

Madrasah Students' Perspectives on the Meaning of Reward (Targhīb) and Punishment (Tarhīb)

Asep Rahmatullah*

Pascasarjana, Universitas Islam Internasional Darullughah Wada'wah, Pasurua

e-mail: aseprahmatullah@uiidalwa.ac.id

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*Corresponding author

Abstract

This study aims to understand students' experiences of receiving *rewards* (*targhīb*) and *punishments* (*tarhīb*) in everyday learning. To achieve this aim, the study employed a qualitative approach using Edmund Husserl's transcendental phenomenological design. This approach was selected for three interrelated reasons: to explore the lived experiences of students, teachers, and administrators regarding the implementation of *targhīb* and *tarhīb* in Islamic education; to apply Husserl's concept of intentionality in understanding how participants construct meaning from their experiences; and to employ transcendental reduction and *bracketing* to identify the essential structures underlying those experiences. The findings show that *targhīb* and *tarhīb* at MHM, Lirboyo Islamic Boarding School, function not merely as behavioral control mechanisms in the behaviorist sense, but as transcendental pedagogical practices that cultivate moral and spiritual awareness. Punishments such as performing 100 cycles of repentance prayer, doing push-ups, or receiving a light finger flick are understood as forms of *tazkiyah* and expressions of teachers' care, while rewards such as taking photographs with the *masyāikh* are perceived as symbols of blessing and spiritual prestige.

Keywords: *Meaning; Reward (targhīb); Punishment (tarhīb).*

Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan memahami pengalaman siswa dalam menerima reward (targhīb) dan punishment (tarhīb) dalam pembelajaran sehari-hari. Untuk itu, penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan desain fenomenologi transendental Edmund Husserl. Pendekatan ini dipilih karena tiga alasan: menggali pengalaman hidup siswa, guru, dan pengurus tentang penerapan targhīb dan tarhīb dalam pendidikan Islam; menggunakan konsep intensionalitas Husserl untuk memahami bagaimana partisipan memberi makna pada pengalaman mereka; serta



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menerapkan reduksi transendental dan bracketing untuk menemukan struktur esensial pengalaman tersebut. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa targhib dan tarhib di MHM Pondok Pesantren Lirboyo bukan sekadar alat kontrol perilaku seperti dalam psikologi behavioristik, tetapi praktik pedagogis transendental yang menanamkan kesadaran moral dan spiritual. Hukuman seperti salat tobat 100 rakaat, push up, atau dijentik dipahami sebagai bentuk tazkiyah dan kasih sayang guru, sedangkan penghargaan seperti foto bersama masyāikh dimaknai sebagai simbol keberkahan dan prestise spiritual.

Kata Kunci: Makna; Penghargaan (*targhib*); Hukuman (*tarhib*).

INTRODUCTION

This study seeks to describe the meaning of students' experiences (*noumena*) when receiving *reward (targhib)* and *punishment (tarhib)* during the learning process at Madrasah Hidayatul Muftadiin (hereafter MHM), an educational institution under Pondok Pesantren Lirboyo (hereafter PPL) in Kediri City. This topic is particularly relevant because *reward (targhib)* and *punishment (tarhib)* continue to be widely implemented in educational contexts (Bardach & Murayama, 2025; Urhahne & Wijnia, 2023; Wu et al., 2022), including within Islamic boarding schools.

Reward (targhib) refers to an effort to motivate individuals to perform virtuous actions or refrain from undesirable behavior by promising certain benefits or favorable outcomes (al-Hazimi, 2005, p. 393). Thus, when individuals perform good deeds, they may receive a reward or be protected from an unpleasant consequence. In other words, *reward (targhib)* can be understood as a form of teacher motivation in which students are promised an incentive or reward for performing desirable actions or refraining from undesirable ones. Reward, however, should not be understood merely as an external incentive; it may also constitute an intrinsically positive experience that directs and sustains learning behavior (Murayama, 2022, pp. 175–198).

Meanwhile, *punishment (tarhib)*, in a broader sense, refers to an attempt to discourage individuals from engaging in undesirable behavior by warning them of punishment or the loss of certain benefits if they fail to comply (al-Hazimi, 2005, p. 393). For example, a mother may warn her child that she will pinch them if they refuse to study or postpone giving the child something until the child has completed their study obligations. In educational settings, *punishment (tarhib)* may also be understood as an educational intervention undertaken by teachers to manage, guide, or correct students who violate established rules, with the aim of improving behavior and supporting students' development (Qi et al., 2025, p. 1).

In practice, the implementation of *punishment (tarhīb)* in the learning process at MHM PPL may appear “unusual,” “amusing,” or even, at times, “harsh” to outsiders (S. Towil, personal communication, 2021). By contrast, the forms of *reward (targhīb)* provided appear remarkably “simple.” From an outsider’s perspective, it may be difficult to understand why MHM PPL students are willing to memorize *Nazm Alfiyyah Ibn Mālik*, *al-Jawhar al-Maknūn*, and *‘Uqūd al-Jumān* simultaneously, given the considerable difficulty of mastering these three demanding classical texts. This becomes even more striking because students who successfully memorize all three receive a seemingly modest reward: an opportunity to take a photograph with the *masyāyikh* of PPL Kediri (A. Yakin, personal communication, 2021).

Unlike the dominant tendency in previous studies, which have largely examined *reward (targhīb)* and *punishment (tarhīb)* through quantitative approaches, the present study employs a qualitative phenomenological approach. The fundamental reason for adopting phenomenology is that the researchers seek to understand and experience what may be described as the “deepest aspects” of the phenomenon (Fatchan, 2004; Nindito, 2013; Schutz, 1970), particularly the meanings underlying the practices of *reward (targhīb)* and *punishment (tarhīb)* at MHM PPL Kediri.

