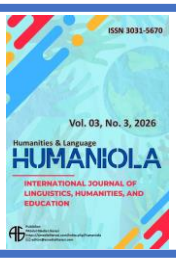
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Bodily Habituation and Symbolic Communication of *Ta'dzim* among Serving Students in an Indonesian *Pesantren*

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ABSTRACT

This study examines how Ta'dzim, the veneration shown by santri toward teachers, is constructed and sustained as communication in the experience of santri mengabdi at a pesantren in Menes, Pandeglang, Indonesia. Existing scholarship largely explains Ta'dzim through kitab akhlak or authority of the kiai, producing a downward account. Employing Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis through Alfred Schutz's Social Phenomenology and Symbolic Interactionism, this study analyses interviews conducted between March and July 2026 with eight serving santri. Supplemented by interviews with the pengasuh and her son, the study finds a different pattern. First, Ta'dzim is learned through the body before reasoning: participants performed acts of veneration before, and sometimes without, knowing their basis, citing the kitab as a justification discovered afterwards. Second, transmission runs horizontally; participants identified senior santri or peers as sources of knowledge, and none reported instruction from the pengasuh, who corroborated this pattern. Third, because opportunities for asking upward are limited, the pengasuh's facial expressions become the santri's main source of information, functioning as standards for self-evaluation and producing guilt without fault. Fourth, obedience does not erase judgment: participants report fatigue, irritation, and doubt, yet express them without disturbing the relationship. The study concludes that agreement rests on the form of the act rather than its reason. Theoretically, it extends Schutz's notions of recipe knowledge and reciprocity of perspectives, showing how nonverbal cues in hierarchical relations become instruments of self-evaluation.

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1. Introduction

To enter the environment of a *pesantren* is to enter a social order that possesses its own way of expressing position. *Santri* stand when the *pengasuh* passes, lower their gaze when speaking, soften the pitch of their voices, approach on their knees, turn the teacher's sandals so that they may be put on easily, and even switch off the engines of their vehicles before crossing the yard. This repertoire of acts is known by the term *Ta'dzim*, the veneration of the teacher together with everything associated with the teacher.

Scholarship on *Ta'dzim* has thus far largely followed two explanatory routes. The first is normative and textual, tracing the practice to the *kitab akhlak*, above all *Ta'lim al*-Muta'allim, which positions reverence for the teacher as a precondition for the acquisition of beneficial knowledge (Hidayati et al., 2024; Ledyana & Haryanto, 2024; Setiyono et al., 2023). The second centres on leadership, accounting for the growth of a culture of *Ta'dzim* through the exemplary conduct and authority of the *kiai* (Alimuddin, 2021; Gapur et al., 2024; Mardiyah, 2020; Rahman et al., 2021). Both yield a picture that moves in a single direction: value passes downward, from the *kitab* and the teacher to the *santri*.

Two questions remain little examined within that picture. The first concerns how *santri* in fact come to know that a given form of veneration must be performed in a particular manner. The second concerns what takes place within the relationship when a *santri* feels uncertain, tired, or in doubt, and whether the communicative channel available to them permits that doubt to be voiced. Both are questions about communication rather than about doctrine, and neither can be answered by reading the texts to which *Ta'dzim* is referred.

This article addresses both questions through the lived experience of *santri mengabdi* (*tahassus*), a category of *santri* occupying a distinctive position within *pesantren* life. Having completed their formal education, they remain resident in the *pesantren* and undertake various forms of service, ranging from kitchen duty and shopping at the market to caring for the *pengasuh's* grandchildren, teaching, and managing a range of *pesantren* affairs. The boundary between the space of education and the domestic space of the *pengasuh's* household thereby dissolves. Their intensity of encounter is higher than that of any other group of *santri*, so that for them *Ta'dzim* is not a rule confined to the *pengajian* assembly but an entire manner of moving, working, speaking, and even feeling.

