; Muntakhib et al., 2024; Zulkhairi et al., 2025); (Prihatin et al., 2019).

According to John Bowlby's attachment theory, children tend to form emotional bonds with adult figures whom they perceive as sources of protection and comfort (Alexander et al., 2018); (Verschueren & Koomen, 2012). Previous studies have demonstrated that secure attachment contributes to adaptive functioning, social competence, and emotional regulation among children, including those with ASD (Ainsworth et al., 2015; Davidson et al., 2022; Duschinsky & Solomon, 2017). Attachment theory posits that responsive and consistent caregivers function as a secure base and safe haven that enable children to explore their environment and develop self-regulatory capacities (Bowlby, 1958); (Nugraini et al., 2023). Furthermore, emotional regulation among autistic children develops through co-regulation processes, in which caregivers act as external regulators before children gradually acquire self-regulation skills (Mazefsky et al., 2013; Vivanti & Nuske, 2017). Likewise, life skills are cultivated through scaffolding and structured support that progressively encourage autonomy and social participation (Gonzalez et al., 2026; Mangrulkar & Health and Human Development Programs, 2001; Wood et al., 1976). These findings suggest that relational dimensions of caregiving are essential for supporting the development of autistic learners.

Despite these advances, existing scholarship has predominantly approached attachment and emotional regulation from psychological and clinical perspectives, with limited attention to faith-based residential education and the pedagogical meanings embedded within caregiving relationships (Boy et al., 2025). Studies on inclusive pesantren have primarily focused on accessibility, religious guidance, or institutional practices (Ghufron & Nasir, 2019; Kibtyah et al., 2022; Maula et al., 2022), while the dynamics through which attachment relationships contribute to emotional regulation and life skills among autistic students remain underexplored. More importantly, little is known about how attachment processes can be interpreted through Islamic educational philosophy, particularly through the concepts of *ta'dib*, *rahmah*, and exemplary conduct (*uswah hasanah*). This gap indicates the need to move beyond purely psychological explanations toward a more holistic understanding of attachment as a relational and pedagogical process within Islamic education.

Grounded in attachment theory, this study adopts an integrative framework in which secure attachment facilitates emotional co-regulation and adaptive functioning, while life skills are nurtured through scaffolding and structured guidance provided by caregivers (Ainsworth et al., 2015; Bowlby, 1958; Davidson et al., 2022; Mazefsky et al., 2013; Wood et al., 1976). Within the context of inclusive Islamic boarding schools, these processes are further interpreted through Al-Attas's concept of *ta'dib* and Al-Ghazali's principles of *rahmah* and exemplary conduct, which emphasize holistic character formation and moral development (Al-Attas, 1993; Al-Ghazali, n.d.). Accordingly, this study proposes Attachment-Based Islamic Pedagogy as an integrative framework that conceptualizes caregiving not merely as emotional support but as a relational educational process aimed at fostering emotional regulation, life skills, and *akhlak al-karimah* among autistic learners in faith-based residential settings.

Against this backdrop, this study explores the attachment dynamics between caregivers and autistic students at Pondok Pesantren Al-Achsaniyyah, an inclusive Islamic boarding school in Indonesia that implements a twenty-four-hour caregiving system. Specifically, the study seeks to examine how attachment-based caregiving supports emotional regulation and life skills development and how these processes are understood from the perspective of Islamic education. By integrating attachment theory with Islamic educational philosophy, this study contributes to the growing discourse on inclusive Islamic education and advances the concept