Based on the foregoing analysis, three research gaps can be identified in the literature on *reward (targhīb)* and *punishment (tarhīb)* in Islamic education. First, existing studies are dominated by quantitative approaches and normative-theoretical analyses. Much of the research on reward and punishment in Islamic education continues to focus either on quantitatively measuring their effectiveness or on conducting textual analyses of normative sources. Although these approaches are important, they are insufficient for addressing questions concerning how and why educational actors—teachers, *ustadz*, and students—interpret, experience, and negotiate the practices of *targhīb* and *tarhīb* in their everyday lives. As noted by Nadlifah and Maemonah, contemporary practices of *reward (targhīb)* and *punishment (tarhīb)* tend to emphasize mechanistic behavioral control, potentially producing compliance without corresponding moral awareness.

Second, there remains limited exploration of subjective meaning and lived experience. Although several studies have begun to employ phenomenological approaches, investigations into the lived experiences of educational actors in the implementation of *reward (targhīb)* and *punishment (tarhīb)* remain relatively limited. Third, phenomenological studies that simultaneously examine the philosophical, psychological, spiritual, and pedagogical dimensions of *reward (targhīb)* and *punishment (tarhīb)* are still scarce (Wardhani, 2024).

Accordingly, the principal research gap identified in this study is the absence of a comprehensive investigation into the lived experiences of teachers and students in implementing *reward (targhīb)* and *punishment (tarhīb)* within Islamic educational institutions through a phenomenological approach capable of simultaneously revealing their philosophical, psychological, spiritual, and pedagogical dimensions. This study therefore addresses a gap identified through the state-of-the-art literature: phenomenological research has yet to examine in sufficient depth the lived experiences associated with the implementation of *targhīb* and *tarhīb* in Islamic educational institutions while simultaneously encompassing these four dimensions. Previous studies remain predominantly quantitative or normative-theoretical and tend to examine these dimensions in a fragmented manner.

By employing a transcendental phenomenological approach, this study offers novelty at four levels. First, it provides conceptual novelty by developing a holistic multidimensional framework for understanding *targhīb* and *tarhīb*. Second, it offers methodological novelty through an exploration of *essences*, *noema*, and *noesis* in order to capture participants' subjective realities. Third, it contributes empirical novelty by revealing the construction of subjective meaning, psychological-spiritual experiences, and the negotiation of pedagogical values that influence character formation and transcendent awareness. Fourth, it provides contextual novelty by examining these practices within the setting of an Indonesian *pesantren*, a context deeply embedded in local values and Islamic traditions.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a qualitative approach using a transcendental phenomenological design grounded in the philosophical tradition of Edmund Husserl (Cudjoe, 2023). Husserlian transcendental phenomenology was selected for three interrelated academic reasons. First, it enables the exploration of the lived experiences of students, teachers, and *pesantren* administrators regarding the implementation of *reward (targhīb)* and *punishment (tarhīb)* in Islamic education. Second, the study draws on Husserl's concept of intentionality—the proposition that consciousness is always “consciousness of something”—as a philosophical framework for examining how participants construct subjective meanings from their experiences. Third, transcendental reduction and *bracketing* were employed to move beyond the natural attitude and gain access to the *noumena*, or essential structures of experience, underlying participants' interpretations of these motivational practices.

The study was conducted at Madrasah Hidayatul Muhtadi-ien (MHM) Lirboyo, an educational institution within Pondok Pesantren Lirboyo in Lirboyo Village, Mojoroto District, Kediri City, East Java, Indonesia. Pondok Pesantren Lirboyo is a historic Islamic educational institution founded in 1901 by KH Abdul Karim. It has strong historical ties with Nahdlatul Ulama and has integrated the traditional *salaf* educational system, centered on the study of classical Islamic texts (*kitab kuning*), with a madrasah-based system since 1925, thereby developing a distinctive hybrid model that combines classical and modern forms of Islamic education. The research site was purposively selected based on four criteria: the institution's long-standing implementation of *reward* (*targhīb*) and *punishment* (*tarhīb*) as integral components of character education; the diversity of its student population across traditional *salaf* and formal madrasah educational pathways; its historical reputation spanning more than a century; and the accessibility of the research site and willingness of the *pesantren* leadership to facilitate the study. Data collection was conducted from January to June 2025 and encompassed preliminary observations, primary data collection, and field verification of the findings.

Participants were selected through purposive sampling combined with criterion sampling. The inclusion criteria were as follows: participants had to be active students (*santri*), *ustadz*, *kyai*, or administrators who had been affiliated with the institution for at least one year; had direct experience with the implementation of *targhīb* and/or *tarhīb*; were willing to provide written informed consent; and were able to articulate their experiences in either Indonesian or Javanese. The exclusion criteria included having been affiliated with the institution for less than six months, being unable or unwilling to provide informed consent, and having physical or psychological conditions that could prevent meaningful participation in the study. A total of 12 participants were recruited, comprising four *santri*, four *ustadz*, two administrators, and two *kyai*. Recruitment followed a systematic procedure involving permission from the *pesantren* leadership, consultation with the MHM administration, an initial approach and explanation of the study objectives, provision of a written participant information sheet, and acquisition of written informed consent. The consent process also included permission for audio recording and the use of collected data for academic publication. Participant recruitment continued until data saturation was reached with the twelfth participant.