The research site possesses a further distinctive feature that makes it methodologically ideal for this inquiry: its principal authority is held by a woman, an *Ibu Nyai*. While authority in traditional *pesantren* typically centres on a male *kiai* often compartmentalising *Ta'dzim* within formal instructional spaces the leadership of an *Ibu Nyai* fundamentally dissolves the boundary between educational authority and domestic life. This integration intensifies the informal, day-to-day encounters between the caregiver and the serving *santri*, whose duties range from kitchen work to childcare. Consequently, this unique dynamic provides an optimal setting to observe how the symbols of veneration are transmitted horizontally and habituated through daily bodily routines rather than formal, top-down instruction.

On this basis the study poses a single question: how is the practice of *Ta'dzim* constructed and sustained through symbolic communication in the lived experience of *santri* mengabdi? By employing a communication and phenomenological perspective, this study departs from traditional sociological or theological approaches that treat *Ta'dzim* merely as a doctrinal rule or institutional norm. Instead, it contributes to communication theory by demonstrating how nonverbal cues within highly hierarchical and closed institutions operate not just as messages, but as powerful instruments of self-evaluation and behavioral control. The argument advanced is that *Ta'dzim* in this setting operates as a symbolic system whose agreement rests on the form of the act rather than on its reason, and that this feature accounts at once for its stability and for the burden borne by those who enact it.

2. Method

This study is qualitative in character and operates within an interpretive paradigm. Analysis was conducted using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), selected for its ontological alignment with Schutzian social phenomenology: both regard human beings as sense-making organisms (Smith & Osborn, 2015). IPA also affords scope for the double hermeneutic, in which the researcher seeks to make sense of participants who are themselves making sense of their own world (Motta & Larkin, 2022).

The research site is a *pesantren* within the MALNU network in Menes, Pandeglang, Banten, whose principal *pengasuh* is a woman. The primary participants were all *santri mengabdi* (*tahassus*) resident at the site at the time the research was conducted, eight persons in total, comprising seven women and one man. Because the entire population was involved, no sampling procedure was applied. Their ages ranged from 18 to 24 years, their length of residence from four to nine years, and their period of service from one to six years. In order to preserve participant confidentiality, the researchers assigned the codes P1 to P8.

In order to situate the accounts of the *santri* within a more complete intersubjective field, interviews were also conducted with the *pesantren's pengasuh* (coded PP) and with one of her sons, who likewise teaches at the site (coded AP). Both interviews are treated as supporting data. Neither is used to determine the truth or falsity of the *santri*'s accounts; where the two parties' statements diverge, that divergence is reported as a finding rather than as an error on the part of either.

Data collection combined a period of residence at the research site with online interviews. During the residential period (March, 2026 to July, 2026), initial face-to-face in-depth interviews were conducted with all eight participants, allowing the researchers to build essential rapport and capture rich nonverbal cues in their natural setting. Subsequently, eight online interviews were conducted via video conference in May to July 2026. These online sessions were necessitated by distance as several participants had temporarily returned to their hometowns and were strictly utilized for follow-up clarifications and member-checking. Because these online sessions built upon the strong relational rapport already established during the fieldwork and utilized video to observe facial expressions, data consistency and phenomenological depth were rigorously maintained. Observation was undertaken in the position of observer as participant and served principally to establish the context for the interview material. Analysis followed the six stages of IPA. All transcripts were read repeatedly and annotated at three levels: the descriptive, namely what was said; the linguistic, namely how it was said, encompassing word choice, repetition, hesitation, and local idiom; and the conceptual, namely the interpretive questions arising from the utterance. This stage yielded approximately ninety-five emergent themes, which were then condensed case by case, separately, into sixty-six personal themes before any cross-case integration was undertaken, in order to preserve the idiographic commitment of IPA. These personal themes were subsequently clustered according to similarity in the movement of meaning, and the distribution of each resulting sub-theme across the eight participants was examined. The present article draws upon that portion of the analysis concerning symbolic communication; themes relating to motive and *keberkahan* are reported in a separate publication.

Credibility was pursued by three means: comparing the *santri's* accounts with the supporting interviews and with the results of field observation; confirming preliminary interpretations with participants; and discussing the resulting thematic structure with

academic peers. Reflexive notes were written following each session in order to maintain the separation between description and interpretation.