of Attachment-Based Islamic Pedagogy as a relational framework for supporting children with special needs in faith-based educational environments.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative case study design to explore how attachment-based caregiving practices support emotional regulation and life skills development among autistic students within the natural context of an inclusive Islamic boarding school. Specifically, this was guided by the theoretical frameworks outlined by Creswell and Poth (2023) and Nurahma and Hendriani (2021). The setting of Pondok Pesantren Al-Achsaniyyah in Kudus was selected as an information-rich case due to its distinctive twenty-four-hour caregiving system designed for children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). Participants were purposively selected to ensure they had direct involvement in caregiving and educational activities, and the sample comprised ten autistic students (ASD1–ASD10), five caregivers (CG1–CG5), and one pesantren supervisor (PG). To gather comprehensive data, multiple methods were employed, including semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and document analysis, following Creswell's (1998) approach. The interviews aimed to explore caregivers' experiences and perceptions regarding attachment-based caregiving and its influence on emotional regulation and life skills. Participant observation specifically focused on caregiver–student interactions during daily routines and social activities to observe natural behaviors and dynamics. Meanwhile, document analysis involved reviewing students' developmental records, caregivers' notes, and photographs documenting educational practices to triangulate findings. Ethical considerations were thoroughly addressed by obtaining informed consent from all participants and ensuring their anonymity through a systematic coding procedure, thereby upholding ethical standards throughout the research process.

Data credibility was established through source and method triangulation by comparing information obtained from autistic students, caregivers, and the pesantren supervisor across interviews, observations, and documentary evidence (Harahap, 2020). To ensure robustness, the data were analyzed using thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's six-phase procedure, which consists of data familiarization, initial coding, theme generation, theme review, theme definition, and report writing. Quirkos software was employed to facilitate data management, coding, and visualization, thereby enhancing analytical transparency and rigor. This methodological approach allows for a comprehensive understanding of the data, ensuring that the findings are reliable and valid. Furthermore, the resulting themes were interpreted through the lens of Attachment-Based Islamic Pedagogy, which integrates attachment theory with Islamic educational concepts of *ta'dib*, *rahmah*, and exemplary conduct (*uswah hasanah*). This approach helps to explain how caregiving relationships contribute to emotional regulation, life skills development, and character formation among autistic learners in faith-based residential education. It emphasizes the importance of nurturing relationships rooted in trust and compassion, which are fundamental to fostering an environment conducive to holistic development and spiritual growth.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study aimed to explore how attachment-based caregiving supports emotional regulation and the development of life skills among autistic students in an inclusive Islamic boarding school. Drawing on data collected through semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and document analysis, thematic analysis generated four interconnected themes: (1) responsive and consistent caregiving as the foundation of secure attachment, (2) co-regulation processes and emotional regulation, (3) structured communal life and life skills development, and (4) boundary-setting and ethical tensions in attachment-based caregiving. The findings presented

below are grounded in triangulation of multiple sources, including autistic students, caregivers, and the pesantren supervisor, as well as in different forms of evidence from interviews, observations, and institutional documents. Participant quotations are used to illustrate salient patterns that consistently emerged from the data.

Responsive and Consistent Caregiving as the Foundation of Secure Attachment

Pondok Pesantren Al-Achsaniyyah, established in 2007, provides twenty-four-hour care for approximately 120 autistic students through a rotating caregiving system. Participant observations and interviews revealed that caregivers function not only as educators but also as primary attachment figures who accompany students throughout their daily routines. Triangulation across caregivers (CG1–CG5), the pesantren supervisor (PG), and observational records consistently indicated that caregiver selection prioritizes affection, patience, and attentiveness rather than formal qualifications in special needs education. As explained by the supervisor, “*What matters is that they genuinely care for the children first*” (PG, personal communication, November 2025). Across the data sources, a recurring pattern emerged in which secure relationships between caregivers and autistic students were characterized by three interrelated dimensions: trust, proactive communication, and affective closeness (Figure 1).

Subsequently, field observations and interview data demonstrated that trust developed through caregivers’ responsiveness, sensitivity, and consistency in addressing the students’ needs. Caregivers described allowing students experiencing emotional distress to calm themselves before gradually exploring the causes of their emotions and responding accordingly. As one caregiver explained, “*After they calm down, we try to respond to what they need*” (CG2, personal communication, October 2025). Similar patterns were observed during daily activities, where caregivers patiently accompanied students who experienced confusion or anxiety and consistently maintained established routines related to prayer, meals, bathing, and sleeping. Document records and observational notes further showed that maintaining promises and predictable routines strengthened students’ trust and willingness to communicate. According to CG5, “*They always remember and hold you to your promises*” (personal communication, January 2026).