Data were collected using three complementary qualitative methods. First, semi-structured in-depth interviews served as the primary data collection method. Each interview lasted approximately 60–90 minutes and was conducted in either Indonesian or Javanese. All interviews were audio-recorded with participants'

consent and transcribed verbatim within 48 hours. The interview guide addressed several key areas, including participants' conceptual understandings of *targhīb* and *tarhīb*, direct experiences with these practices, emotional responses, spiritual significance, and contextual factors influencing their experiences.

Second, moderate participant observation was conducted over a four-week period, with three observation sessions per week. The observations covered classroom activities, *sorogan* and *bandongan* learning sessions, daily routines, formal and informal interactions, and institutional activities. Third, document analysis was undertaken using institutional curricula, regulations or *qānūn*, achievement and disciplinary records, historical documents, and religious texts (*kitab kuning*) that provided the theological and pedagogical foundations of the practices under investigation. The integration of these three methods enabled methodological triangulation and facilitated a comprehensive understanding of the relationships among motivational practices, participants' subjective experiences, and the institutional framework within which *targhīb* and *tarhīb* were implemented.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the data within the Husserlian phenomenological framework, four strategies were employed. First, bracketing (*epoché*) was applied throughout the research process. Through this procedure, the researchers consciously suspended prior assumptions, personal experiences, judgments, and preconceived interpretations to ensure that the analysis remained centered on the participants' experiences rather than the researchers' perspectives. Second, reflexive journaling was maintained throughout the study. The researchers systematically documented their thoughts, emotional reactions, assumptions, methodological reflections, and potential sources of bias in order to promote reflexivity and maintain openness throughout the analytical process. Third, an audit trail was established by systematically documenting methodological and analytical decisions, thereby allowing the relationship among the raw data, analytical procedures, interpretive decisions, and final findings to be traced. Finally, peer debriefing and external checking were conducted by discussing the analytical procedures and emerging findings with other researchers to assess the consistency and credibility of the interpretations and to minimize the influence of individual researcher bias (John et al., 2025).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The qualitative analysis of data obtained from twelve participants, comprising *santri*, *ustadz*, administrators, and *kyai*, generated five major themes that represent their lived experiences of the implementation of *reward (targhīb)* and *punishment*

(*tarhīb*) within the educational framework of Madrasah Hidayatul Muhtadi-ien (MHM) Lirboyo. The findings indicate that these pedagogical practices do not merely operate as isolated technical interventions; rather, they are deeply embedded in a holistic, spiritual, and transcendental system of character formation that simultaneously shapes the students' moral awareness and behavioral discipline.

The first theme highlights the dual and complementary functions of *reward (targhīb)* and *punishment (tarhīb)* as mutually reinforcing pedagogical instruments within the educational philosophy of the *pesantren*. One participant explained that *reward (targhīb)* and *punishment (tarhīb)* are like two sides of the same coin: one generates hope and joy, while the other reminds students of the boundaries that must not be crossed, and both are essential in shaping the character of the *santri*. This finding demonstrates that educators and students alike perceive *reward (targhīb)* and *punishment (tarhīb)* not as opposing forces, but as reciprocal mechanisms that jointly create a balanced moral ecosystem. The integration of these two approaches enables the *pesantren* to simultaneously cultivate aspirational motivation and disciplinary awareness, ensuring that character development occurs through both positive reinforcement and the respectful enforcement of boundaries.

The second theme concerns the affective motivational power of *targhīb* in fostering student agency, self-confidence, and academic perseverance. One *santri* stated:

"When I received a reward from the ustadz because I recited my memorization fluently, I felt truly appreciated, and my motivation immediately increased. I wanted to continue receiving that kind of praise."

This statement illustrates that recognition and appreciation function as powerful catalysts for sustained motivation and continued effort. Such experiences of validation contribute to the development of a stronger commitment to learning, as students begin to recognize their own potential and become active agents in their educational development. Recognition from the *ustadz* therefore motivates the *santri* to strive for further improvement and contributes positively to their educational motivation.

The third theme reveals that *tarhīb* functions as a mechanism of moral self-regulation through the cultivation of productive shame, self-discipline, and behavioral accountability. One participant explained:

"When the kyai strongly reprimanded me because I was caught not attending the congregational prayer, I felt extremely ashamed. But that feeling of shame actually made me more disciplined and afraid of repeating the same mistake."

This finding indicates that corrective consequences, when situated within a trusted structure of authority and a spiritual framework, may be transformed into an internalized ethical compass rather than remaining merely external punishment. The experience of shame is reframed as a constructive emotional response that strengthens moral awareness and reinforces commitment to collective religious obligations. In this sense, *tarhīb* contributes to the development of self-regulatory capacities that are essential for sustaining ethical behavior over the long term. The fourth theme demonstrates that the spiritual interpretation of reprimands and sanctions reinforces the sacred bond between teachers and students, transforming hierarchical authority into a form of supportive guidance. One participant explained:

"I have never regarded a reprimand from an ustadz as merely a punishment. I believe that it is a form of his affection and concern so that I do not suffer harm either in this world or in the hereafter."

This statement illustrates how the *santri* actively reinterpret pedagogical sanctions through the lens of spiritual care and benevolence, viewing corrective interventions as expressions of the teacher's concern rather than manifestations of authoritarian control. Such interpretations foster trust, emotional security, and profound respect for educators, creating a relational environment in which disciplinary practices are received with openness and gratitude rather than resentment or resistance. The sacralization of the teacher-student relationship therefore becomes a crucial mediating factor that enhances the effectiveness of both reward (*targhīb*) and punishment (*tarhīb*) in shaping students' character.