The researchers' position requires acknowledgement. The *pesantren's pengasuh* was the first author's teacher during her secondary education, and a member of her family had previously been a *santri* at the site. This proximity eased the securing of access and the building of mutual trust, but at the same time carried the potential to influence interpretation. Reflexivity was therefore maintained throughout the research, with an awareness that certain questions posed at later stages had already been shaped by the findings of earlier ones, so that each topic was opened with an open question before being pursued in depth.

With respect to ethics, all participants gave their consent after receiving an explanation of the purpose of the research. Participants' names were replaced with codes, and the names of members of the *pengasuh's* family appearing in participants' speech were replaced with role markers. It must be acknowledged that in a community of this size full anonymity cannot be guaranteed; for that reason, highly distinctive details concerning the duties or personal histories of individual participants are not specified in this article. Quotations were originally produced in the participants' own language, namely colloquial Indonesian interspersed with Sundanese, and were recorded without grammatical correction, since the form of the utterance is itself part of the data. For the purposes of this article they have been translated into English by the authors, with terms whose original wording carries analytic weight retained in italics.

3. Result and discussion

3.1 Ta'dzim as Bodily Knowledge: Imitating Before Understanding

All eight participants performed acts of veneration before, and in several respects without ever, knowing their basis. In their accounts the body becomes the first medium that learns to venerate, long before the mind is able to formulate why that veneration must be performed. One participant stated the sequence with striking plainness:

> "We had already seen it, already grown used to it oh, so the people before us did it like that, and we followed along, so it became normal; and then after *pengajian* it turned out there was a teaching about it." (P1)

The sequence warrants attention: seeing, growing accustomed, following, and only then attending *pengajian* and discovering that a teaching does in fact exist. Two markers of discovery, namely "oh" and "it turned out" (*ternyata*), indicate that the grounds were not known beforehand. The same sequence appears in the account of the participant with the greatest command of textual references. P7, the only participant able to cite an Arabic maxim together with its translation, described his own beginning in a manner no different from the rest: "still a junior, so I just went along with it" (*ikut-ikutan*) (P7).

Six participants named the *kitab akhlak* as the basis of the practice they undertake, among them *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim*, *Taisir al-Khalaq*, *Adab al-Muta'allimin*, and *Minhaj al-Muta'allimin*. Almost all referred to these as something encountered after the practice was already under way. One participant even acknowledged that certain practices possess no clear textual basis:

> "Actually there are some that aren't specifically discussed in the *kitab*, teh, but we do them because it's the teacher who explains them." (P2)

Here legitimacy shifts from the text to the one who conveys it. The validity of the practice rests upon who does the explaining rather than upon what is written.

Over time these acts became responses that no longer required deliberation. Participants described their bodies as having grown "accustomed": when the *pengasuh* passes, they stand without first having to think. What was initially an institutional rule became in their own words, part of the manner in which they exist as *santri*. This trajectory accords with what Chenail, (2009) Smith et al. (2009) term the meaning-making process, namely the process by which meaning accrues gradually to experience that is continuously lived rather than being grasped from the outset.

Within the Schutzian framework this pattern is most aptly read through recipe knowledge: practical knowledge of how to handle recurrent situations, socially inherited and accepted without examination (Rasid et al., 2021; Wilson, 2002). No characterisation is more apt for the expression *ikut-ikutan* that recurs repeatedly in participants' accounts. This finding also casts in a different light those studies that position *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim* as the normative foundation of the practice of veneration in *pesantren* (Setiyono et al., 2023). At this research site that *kitab* is indeed the principal reference, yet for the participants it does not function as the point of departure for practice but rather as a justification that follows after. What normative scholarship presents as a premise occupies, within lived experience, the position of a conclusion.