Triangulation across interviews and participant observations also revealed that attachment relationships were expressed through affective closeness. Autistic students were frequently observed seeking physical proximity to caregivers, expressing affection through hugs and verbal expressions, and showing signs of distress when their primary caregivers were absent during shift changes. One caregiver noted that behavioral changes often occurred following caregiver transitions, stating, “*When the shift changes, the children can change drastically*” (CG3, personal communication, November 2025). Conversely, students appeared calmer and more willing to resume their activities once familiar caregivers returned. Observational data further indicated that some students who had experienced emotional outbursts later approached caregivers to apologize and re-establish interactions. These recurring patterns across participants suggest that responsive and consistent caregiving fostered emotional security and relational closeness among autistic students within the pesantren environment.

Although caregiving relationships were predominantly supportive, data from caregivers and the pesantren supervisor revealed that crisis situations occasionally required more directive responses. Interviews consistently identified several practices used when students experienced severe tantrums or aggression, including separating students from peers, employing a firm tone of voice, and, in certain circumstances, utilizing symbolic objects associated with the students’ specific fears. As one caregiver stated, “*Usually we separate them in a room by themselves. That is the last resort*” (CG3, personal communication, November 2025). Similar accounts were reported by other caregivers and confirmed by the pesantren supervisor. Despite these interventions, observations and interviews showed that students generally maintained affectionate

relationships with caregivers and continued to seek them during stressful situations. Figure 1 illustrates the key components that shape attachment patterns in the pesantren caregiving context.

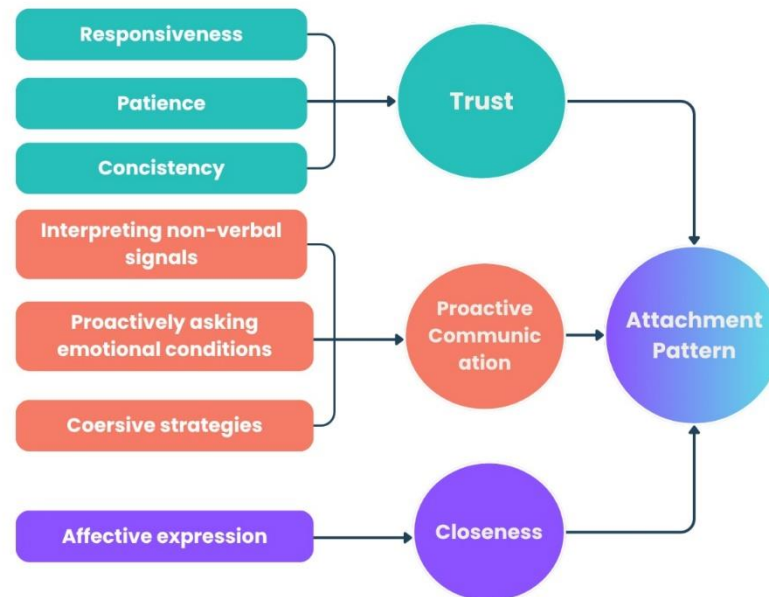


Figure 1. Dimensions of Secure Attachment between Caregivers and Autistic Students in the Pesantren Context

Collectively, the data indicate that attachment relationships in the pesantren context were shaped by trust, proactive communication, affective closeness, and consistent caregiving practices, as illustrated in Figure 1. The model highlights how responsiveness, patience, and consistency build trust, while interpreting non-verbal signals, proactively asking about emotional conditions, and using coercive strategies when necessary contribute to proactive communication. Affective expression further strengthens closeness, ultimately forming secure attachment patterns between students and caregivers.