The fifth theme concerns the internalization of transcendental values that extends the pedagogical consequences of *targhīb* and *tarhīb* into eschatological awareness, thereby shaping a form of moral subjectivity that operates beyond mere compliance with institutional rules. One *santri* stated:

"Sometimes tarhīb makes me afraid, but it is a healthy kind of fear. It reminds me that every action has consequences, both in this world and in the hereafter."

Such an interpretation demonstrates that the ultimate purpose of these motivational practices is not superficial compliance with *pesantren* regulations, but rather the formation of transcendent moral awareness in which students' behavior is guided by a profound consciousness of divine accountability and the spiritual consequences of the hereafter. This eschatological dimension transforms everyday disciplinary experiences into opportunities for spiritual growth, enabling the *santri* to internalize ethical standards as personal convictions rather than as obligations externally imposed upon them. Through this process, *targhīb* and *tarhīb* become

vehicles for integrating pedagogical practice, psychological development, and religious devotion, collectively fostering a holistic educational experience that prepares students for both worldly success and salvation in the hereafter.

Table 1. Coding Matrix of Research Findings

Data Verbatim	Open Coding	Axial Coding	Themes
“When I received a reward from the <i>ustadz</i> because I kept striving despite all my limitations, I felt deeply appreciated, and my motivation immediately increased.”	Feeling appreciated	Positive reinforcement	Affective motivation in learning
“When the <i>kyai</i> strongly reprimanded me for not attending the congregational prayer, I felt ashamed and became more disciplined.”	Shame and self-discipline	Moral awareness through sanctions	Self-regulation through social sanctions
“ <i>Targhīb</i> and <i>tarhīb</i> are like two sides of the same coin, both of which are equally important in shaping the character of <i>santri</i> .”	Complementary perception	Reward and punishment function	Integrated pedagogical framework
“I view reprimands from the <i>ustadz</i> as a form of care and affection intended to help me become a better person.”	Spiritual interpretation of reprimand	Religious coping mechanism	Sacralized teacher-student bond
“Praise from the teacher makes me more confident in trying new things.”	Self-confidence development	Empowerment through recognition	Student agency development
“ <i>Tarhīb</i> makes me realize that every action has consequences both in this world and in the hereafter.”	Productive fear and moral awareness	Theological moral consciousness	Internalization of transcendental values

Discussion

The Concept of *Reward (Targhīb)* and *Punishment (Tarhīb)* in Learning at MHM Lirboyo

The concepts of *reward (targhīb)* and *punishment (tarhīb)* in Islamic education have epistemological foundations that extend far beyond their apparent equivalence to reward and punishment in secular educational discourse (Rahman & Rochbani, 2025). Etymologically, *targhīb* refers to a promise accompanied by encouragement toward pleasure and happiness, both in this world and in the hereafter, for those who perform righteous deeds (Muslem, 2022a). By contrast, *tarhīb* refers to a warning conveyed through firmness or sanctions for violations of established rules or norms (Romli & Nurlia, 2023, p. 64). The application of *targhīb* and *tarhīb* in madrasah learning therefore suggests that the effectiveness of these methods depends substantially on the extent to which educators consistently integrate their spiritual dimensions into the learning process, rather than presenting them merely as occasional normative messages.

The findings of this study demonstrate that *targhīb* and *tarhīb* at MHM Lirboyo do not function merely as two separate classroom management techniques. Rather, they constitute an integrated lived experience interpreted at multiple levels by the twelve participants, comprising *santri*, *ustadz*, administrators, and *kyai*. The five themes emerging from the data analysis, as reflected in the coding matrix, reveal a consistent pattern: *targhīb* and *tarhīb* are experienced as complementary mechanisms, as sources of affective motivation, as mechanisms of self-regulation through productive shame, as means of strengthening the sacred teacher–student relationship, and as media for internalizing eschatological awareness. Moving beyond this descriptive level, the findings reveal the underlying structure of consciousness that shapes participants' experiences. This interpretation is grounded in Edmund Husserl's transcendental phenomenological tradition and is placed in dialogue with relevant theories of Islamic education and contemporary educational psychology.

Conceptually, the finding that participants perceived *targhīb* and *tarhīb* as “two sides of the same coin” is consistent with the etymological foundations of both concepts in the Islamic educational tradition. Linguistically, *targhīb* denotes a promise accompanied by encouragement toward desirable outcomes, whether worldly or eschatological, for those who perform good deeds, whereas *tarhīb* refers to warnings or threats associated with violations and their consequences (Nur & Hasnawati, 2020). Both concepts are rooted in the pedagogical pattern of the Qur'an, which repeatedly juxtaposes promises of divine reward and paradise with warnings of punishment and hell as complementary educational mechanisms. The crucial

distinction between *targhīb-tarhīb* and secular conceptions of reward and punishment lies in their transcendental dimension: the motivation being cultivated is not limited to worldly consequences but is directed toward an awareness of divine supervision, or *murāqabah* (Muslem, 2022b).

The Meaning of Reward (*Targhīb*) and Punishment (*Tarhīb*) in Learning at MHM Lirboyo

The first theme—the participants’ perception that *targhīb* and *tarhīb* are “equally important”—provides empirical evidence that, at the level of practical consciousness rather than merely normative prescription, the integration of these two approaches is genuinely experienced rather than simply taught. This point is particularly important because many conceptual studies of *targhīb-tarhīb* remain confined to textual or interpretive analyses, whereas the present study demonstrates how these concepts are transformed into everyday lived experiences within the learning environment of a traditional *madrasah diniyah salaf*.