3.2 Horizontal Transmission and the Repertoire of Symbols of Veneration

All eight participants identified their source of knowledge concerning *Ta'dzim* as senior santri, peers, older cohorts, or a member of the *pengasuh's* family recounting her own experience. Not one stated that the *pengasuh* taught it directly. For the participant who entered the *pesantren* without a background in religious education, the first explanation came instead from a peer:

> "I didn't really know beforehand what the inside of a *pesantren* was like… When I first became a new *santri*, when a teacher passed by, everyone would fall silent for a moment and bow, and I was a little puzzled, wondering why it had to be like that. Then my friend explained that this was a form of *Ta'dzim*, of honouring the teacher." (P8)

The sequence is again instructive: seeing, puzzlement, and only then the receipt of an explanation, and that explanation came from a fellow *santri*. The most influential form of instruction, moreover, proved not to be instruction in the sense of command, but the recounting of one's own past obedience. A participant who had once lived under the same roof as the *pengasuh* during the *pesantren's* early years described it thus:

> "Everything came from the senior *santri*… even what [the *pengasuh's* child] demonstrated was not us having to do this or that, but she demonstrated on herself. In the past she used to be like that… she often walked with her head bowed very low… It was more that kind of demonstrating, demonstrating on herself." (P4)

Influence of this kind is difficult to resist. There is no command that may be disputed, only an example that gives rise to the wish to imitate; obedience is transformed into an aspiration rather than a burden. The supporting data reinforce this pattern rather than contradicting it. Asked how *santri* change in their performance of *Ta'dzim*, the *pengasuh* named senior *santri* before naming the study of the *kitab*. In her account, *santri* at first do not yet know and must be told, and "perhaps the ones who tell them are their seniors", which is subsequently supported by the study of *Taisir al-Khalaq* and *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim* as time goes on (PP). Her son stated the matter more firmly still: "mostly they come to know it from theory and from the practice of the senior *santri*" (AP). A comparison between the transmission assumed by earlier scholarship and the direction found in this study is presented in Figure 1.

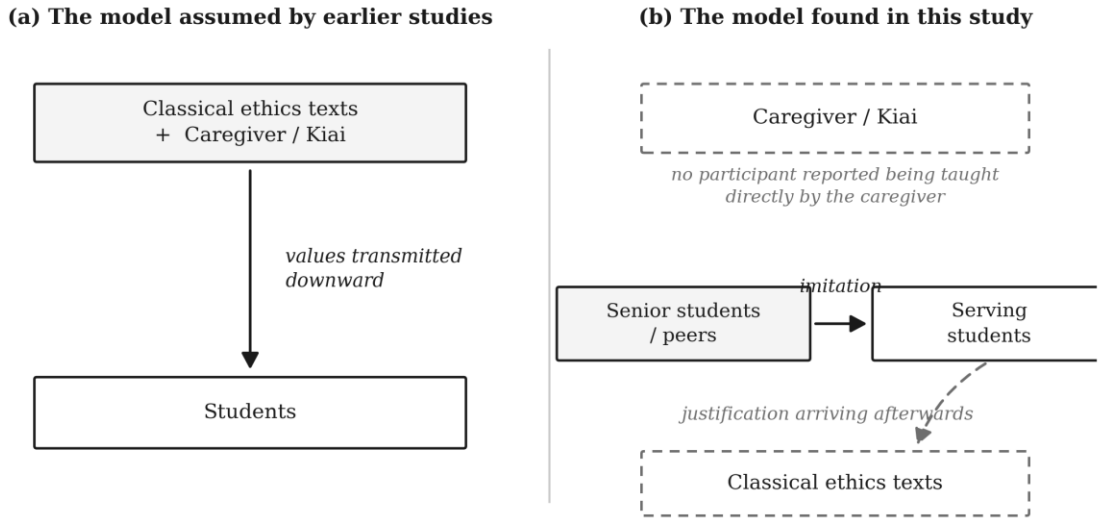


Figure 1. The Transmission of *Ta'dzim*: The Assumed Model and the Model Found
Source: Authors, 2026

The repertoire of symbols circulating along this route is extensive, and all eight participants described acts oriented toward one and the same end, namely the diminishing of the self before the *pesantren*. Standing when a teacher passes, lowering the gaze, refraining from eye contact in serious conversation, walking in a crouch or shifting along the floor, not preceding the *pengasuh* on the stairs, turning the teacher's sandals, softening the pitch of the voice, and employing refined Sundanese (*bahasa Sunda lemes*) all belong within it. Two domains merit particular note because they are seldom brought into view. The first is sound:

> "Before passing the teacher, we have to switch off the motorbike and push it until we are outside the gate." (P8)

What is honoured, accordingly, is not only the body of the *pengasuh* but also the quiet surrounding that body. The second domain is space. A participant who had once lived in the *pengasuh's* residence recounted that even to meet the most basic of needs she first had to reconnoitre:

> "The bathroom was downstairs, in the kitchen, so we had to go down, and we would check the situation first whether Ibu or another teacher was down there, or not." (P4)

Ta'dzim is therefore not an act performed at the moment of encounter. It is the entire manner of moving within space, ordered by a calculation of the possibility of encounter.

This finding carries an important implication for communication studies. Symbols acquire meaning because they are understood in common through interaction that proceeds continuously (Haris & Amalia, 2018). Recent scholarship within the humanities underscores that symbolic cultural artifacts actively shape institutional identity (Antwi et al., 2026), and that traditional communication ethics function as binding norms for interaction across different hierarchical structures (Hardiyanti et al., 2023). The results of this study indicate, however, that shared meaning is not primarily constructed upon the normative reasons underlying an act, but upon the repetition of and immersion in the form of the act itself as observed in everyday social practice. This is at the same time what renders the practice stable, since nothing can be disputed when no one claims to know its grounds.

3.3 Reading the Face: Nonverbal Cues as the Only Available Information

Six participants described themselves as continuous readers of cues whose inner state follows directly upon the inner state of the *pengasuh*. One participant recounted the agreeable aspect of this condition: “Happy if Ibu is happy do you see what I mean, teh? Just seeing Ibu smile makes me happy” (P1). The construction of that sentence mirrors the construction of the relation, since the subject “I” appears only as a derivative of “Ibu is happy”. Yet the same condition operates in the opposite direction as well:

> “Not a chance (*boro-boro*), teh, we are already reluctant and afraid, so we just keep quiet. We don't disturb Ibu. And if Ibu is frowning, we already surmise (*menduga*) that she must have a headache… we hold back first: ‘don't go before Ibu, she has a headache’, because afterwards we will get it too.” (P2)

Three features of this utterance warrant attention. First, the expression *boro-boro* at the beginning of the sentence rejects the very idea of asking before that idea has had the chance to be considered. Second, the verb employed is *menduga*, to surmise, so that all knowledge concerning the *pengasuh's* state occupies the position of conjecture. Third, the outcome of that conjecture is disseminated to other *santri* as a shared warning, so that a one-sided interpretation of a single facial expression may become collective knowledge without ever being open to correction.

The gravest consequence is the migration of evaluation into the self. Guilt may arise without any certainty that a fault has occurred: “There was a time she was simply frowning. It made us afraid, we began wondering what we had done wrong. So we ended up feeling guilty by ourselves” (P2). The pattern appears in more extended form in the account of a participant who had borrowed the *pengasuh's* motorbike and turned back partway:

> “I was halfway there and I turned back. But when I got back… [the *pengasuh's* child] had already taken the car, and his expression looked disappointed. And there I was truly sad, like, I don't know where I went wrong. And I was also confused about what I ought to do. I simply felt guilty.” (P6)

The expression “I don't know where I went wrong” stands alongside “I simply felt guilty” without being experienced as contradictory. Uncertainty does not diminish the sense of guilt; an expression once apprehended suffices to generate a judgment upon the self. Four participants recounted comparable experiences.

The supporting data clarify why the capacity to read cues acquires such importance. Asked how she exemplifies *Ta'dzim* to the *santri mengabdi*, the *pengasuh* named neither explanation nor instruction but sensitivity (*kepekaan*). A *santri* who is sensitive, in her account, will take the initiative without having to be told; if she is sweeping and a sensitive *santri* passes, the broom will be taken from her hand so that the work may be continued, “but those who are not sensitive simply carry on as normal” (PP). A criterion is therefore at work, and that criterion distinguishes clearly between *santri*, yet it is never articulated to those it evaluates. The *santri* who does not take the broom is not told that something has just been overlooked.