Co-Regulation Processes and Emotional Regulation

Triangulation across interviews, participant observations, and institutional records revealed that emotional regulation among autistic students was closely intertwined with the presence and responsiveness of caregivers. Caregivers consistently described emotional dysregulation as manifesting in tantrums, crying, aggression, withdrawal, and, in several cases, extreme behaviors such as removing clothes or running outside the pesantren during emotional distress. Similar patterns were confirmed by observational data and accounts from the pesantren supervisor. Despite these challenges, interviews with caregivers and observations of daily interactions indicated that students frequently sought caregivers when experiencing frustration, interpersonal conflicts, or sudden changes in routine. One caregiver explained, “*When they are being chased by a friend, they ask me for help, saying, ‘Please help me, ma’am.’ I feel that they are calm and feel safe because I interact with them every day*” (CG3, personal communication, November 2025). Recurrent patterns across participants showed that familiar caregivers often became the first individuals approached by students when facing emotional difficulties.

Data obtained from interviews with caregivers (CG1–CG5) and the pesantren supervisor (PG), corroborated by observational notes, further demonstrated that emotional regulation was facilitated through various forms of co-regulatory interaction. Caregivers

reported using calming conversations, physical proximity, touch, hugs, reassurance, and routine activities to help students regain emotional stability. According to the pesantren supervisor, understanding emotional conditions depended largely on caregivers' ability to adjust to the students' affective states, noting, "*We become a kind of emotional dumping bin. What does the child want, what are they like? If they go 'crazy,' we 'go crazy' with them first?*" (PG, personal communication, January 2026). Similar observations indicated that caregivers often redirected students toward familiar routines and preferred activities to reduce emotional tension. These strategies appeared repeatedly across different participants and situations, suggesting that emotional regulation occurred through continuous interpersonal interactions rather than through isolated behavioral interventions.

Participant observations also showed that changes in routines and caregiver shifts frequently influenced students' emotional states. Several caregivers reported that students who appeared calm during one shift could become distressed when cared for by different caregivers. In addition, data from interviews and institutional records revealed several incidents illustrating the broader consequences of emotional dysregulation. One caregiver recounted that a student who previously tended to remove clothing during emotional outbursts had gradually reduced this behavior over time, while the pesantren supervisor described an incident in which a student ran into the street without clothing, leading to misunderstandings with local residents. Such events highlighted the challenges faced by caregivers in maintaining students' emotional stability within a communal environment. Observational data further showed that physical arrangements within the pesantren, including reinforced furniture and one-to-one supervision during certain activities, were implemented to ensure students' safety during periods of emotional distress.

Across interviews, observations, and documentary evidence, caregivers consistently reported employing emergency strategies when students experienced severe tantrums or potentially harmful behaviors. These included isolating students temporarily from peers, speaking with a firm tone, and using objects associated with specific fears to de-escalate emotional outbursts. Despite these episodes, repeated observations indicated that students often returned to caregivers after emotional crises, expressed remorse, and resumed daily activities. Several students were observed becoming calmer after interacting with familiar caregivers and showed fewer disruptive behaviors over time. Collectively, the triangulated findings suggest that emotional regulation among autistic students in the pesantren environment was characterized by continuous co-regulatory processes involving caregiver presence, emotional responsiveness, routine-based interactions, and adaptive strategies to restore emotional stability.

Structured Communal Life and Life Skills Development

Triangulation across interviews, participant observations, and documentary records revealed that the structured and communal environment of Pondok Pesantren Al-Achsaniyyah provided opportunities for autistic students to develop various life skills through everyday activities and social interactions. Observations consistently showed that students were actively involved in collective routines, including congregational prayers, meals, physical exercise, and other scheduled activities. Across participants, self-awareness emerged as a prominent characteristic, particularly among students with mild support needs, who demonstrated an understanding of daily schedules and responsibilities. Observational records indicated that students generally followed communal activities in an orderly manner and displayed enthusiasm during group exercises. Caregivers reported that students with moderate to severe support needs required more intensive guidance, especially during periods of emotional distress triggered by hunger, homesickness, or changes in caregiver shifts. These patterns were consistently confirmed through interviews with caregivers and field observations.