At the institutional level, *tarhīb* at MHM Lirboyo is concretely manifested through a mechanism known as *ta’zīr*, or educational sanctions imposed by a *mustahīq* or administrator according to the severity of the violation. Such *ta’zīr* practices have a clear basis in Islamic jurisprudential reasoning and have long constituted an established disciplinary tradition in many traditional *pesantren* as an instrument of character formation. What is particularly noteworthy in the case of MHM Lirboyo is the absence of written regulations explicitly governing the forms and implementation of *targhīb* and *tarhīb*. Instead, these practices are transmitted across generations and entrusted largely to the discretion of the *mustahīq*, with *syar’an wa ‘ādatan*—that is, conformity with Islamic law and accepted *pesantren* custom—serving as the principal normative framework. This condition illustrates that pedagogical authority within the traditional *pesantren* does not primarily rest on administrative bureaucracy, but rather on structural trust in the moral integrity and scholarly competence of the *mustahīq* as a representative of the *kyai*’s authority.

From the perspective of learning psychology, the pattern of *targhīb* in the form of praise and *tarhīb* in the form of push-ups, standing, or other forms of *ta’zīr* can be partially understood through the principles of reinforcement in behaviorist theory. Positive reinforcement increases the likelihood of desired behavior, whereas punitive or corrective consequences are intended to reduce undesirable behavior (Antoni, 2024). The second theme of this study—where praise from an *ustadz* for fluent memorization caused a student’s motivation to “immediately increase” and encouraged participation in new competitions—illustrates a characteristic positive

reinforcement mechanism in which social recognition functions as an incentive that encourages the repetition of desirable behavior.

Nevertheless, these findings cannot be adequately explained solely through a behaviorist framework. Rohmah and Izzati (2026), drawing on self-determination theory, emphasize that autonomous motivation arising from feelings of competence, autonomy, and relatedness is more predictive of sustained engagement in learning than controlled motivation that depends primarily on external incentives. When a *santri* in the second theme explained that praise made them want to “do better than the other students” and motivated them to complete their annual memorization targets more quickly, the process observed was not merely a response to an external stimulus. Rather, it reflected a process of internalization in which praise from the *mustahiq* functioned as informational feedback that affirmed the student’s competence and was subsequently transformed into a more autonomous form of motivation. This convergence explains why *targhīb* should not be understood merely as an instrument of behavioral control in a narrow behaviorist sense, but also as a means of cultivating intrinsic motivation.

A similar pattern is evident in relation to *tarhīb*. The third theme demonstrates that the sense of shame arising from a stern reprimand by the *kyai* functions as a productive mechanism of self-regulation rather than simply as an externally imposed means of suppressing behavior. Within the framework of Islamic character education, this finding is consistent with the notion that effective discipline is discipline that becomes internalized as personal moral awareness rather than remaining externally enforced compliance (Romdoni & Malihah, 2020). In the cultural context of the *pesantren*, shame is not necessarily interpreted as humiliation that diminishes personal dignity; rather, it may function as a moral emotion that activates awareness of limits, obligations, and responsibility. In this respect, *tarhīb* at MHM Lirboyo differs qualitatively from punishment in a purely behaviorist sense. It does not merely suppress behavior through instrumental fear, but also cultivates a longer-term capacity for self-evaluation and moral regulation.

The fourth and fifth themes—the spiritual interpretation of reprimands as expressions of teachers’ care and the internalization of eschatological awareness regarding consequences in the hereafter—demonstrate that the motivational structure at MHM Lirboyo extends beyond psychological and cognitive dimensions into the theological domain. This characteristic clearly distinguishes *targhīb–tarhīb* from secular reinforcement. As studies examining the relationship between *targhīb–tarhīb* and behaviorism have suggested, the transcendental dimension grounded in belief in Allah and the hereafter provides a moral significance that is absent from conventional Western reinforcement theory (Kurniawan, 2016). The sacralized

teacher–student relationship further transforms pedagogical authority from a form of power that must simply be feared into a medium of care and guidance that is trusted. This epistemological shift enables corrective sanctions to be accepted with openness and, in some cases, even gratitude.

The Meaning of Reward (*Targhīb*) in Education from a Husserlian Perspective

To uncover the deeper structures of consciousness underlying the five themes, this study employed *epoché* as a methodological prerequisite. Through this process, the researchers suspended their initial assumptions that *targhīb* and *tarhīb* were merely instruments of behavioral control, thereby allowing the meanings that emerged to arise from the participants' own intentional consciousness rather than from the projection of the researchers' theoretical frameworks. Through phenomenological reduction, the participants' textual descriptions—expressions such as “I felt deeply appreciated,” “that feeling of shame actually made me more disciplined,” and “I believe it was a form of care”—were reduced to the structures of pure experience as they presented themselves, *given as they are*, independently of normative judgments concerning whether the practices of *ta'zīr* and praise were right or wrong.

Within the Husserlian framework, consciousness is always intentional; that is, it is invariably directed toward an object of experience (Husserl, 1970). In this context, *targhīb* and *tarhīb* constitute the *noema*—the objects perceived or experienced by participants as external phenomena, such as praise, push-ups, *ta'zīr*, certificates, and green cards. However, the actual meaning of these phenomena does not reside solely in their objective forms but also in the *noesis*, namely, the ways in which participants consciously experience and subjectively interpret them. A *santri* who interprets a stern reprimand as an expression of “care and affection” performs a noetic act that transforms an object that outwardly appears to be punishment into an experience of spiritual affection, whose meaning differs substantially from punishment as understood within a secular disciplinary framework. In other words, the same noema—such as a “reprimand from the *kyai*”—may give rise to different noetic experiences, including fear, shame, or affection, depending on the participants' horizons of consciousness and the cultural contexts that shape their experiences.