Two processes of interpretation proceed simultaneously. The *santri* interpret the *pengasuh*'s facial expressions in order to apprehend her emotional condition, while the *pengasuh* interprets the conduct of the *santri* in order to assess their degree of sensitivity and obedience. Both parties alike construct meaning through a process of interpretation, yet the outcome of that interpretation is never confirmed directly with the party interpreted. From the perspective of symbolic interactionism, the process of role-taking proceeds intensively and reciprocally (Baggio, 2020; García, 2015; Halik, 2024). That process, however, is not accompanied by any mechanism of verification enabling either party to establish the accuracy of the meanings they construct. It is crucial to note that the absence of this confirmation channel is not due to explicit structural rules prohibiting *santri* from asking questions. Rather, it is a communicative and perceptual barrier; *santri* engage in self-censorship driven by the psychological weight of *adab*and the fear that questioning or verifying their interpretation with the *pengasuh* might constitute a breach of *Ta'dzim*.

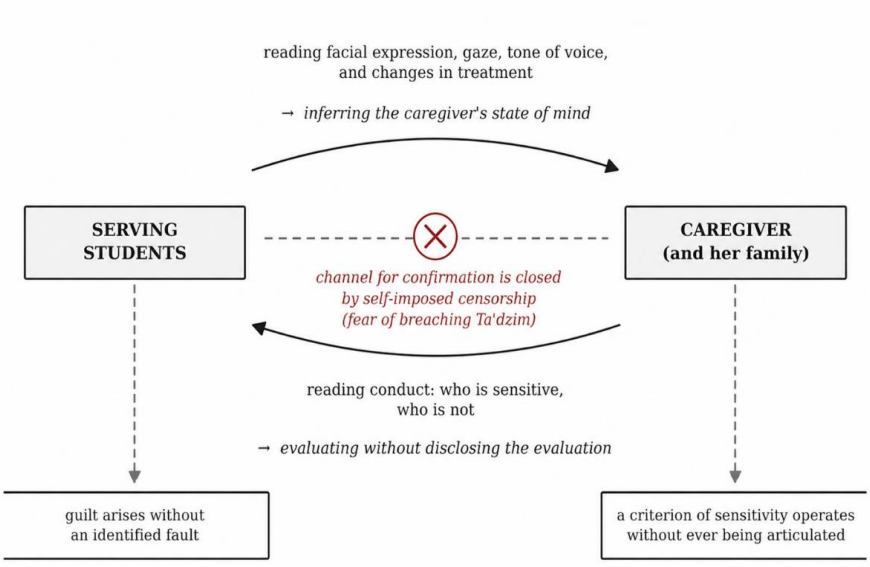


Figure 2. Two Directions of Interpretation Bound by Communicative Barriers and Self-Censorship

Source: Authors, 2026

This finding makes an important contribution to communication studies. In the context of the relation between *santri* and *pengasuh*, nonverbal cues do not function solely as a means of conveying relational information, as set out in the existing literature

(Remland, 2017). Beyond this, nonverbal cues operate as a mechanism of self-evaluation that prompts *santri* to monitor, adjust, and correct their conduct on the basis of meanings they themselves construct. Nonverbal communication, accordingly, does not terminate in the conveyance of meaning but participates in the regulation of conduct through symbolic interpretation that may never obtain confirmation from the other party.

A look of disappointment, a diminution of warmth, or a change in treatment is experienced as a marker prompting *santri* to assess whether they have acted in accordance with expectation. Such cues therefore function as a standard of self-evaluation rather than merely as information concerning another person. Under these conditions the ambiguity of a cue does not diminish its effect but magnifies it, since the recipient will fill the void of meaning unaided and tends to fill it by blaming the self. This finding extends the concern raised by Toruan & Susilowati, (2024), that a highly absolute understanding of *Ta'dzim* may constrain the capacity of *santri* to raise questions, by identifying the mechanism through which that constraint operates.

3.4 Obedience That Does Not Erase Judgment

The practice of *Ta'dzim* shapes not only the manner in which participants act but also the manner in which they experience emotion. Fatigue, irritation, fear, awkwardness, sorrow, and happiness are present together and in alternation. What warrants note is that judgment remains alive within obedience, while that judgment possesses no channel. Six participants recounted forms of emotional release none of which disturbs the relation: weeping, grumbling while continuing to work, holding matters in, falling silent, repeating the word patience, and concealing mistakes.