Empathy and social awareness also emerged from the data as important aspects of students' daily interactions. Interviews with caregivers and participant observations indicated that autistic students frequently demonstrated concern for their peers, despite having difficulties expressing emotions in socially conventional ways. One participant explained, "*They seem to be in their own world, communicating with one another and helping each other*" (ASD3, personal communication, November 2025). Observational data showed that students often recognized when peers were upset and attempted to respond through simple acts of assistance or companionship. Although some responses occasionally appeared inappropriate, caregivers noted that such behaviors often reflected intentions to remind or support peers rather than hostility. Similar patterns were observed across different settings within the pesantren, indicating the emergence of social sensitivity and interpersonal awareness among students.

Data from interviews and observations further revealed the development of critical and creative thinking through activities tailored to students' interests and talents. Caregivers described efforts to identify individual strengths and provide opportunities for creative expression. Students who enjoyed drawing, for example, were encouraged to produce paintings and handicrafts, while others demonstrated interests in geography, technology, and higher education. As one participant noted, "*Some recognize countries around the world and talk about wanting to study computer science at university*" (ASD5, personal communication, December 2025). Participant observations and documentary records also highlighted the role of structured guidance in developing problem-solving skills. One frequently observed example involved a student who became anxious after losing sandals. Rather than immediately providing the answer, caregivers guided the student to retrace previous actions and search systematically for the missing item. Similar situations during daily routines, such as waiting in meal queues or managing personal belongings, provided opportunities for students to learn adaptive responses to everyday challenges.

Leadership and responsibility were likewise evident across interviews and observations. Caregivers reported that students were regularly entrusted with simple responsibilities and encouraged to participate in religious and communal activities. Observational records showed that several students led *dzjiba'*, *shalawat*, *tablil*, and congregational prayers, while others delivered short religious speeches during pesantren activities. According to one caregiver, "*We give the students opportunities to become imams, lead tablil, and deliver speeches. They are even able to summarize trending topics and present them in front of others*" (CG3, personal communication, November 2025). Interviews and observations consistently suggested that repetitive routines, social participation, and caregiver support enabled autistic students to gradually acquire self-awareness, empathy, creative thinking, problem-solving abilities, and leadership skills. Collectively, the findings indicate that the structured communal life of the pesantren served as an important context for fostering practical competencies and social participation among autistic students.

Boundary-Setting and Ethical Tensions in Attachment-Based Caregiving

Triangulation across interviews with caregivers (CG1–CG5), the pesantren supervisor (PG), participant observations, and documentary records revealed that attachment-based caregiving in Pondok Pesantren Al-Achsaniiyah involved not only nurturing and emotional support but also the establishment of behavioral boundaries, particularly during episodes of severe emotional dysregulation. Caregivers consistently reported encountering situations involving intense tantrums, aggression, self-injurious tendencies, or behaviors that posed risks to other students. Observational records documented that in such circumstances, caregivers employed several de-escalation strategies, including speaking in a firm tone, temporarily separating students from peers, and allowing them time to calm down before re-engaging in communication. As one caregiver explained, "*Usually we separate them in a room by themselves. We*

lock it first so they can calm down. The others are asked to go downstairs, and the child is left alone. That is the last resort" (CG3, personal communication, November 2025). Similar accounts were reported by other caregivers and confirmed by the pesantren supervisor, indicating that these responses constituted a shared crisis-management practice within the institution.