The process of imaginative variation in this study revealed the contextual factors that account for both the diversity and commonality of these experiential structures. The cultural context of the traditional *salaf pesantren*—characterized by the tradition of *ta'zīm* or profound respect for teachers, restrictions on the use of mobile devices, and a comprehensive and hierarchical teacher–student

relationship—constitutes an experiential condition that enables *tarhīb* to be interpreted as an expression of care rather than neglect or unilateral violence. If these conditions were imaginatively varied—for example, if the same sanctions were imposed within a teacher–student relationship lacking affective bonds and spiritual authority—the experience could plausibly be interpreted as resistance rather than acceptance. This imaginative variation demonstrates that the essence of the experience of *targhīb–tarhīb* cannot be separated from the relational and spiritual structures of the *pesantren* as the *lifeworld* (*Lebenswelt*) within which those experiences are constituted.

At the stage of synthesizing meaning and essence, the fundamental nature of *targhīb* and *tarhīb* in the consciousness of MHM Lirboyo participants can be formulated not as “reward and punishment” in an instrumental sense, but as manifestations of pedagogical care and affection imbued with a transcendental dimension and experienced as part of the journey toward attaining the *barakah* of knowledge. This structure of consciousness appeared consistently across participants—whether academically high-achieving or otherwise, and whether involved in minor or more serious violations—suggesting that it was not merely an idiosyncratic individual experience but rather a form of transcendental subjectivity constituted intersubjectively within the *pesantren* community. This is precisely where Husserlian phenomenology becomes particularly relevant: it enables the researcher to move beyond observable behaviors, such as push-ups, green cards, and certificates, toward the inner consciousness through which these practices acquire religious and existential meaning for those who experience them.

These findings both reinforce and extend previous studies. Research on Qur’anic reception in *pesantren* using a Husserlian phenomenological approach has demonstrated that the meaning of a religious text or practice within the *pesantren* is constituted through directly lived communal experiences rather than merely through normative-textual interaction. This finding parallels the way in which MHM Lirboyo *santri* reinterpret *ta’zīr* as an expression of care rather than simply the enforcement of rules. Meanwhile, previous studies of *ta’zīr* traditions in various *pesantren* have generally remained at the level of describing practices and evaluating their effectiveness in promoting discipline (Aqil & Rifai, 2024; Oktavera et al., 2023), without uncovering the structures of consciousness through which these sanctions are voluntarily accepted by the *santri*. The present study goes further by demonstrating that such acceptance is not merely the result of hierarchical compliance but also emerges from an active noetic process through which *santri* reflectively assign spiritual meaning to their experiences.

Compared with behaviorist studies of *targhīb-tarhīb* (Andriani et al., 2022; Kurniawan, 2016), which tend to position *targhīb-tarhīb* as equivalent to Skinnerian reinforcement, the present findings reveal the limitations of a purely behaviorist approach in explaining why *santri* who are repeatedly sanctioned—as illustrated in the case of Irwan Masduki—remain within the educational system and ultimately undergo transformation. Such transformation does not occur merely because of the deterrent effects of physical sanctions, but also because of social shame and the recognition of the *mustahiq*'s care, which remains present even when disciplinary action is imposed. This pattern is more closely aligned with humanistic character education, which emphasizes the importance of a supportive relational environment in character formation (Nurul Romdoni & Malihah, 2020). At the same time, it underscores a distinctive feature of the traditional *salaf pesantren*: strict discipline does not necessarily contradict relational warmth; rather, it may be built upon it.

A synthesis of these layers of analysis demonstrates that *targhīb* and *tarhīb* at MHM Lirboyo operate simultaneously across three domains. The first is the behavioral domain, involving the reinforcement and regulation of behavior. The second is the psychological domain, involving the development of intrinsic motivation and self-regulatory capacity. The third is the spiritual-existential domain, involving the internalization of awareness of divine supervision and accountability. These three domains do not operate independently but converge within a unified structure of consciousness that, in Husserlian terms, may be understood through noetic-noematic unity. The same pedagogical object—whether praise or *ta'zīr*—is experienced as an integrated configuration of meaning encompassing attention, affection, and a path toward *barakah*, rather than as a stimulus perceived in isolation from its broader horizon of meaning.

The implications of these findings for *pesantren* education concern the importance of consciously maintaining and cultivating what has traditionally and implicitly operated at MHM Lirboyo: the close interconnection among institutional authority represented by the *mustahiq* and *masyāyikh*, disciplinary practices involving various forms of *ta'zīr*, and the spiritual framework through which these practices are interpreted. The absence of explicit written regulations, which at first glance may appear to constitute an administrative weakness, can be interpreted differently through a Husserlian phenomenological lens. The flexibility afforded to the *mustahiq* in recognizing the psychological conditions and personal contexts of individual *santri* enables the implementation of *targhīb* and *tarhīb* to remain contextual rather than mechanical. Nevertheless, this finding also raises an important critical consideration. Dependence on the personal judgment of

individual *mustahiq* without a clearly articulated framework of accountability may create the potential for inconsistent treatment across educators. Strengthening the guidance and mentoring provided to *mustahiq*, while preserving the flexibility and local wisdom that constitute the spirit of this educational system, therefore remains worthy of consideration.