> "We can only grumble (*ngedumal*). Yes. But still, we grumble and we do the work at the same time. That is how it ends up." (P2)

The construction "doing both at once" (*sambil… sambil…*) presents two layers of experience proceeding concurrently. Obedience and refusal are not two states that cancel one another but two layers present at the same time. *Santri* continue to display *Ta'dzim* before the *pengasuh* while at the same moment harbouring fatigue, objection, or the wish to withdraw. Meaning here does not rest upon a correspondence between feeling and action; what matters more within this lifeworld is the preservation of relational order through visible conduct, while unspoken refusal remains part of inner experience.

Two further patterns merit report. The first is a division of address. Six participants preserved the figure of the *pengasuh* intact while directing fatigue and injury toward her children, sons-in-law, or grandchildren. One participant marked this by correcting herself in mid-sentence:

> "What I feel is not displeasure, no, but more like tiredness… Usually it is requests from Ibu's children. Except Ibu. Ibu is very understanding." (P4)

The clause "Except Ibu" functions as a shield separating the *pengasuh* from the source of the fatigue. Another participant analysed for herself the relation of power she was undergoing and, within the same sentence, declared her resignation:

> "The teacher's children, you know, are known for being unruly, perhaps because they feel they hold power, so they treat us as they please even though we are tired, but we cannot do anything, so it feels entirely wrong… in the end we simply resign ourselves." (P2)

(P2)

Critical awareness is present within her; what is absent is a place in which to lodge it. One participant supplied an account of why this separation is nearly unavoidable, explaining that veneration must proceed "from heart to heart" and that among the things taught is that "we (*santri*) must never think ill of the teacher" (P7). If harbouring ill thoughts toward the teacher already constitutes a breach of *Ta'dzim*, then disappointment with the *pengasuh* is not merely uncomfortable to admit but illegitimate to feel.

The second pattern is that acceptance is not always complete. One participant stated that she believed only "half and half" that the work of service constitutes a form of *Ta'dzim*, and accounted for her hesitation by pointing to the limits of her own *pengajian*:

> "In my view it is sometimes half and half… Sometimes fifty per cent I believe that it is a form of *Ta'dzim*… Perhaps I think that way because my *pengajian* on *adab* has not been very deep." (P8)

Even so she carried out that work in full, and indeed added tasks of her own that had not been assigned. Another participant carried out a practice whose grounds she did not know: "As for the philosophy behind it, I don't know, teh; I just went along with it, sometimes watching the senior *santri* first" (P3). A third acknowledged fatigue while treating refusal as something unavailable: "It is tiring, teh, because we serve so many people, the *pengasuh*'s family and the *santri* as well. But what else can I do, it would not feel right" (P3). The boundary felt here derives not from a rule prohibiting complaint but from a consideration of feeling within a relationship held to be of value.

It is of interest that the construction of the meaning of *Ta'dzim* emerges not only from the perspective of the *santri* but is also reflected upon by the *pengasuh*'s son. He stated that he does not yet consider himself worthy of receiving *Ta'dzim*, since veneration ought properly to be directed toward the knowledge that is taught rather than toward the person who conveys it. He further judged that certain practices of *Ta'dzim* have exceeded what may be regarded as reasonable. When *santri* stood and broke off their *lalaran* (collective recitation) as he passed, for instance, the act was deemed excessive, and he asked them to resume their recitation (AP). This finding indicates that the meaning of *Ta'dzim* is not always understood uniformly, even by the party who is its object. His formulation stands close to that of a participant whose account had initially appeared isolated within the cross-case analysis: "if we honour the teacher, the meaning that is actually intended is not the teacher as a person, but rather whoever is higher in knowledge" (P8). The convergence of formulation between two parties of differing standing indicates that an understanding of this kind is alive within the setting, even though only one participant articulated it.