Interviews and observations further showed that caregivers occasionally relied on objects associated with students' specific fears as emergency measures to interrupt escalating behaviors. According to the pesantren supervisor, "*Some are afraid of a lighter, some of a broom made of coconut-leaf ribs, and some of a candle. When we use those objects, their emotions subside*" (PG, personal communication, January 2026). Caregivers also described raising their voices in certain situations when students became difficult to redirect. One caregiver noted, "*When they can no longer be reasoned with, we call them with a firm voice, and they may stop immediately and calm down*" (CG4, personal communication, November 2025). These accounts were corroborated by participant observations showing that such interventions were employed selectively during crisis situations rather than as routine disciplinary measures. Documentary evidence and field notes further indicated that modifications to the physical environment, including reinforced furniture and increased supervision during psychological assessments, were implemented to reduce the risk of injury to students and others.

Despite these restrictive interventions, observational data and interview findings consistently indicated that students generally maintained close and affectionate relationships with caregivers. Caregivers reported that students often approached them after emotional outbursts to apologize or seek reassurance. One caregiver recalled, "*They come and apologize after being angry. It feels difficult to describe*" (CG1, personal communication, October 2025). Participant observations similarly showed that students continued to seek familiar caregivers during stressful situations and displayed signs of emotional comfort when interacting with them. These recurring patterns suggest that boundary-setting practices and crisis-management strategies coexisted with caring and emotionally supportive relationships within the daily life of the pesantren. Collectively, the findings demonstrate that attachment-based caregiving involved continuous negotiation between emotional support, behavioral regulation, and safety considerations in responding to the complex needs of autistic students.

The findings demonstrate that emotional regulation among autistic students is inseparable from the quality of attachment established with caregivers. Consistent with attachment theory, caregivers in Pondok Pesantren Al-Achsaniyyah function as both a secure base and a safe haven, providing emotional security that enables students to seek comfort and gradually resume adaptive activities following periods of distress (Ainsworth et al., 2015; Bowlby, 1958). The observed tendency of students to approach familiar caregivers during moments of anxiety, conflict, or frustration suggests that emotional regulation is relational rather than purely intrapersonal. These findings support previous studies showing that secure attachment contributes to adaptive functioning and social competence among children with ASD by fostering a predictable, emotionally safe environment (Davidson et al., 2022; Duschinsky & Solomon, 2017; Teague et al., 2017). In this regard, the quality of emotional relationships appears more influential than caregivers' formal educational backgrounds, indicating that sensitivity, responsiveness, and consistency are critical elements in supporting autistic learners (Altgassen et al., 2019).

The findings further illustrate that emotional regulation among autistic students occurs through processes of co-regulation. According to Mazefsky et al. (2013), children with ASD often experience difficulties identifying and regulating emotions independently, making external support indispensable for the development of self-regulation. The present study found that caregivers acted as emotional co-regulators through physical proximity, reassuring language, familiar routines, and empathic interactions. Similar findings have been reported by Vivanti and

Nuske (2017), who argue that attachment and social learning are closely intertwined in autism, with caregivers serving as mediators who facilitate adaptive emotional functioning. The recurring pattern in which students sought caregivers during distress and gradually returned to daily activities suggests that emotional regulation develops through sustained interpersonal interactions rather than isolated behavioral interventions. Thus, attachment-based caregiving provides an important relational mechanism through which autistic students acquire emotional stability and adaptive coping strategies.

The findings indicate that the structured communal life of the pesantren provides autistic students with opportunities to develop life skills through ongoing guidance and social participation. This finding aligns with Wood et al.'s (1976) concept of scaffolding, which emphasizes the role of more knowledgeable individuals in providing structured assistance that gradually enables learners to become independent. Rather than immediately solving students' problems, caregivers at Al-Achsaniyyah guided students through sequences of actions and routines, thereby creating opportunities for learning through experience (Ratnawulan et al., 2025; Tian et al., 2022). Such interactions were particularly evident in problem-solving situations and daily activities, where caregivers supported students in identifying difficulties and gradually encouraged independent responses.