Ultimately, as revealed through transcendental phenomenological analysis, the essence of *targhib* and *tarhib* at MHM Lirboyo cannot be reduced to rewards and punishments in a technical-instrumental sense. Rather, they function as pedagogical instruments that simultaneously foster pedagogical awareness, spiritual motivation, the internalization of *adab*, and the transformation of *santri* character. They therefore represent a humanistic and transformative paradigm of Islamic education in which learning is understood not merely as the transmission of knowledge but as a spiritual journey toward the perfection of moral character.

A phenomenological examination of *reward (targhib)* at MHM Lirboyo further reveals that the essence of recognition often remains hidden—not because rewards are absent, but because of the spiritual intentionality underlying their implementation. Praise may be conveyed implicitly without directly mentioning a student's name or may be communicated through narratives of perseverance, such as the story of an economically disadvantaged *santri* who worked as a pedicab driver before eventually becoming a prominent *kyai*. As explained by AY, one of the teachers, such recognition is intended to move the *santri's* inner consciousness toward existential earnestness rather than merely providing short-term ego satisfaction.

The practice of offering praise indirectly is intended to preserve the inner meaning, or *noema*, of praise itself so that it is not distorted by arrogance or by perceptions of unfairness among the *santri*. It reflects the *mustahiq's* effort to reduce the materialistic and hedonistic dimensions of reward, leaving behind the essential character of motivation as an inner calling. Even more noteworthy is HB's practice of providing material rewards, such as classical Islamic books, money, or *sarongs*, not necessarily to the highest-achieving students, but to students whose academic performance may be relatively weak while their enthusiasm and perseverance remain exceptionally strong.

Within Husserlian logic, this practice represents a fundamental reorientation of consciousness. The intentional object, or *noema*, of the reward is not an objective "report-card grade," but rather the "existential earnestness" manifested in the life of a *santri* who may be economically marginalized yet continues to persevere. Such recognition may be understood as a transcendental acknowledgment of the human dignity inherent in every individual. At the highest level of the reward system at

MHM Lirboyo are prestigious forms of recognition, such as certificates and opportunities to take photographs with all the *mustahiq* or even the *masyāyikh*. Such recognition is reserved for *santri* who have completed extended periods of study, reaching as long as 12 years, and for those who have memorized approximately 1,000 to 2,000 verses (*naẓm*) from classical Islamic texts.

From a phenomenological perspective, a photograph with the *masyāyikh* is not merely a souvenir. Rather, it constitutes a symbolic object through which a new identity is constituted for the *santri*. It visually represents a form of transcendental intersubjectivity connecting the individual to the intellectual chain of transmission (*sanad*) and spiritual blessing (*barakah*), signifying that the *santri* has been fully incorporated into the spiritual community of the *pesantren*. The *pesantren lifeworld* functions here as a horizon of meaning that prevents such a photograph from being reduced to a mere printed image. Instead, it becomes a sacred record of one's educational journey and the responsibility associated with the transmission of knowledge.

Punishment (Tarhīb) in Education from a Husserlian Perspective

While *reward* directs attention toward the consciousness of hidden meanings, the various forms of *punishment (tarhīb)* at MHM Lirboyo reveal a graded spectrum rich in phenomenological significance and moral formation. At the mildest level, punishment takes the form of summonses and advice, in which the *mustahiq* seeks to understand the psychological and existential condition of the *santri* in order to engage their reflective consciousness. This may progress to proportionate symbolic physical sanctions, such as performing push-ups in proportion to the duration of lateness or standing in the classroom while continuing to interpret the lesson. Within a phenomenological perspective, the lived body (*Leib*) serves as a medium through which consciousness encounters the world. Fatigue and embarrassment resulting from bodily sanctions can therefore become occasions for reflection, enabling the *santri* to become bodily aware of their mistakes while restoring their self-discipline in relation to time and academic obligations.

When sanctions intensify to practices locally referred to as being "*dipaket*"—being sent to another classroom and required to stand in front of other students—or even to unconventional sanctions involving tickling or carrying one another, the dynamics of collective intersubjective intentionality become more visible. These sanctions do not merely educate the individual offender through social embarrassment; they may also serve as a moment of catharsis or amusement for other *santri* who are themselves experiencing the pressures of intensive memorization. In this sense, the *pesantren lifeworld* reveals a distinctive dialectic

between individual discomfort and collective amusement, both of which become integrated within the particular rhythm of its *Lebenswelt*.

The most distinctive manifestation of punishment within this institution, however, is found in explicitly spiritual sanctions. These include performing the prayer of repentance (*ṣalāt al-tawbah*) inside the classroom while teaching and learning activities are taking place, reciting *tahlīl* and Sūrat Yāsīn, and reciting *istighfār* and *ṣalawāt* 1,000 times at the grave of the founder of the *pesantren*.

Within the Husserlian framework, such punishment can be interpreted as a particularly radical form of suspension because the *santri* is required to disengage temporarily from ordinary worldly activities and directly confront transcendental realities associated with God, death, and eschatological accountability. The founder's grave is not experienced merely as an ordinary physical location but as a sacred locus saturated with meaning, within which the *santri's* consciousness is directed toward its deepest layers. The experience encourages an awareness that an educational violation may simultaneously possess a spiritual dimension affecting one's vertical relationship with Allah and one's horizontal relationship with previous generations of scholars.

The use of red and green cards further reinforces a decentralized structure of intersubjective authority, as disciplinary responsibility involves not only the *mustahiq* but also security personnel and younger *masyāyikh*. The green card, which the *santri* ironically refer to as a "smart card," may, for example, become a boundary experience that triggers a crisis of self-awareness as well as an existential impulse to recover from academic decline. Taken together, these graded forms of sanction demonstrate that *punishment* at MHM Lirboyo is not conceptualized merely as an instrument of violence or retaliation, but as a progressive pathway toward *tawbah*, self-reflection, and a higher level of moral consciousness.