These findings lend nuance to two existing readings. Jannah (2025) demonstrates that hierarchical relations may give rise to normative obedience; the present study shows that such obedience does not entail the absence of inner struggle, since participants continue to experience doubt, fatigue, and even the wish to withdraw, yet

negotiate these within themselves so as to remain consistent with the meaning of *Ta'dzim* they hold. Alfi et al. (2023); Basuni et al. (2025); Alhadiq (2022) interpret the fear of losing keberkahan as internalised symbolic violence. While the present data evidenced by *santri* experiencing guilt without fault and unvoiced frustration certainly points to profound structural power asymmetries, classifying this solely as symbolic violence is inadequate to capture the participants' lived reality. The phenomenological reality of the *santri* is deeply agency-driven; they actively choose to sublimate their fatigue to preserve a relational order they perceive as sacred. Rather than a pure binary of domination versus submission, the findings reveal two parties acting in mutual care and good faith, each endeavouring not to disappoint the other, thereby sustaining a rigid form not wholly desired by either. One participant conveyed this complexity herself: "even though people outside say that *Ta'dzim* makes us something like servants, they do not know that there is a keberkahan there that is genuinely real" (P3).

4. Conclusion

This study has sought to understand how *Ta'dzim* is constructed and sustained through symbolic communication in the lived experience of *santri mengabdi*. Four findings answer that question. *Ta'dzim* is learned through the body before it is understood through reasoning, and the *kitab akhlak* function as a justification arriving after the practice has become established rather than as its point of departure. Knowledge of that practice circulates horizontally among fellow *santri* rather than descending from the *pengasuh*, a pattern the *pengasuh* herself corroborates. Because the channel for asking upward is nearly closed, the *pengasuh*'s nonverbal cues become the *santri*'s principal source of information concerning the state of the relationship, and those cues operate as a standard of self-evaluation, such that guilt may arise without any identified fault. And obedience does not erase judgment, since fatigue, irritation, and doubt remain alive yet are directed into forms that leave the relation intact.

Taken together, these findings point toward a single understanding: that agreement within the symbolic system of *Ta'dzim* rests more upon uniformity in the form of the act than upon commonality in the understanding of the reasons behind it. It is this condition that accounts for why the practice of *Ta'dzim* can be sustained so consistently. When the grounds of its meaning become an object neither of negotiation nor of dispute, the forms of veneration that have been jointly accepted tend to be reproduced as part of *pesantren* tradition. Theoretically, this study extends Schutz's notion of recipe knowledge by demonstrating its operation at the level of a community, that is, where a practice is performed accurately by everyone while its grounds are held in full by no one, and it extends the notion of the reciprocity of perspectives by describing a condition in which that assumption is not merely unexamined but incapable of being examined, because no channel for doing so is available. For communication studies, this research demonstrates that within relations of a hierarchical character, nonverbal cues function not only as a medium for conveying meaning but also as an instrument by which the party of lower standing evaluates and corrects itself. It further demonstrates that the ambiguity of nonverbal cues strengthens rather than weakens their influence upon the process of meaning-making.

The findings of this research carry practical implications for the management of communication within the *pesantren* environment. A communicative mechanism is required that enables *santri* to obtain clarification of cues or attitudes they have not yet understood without diminishing the value of veneration toward the *pengasuh*. The

results indicate that when confronted with ambiguity of meaning, *santri* more often choose to hold their confusion in, to blame themselves, or to construct interpretations of their own. Such a condition holds the potential to perpetuate misunderstanding within the process of communication. The availability of a space in which questions may be raised with propriety may therefore serve as a means of clarifying meaning without diminishing the practice of *Ta'dzim*, since what is clarified is not the veneration itself but the meaning contained within the interaction. This implication also accords with the view of the *pengasuh*, who positions *adab* as the principal foundation of the learning process and affirms that knowledge must be realised within the practice of life.

This research is limited to a single site with a relatively small number of participants, so that its findings are directed more toward understanding a context than toward generalisation. The composition of participants, predominantly female *santri*, together with the conducting of some interviews in pairs, may also have affected the breadth of the data obtained. Subsequent research therefore needs to involve a more diverse range of participants and to test these findings within differing *pesantren* contexts.

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