The life skills observed in this study correspond closely with the dimensions proposed by Mangrulkar and Health and Human Development Programs (2001), namely self-awareness, empathy, critical and creative thinking, problem-solving, and leadership. The structured routines of congregational prayer, communal meals, physical exercise, and social interaction served as natural contexts for cultivating these competencies. Previous studies have emphasized that life skills are essential for improving the quality of life and social participation of individuals with ASD (Kose et al., 2025; Yon-Hernández et al., 2023). The present findings suggest that life skills development is not merely the product of formal instruction but emerges from repetitive social practices and supportive relationships embedded within everyday life. Thus, the pesantren environment functions not only as a religious institution but also as a social ecology that promotes adaptive functioning and independence among autistic learners (Aziz et al., 2026).

One of the most distinctive findings of this study concerns the presence of crisis-management strategies that coexist with nurturing relationships. Although attachment-based caregiving is characterized by affection and responsiveness, caregivers occasionally employed restrictive interventions such as temporary isolation, firm verbal commands, and the use of objects associated with students' fears to interrupt severe tantrums or potentially dangerous behaviors. These practices reveal the complex realities faced by caregivers in communal educational settings where ensuring safety becomes an immediate priority. Such findings reflect the challenges identified by Dillenburger et al. (2014), who argue that interventions for individuals with ASD are often shaped by contextual demands and practical constraints.

From the perspective of attachment theory, the use of fear-based strategies raises important ethical questions because secure attachment is fundamentally grounded in safety, trust, and emotional availability (Ainsworth et al., 2015; Bowlby, 1958). While the findings indicate that students generally maintained affectionate relationships with caregivers and continued to seek them during distress, these practices illustrate the tension between compassion and control in crisis situations. Rather than viewing this contradiction as evidence of failed attachment, the findings suggest that caregiving in residential settings involves continuous negotiation between emotional support, behavioral regulation, and collective safety. This highlights the need for more trauma-informed and ethically sensitive approaches to crisis intervention among autistic learners. Future studies should examine the long-term implications of these strategies and explore alternative de-escalation techniques that preserve emotional security while ensuring safety for both students and caregivers.

The findings of this study suggest that attachment relationships in the pesantren context extend beyond psychological processes and constitute a relational form of education. While attachment theory emphasizes that responsiveness and consistency provide children with a secure base and safe haven for development (Ainsworth et al., 2015; Bowlby, 1958), the present findings indicate that these relationships are embedded within religious routines, communal life, and moral cultivation. The twenty-four-hour caregiving system at Pondok Pesantren Al-Achsaniyyah creates sustained interactions that support not only emotional regulation and life skills but also the development of empathy, responsibility, discipline, and social participation (Rusmana et al., 2024). In this context, attachment is experienced not merely as emotional dependence but as a pedagogical relationship through which values and character are continuously nurtured.

This interpretation resonates with Al-Attas’s (1993) conception of *ta’dib*, which views education as the cultivation of adab and the holistic formation of human beings. The caregivers’ responsiveness, patience, and consistency observed in this study can therefore be understood as educational practices directed toward nurturing students’ *fitrah* and facilitating moral development rather than merely correcting behavior. Similarly, Al-Ghazali’s emphasis on *rahmah* (compassion), exemplary conduct (*uswah hasanah*), and gradual habituation highlights the inseparability of emotional support and moral education (Al-Ghazali, n.d.). The structured routines of congregational prayer, communal living, and shared responsibilities observed at Al-Achsaniyyah provide a social ecology that reinforces self-discipline and the internalization of positive values. These findings corroborate previous studies demonstrating the potential of pesantren to provide holistic and inclusive education for children with special needs (Ghufron & Nasir, 2019; Maula et al., 2022; Muntakhib et al., 2024).