Ultimately, one of the most fundamental findings—the absence of written regulations governing *targhib* and *tarhib*—reveals the deeper character of *pesantren* education as a system substantially grounded in intersubjective meaning and lived moral authority. From a phenomenological perspective, the objective world, including formal regulations, may be understood as sedimented through previous intersubjective experiences. At MHM Lirboyo, the *mustahiq* have internalized *fiqh* and *akhlāq* to such an extent that they function as meaning-constituting subjects in pedagogical practice. Their educational decisions are therefore guided less by detailed written procedures than by internalized moral and scholarly judgment.

This is consistent with the concept of *ta'zīr* in *fiqh*, which grants legitimate authority a degree of discretion in determining sanctions considered most

appropriate and beneficial according to the particular context. Phenomenologically, this implies recognition that every case of misconduct possesses its own horizon of meaning and cannot necessarily be treated through rigidly standardized rules. Creative sanctions imposed by a *mustahiq*, such as instructing a student to massage a wall or collect cigarette butts, are therefore interpreted within the institution not simply as arbitrary acts but as contextual expressions of pedagogical discretion grounded in an understanding of the students' psychological conditions and the needs of the community. Consequently, the *pesantren lifeworld*, with its hierarchies, symbols, rituals, and communal values, does not merely constitute the background against which these practices occur; rather, it is constitutive of the very meanings that make these practices intelligible to those who experience them.

Thus, *reward* and *punishment* at MHM Lirboyo are not merely technologies of behavioral modification. They are existential experiences that contribute to the constitution of the *santri*'s moral and spiritual subjectivity, teaching them not only to develop intellectually but also to become sensitive to transcendental dimensions, respectful of spiritual authority, and morally conscious through sincere personal commitment. Through a phenomenological approach, the findings demonstrate that even in the absence of detailed formal regulations, character education may be sustained through continuously lived, reflected upon, and interpreted experiences. In this sense, Madrasah Hidayatul Mubtadi-ien Lirboyo emerges as a living setting in which tradition, *fiqh*, and pedagogical creativity intersect within a transcendental educational horizon.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the implementation of *targhīb* and *tarhīb* at MHM Pondok Pesantren Lirboyo should not be understood merely as a stimulus–response mechanism of behavioral control, as commonly conceptualized in behaviorist psychology. Rather, these practices constitute a form of transcendental pedagogy through which moral and spiritual awareness is deeply internalized. In contrast to academic reductionism that separates psychological processes from transcendent values, the *santri* interpret apparently “harsh” disciplinary practices—such as performing 100 *rak'ahs* of repentance prayer, doing push-ups, or being tickled—not simply as punishment, but as means of *tazkiyah* and expressions of teachers' care and concern. Likewise, seemingly simple forms of recognition, such as the opportunity to take photographs with the *masyāyikh*, are perceived as symbols of *barakah* and spiritual prestige whose significance extends far beyond their material value. The sacralized teacher–student relationship serves as a crucial mediating factor, transforming disciplinary sanctions from external threats into moments of

existential reflection that strengthen emotional bonds and social cohesion among the *santri*.

The theoretical novelty of this study lies in its simultaneous integration of philosophical, psychological, spiritual, and pedagogical dimensions that have often been treated separately in normative-textual and quantitative studies. Through a transcendental phenomenological approach, this study reveals the essential structures underlying the subjective experiences of educational actors—dimensions that cannot be adequately captured through surveys or textual analysis of classical Islamic sources alone. The findings demonstrate that the meanings of *targhīb* and *tarhīb* are constituted through a complex interplay among the tradition of *kitab kuning*, the cultural authority of the *kyai*, and the *santri*'s eschatological awareness of accountability in the hereafter.

These findings shift the discourse of Islamic pedagogy from a predominantly textual domain toward an existential one. At the same time, they provide a multidimensional framework for explaining why educational practices that may appear “unusual” to outsiders can nevertheless function meaningfully within the *pesantren* context in cultivating resilient character and autonomous disciplinary awareness among *santri*.

At the practical level, the findings offer concrete recommendations for the development of humanistic and context-sensitive Islamic educational policies. Motivational practices should be oriented toward cultivating reflective moral awareness rather than merely producing unquestioning compliance, while educators' spiritual and pedagogical competencies should be strengthened so that they are better able to understand the individual characteristics and needs of their students. *Pesantren* are therefore encouraged to preserve pedagogical flexibility rooted in local and theological values while responding to contemporary challenges through approaches that empower students' subjectivity. Accordingly, the contribution of this study lies not only in addressing the gap in the literature concerning the lived experiences associated with the implementation of *targhīb* and *tarhīb*, but also in proposing a model of pedagogical transformation that integrates traditional foundations with contemporary educational demands in order to cultivate a generation that is not merely outwardly compliant but also possesses a profound awareness of spiritual responsibility in this world and the hereafter.

Nevertheless, these findings should be interpreted within the limitations of the study. The research was conducted within a single *pesantren* setting and involved a relatively small number of participants, meaning that the findings are intended to provide an in-depth phenomenological understanding rather than statistical generalization. Moreover, the interpretation of participants' lived experiences

remains closely connected to the distinctive cultural, spiritual, and institutional context of MHM Lirboyo. Future studies may therefore examine *targhib* and *tarhib* across different types of Islamic educational institutions, involve more diverse participants, or employ comparative and mixed-method designs to explore the extent to which similar structures of meaning emerge in other educational contexts.

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