Building upon these findings, this study proposes Attachment-Based Islamic Pedagogy as an integrative framework that links secure attachment, emotional co-regulation, and scaffolding processes with the Islamic educational principles of *ta’dib*, *rahmah*, and exemplary conduct. Within this framework, caregivers function not merely as attachment figures or instructors but as *murabbi* who facilitate emotional, social, and moral development through sustained relational interactions. Consequently, emotional regulation and life skills are understood not solely as psychological outcomes but as components of *akhlaq al-karimah* cultivated through compassionate accompaniment and structured communal life. By integrating attachment theory with Islamic educational philosophy, this study extends existing scholarship beyond clinical and psychological perspectives and offers a conceptual contribution to inclusive Islamic education. Figure 2 illustrates the proposed Attachment-Based Islamic Pedagogy framework.

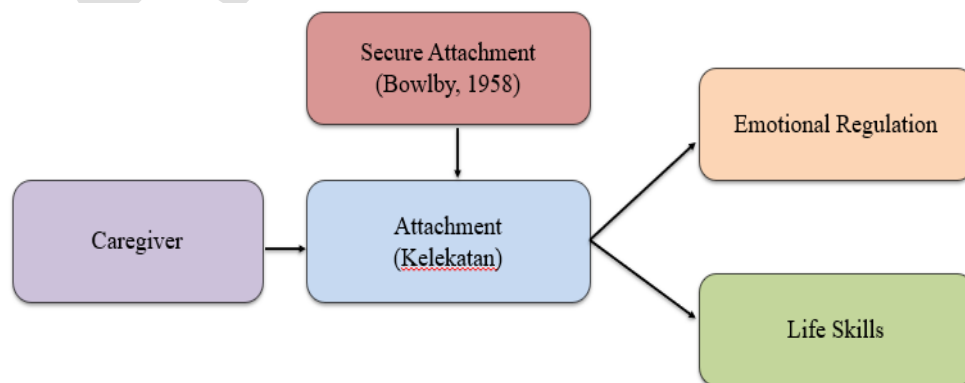


Figure 2. Caregiver–ASD Santri Attachment in Shaping Life Skills and Emotion Regulation in the Pesantren Context

As illustrated in Figure 2, responsive and consistent caregiving establishes secure attachment characterized by trust, emotional safety, and relational closeness. This secure attachment facilitates emotional co-regulation and scaffolding processes through which autistic students gradually develop adaptive competencies, including self-awareness, empathy, critical thinking, problem-solving, and leadership. Within the pesantren environment, these developmental processes are further shaped by the Islamic educational principles of *ta'dib*, *rahmah*, and *uswah hasanah*, which transform caregiving relationships into pedagogical relationships aimed at cultivating *akhlak al-karimah*. Accordingly, Attachment-Based Islamic Pedagogy conceptualizes caregiving not merely as emotional support but as a holistic educational process that integrates emotional, social, and moral development within faith-based residential education. This framework advances contemporary discussions on inclusive Islamic education by demonstrating that secure attachment and compassionate caregiving can serve as relational foundations for nurturing autistic learners and supporting their full participation in educational and social life.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that attachment-based caregiving in an inclusive Islamic boarding school provides a relational foundation for fostering emotional regulation and life skills among autistic students through responsive, consistent, and compassionate interactions. Secure attachment enables caregivers to function as emotional co-regulators, while structured communal life and guided participation facilitate the development of self-awareness, empathy, critical thinking, problem-solving, and leadership. Beyond these psychological and adaptive outcomes, the findings reveal that caregiving relationships in the pesantren context embody the Islamic educational principles of *ta'dib*, *rahmah*, and *uswah hasanah*, transforming attachment into a pedagogical process oriented toward the cultivation of *akhlak al-karimah*. Accordingly, this study proposes Attachment-Based Islamic Pedagogy as a conceptual framework that integrates secure attachment, emotional co-regulation, and scaffolding with Islamic educational philosophy, thereby extending attachment theory beyond clinical and psychological perspectives. The framework offers theoretical and practical implications for strengthening inclusive Islamic education and faith-based residential care for children with special needs. Nevertheless, this study is limited to a single-case context, and future research involving multiple settings and diverse stakeholders, including parents and teachers, is needed to examine the transferability and broader applicability of the proposed framework.

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