

## **Integrating Peer Support into Mental Health Courses to Strengthen Student Self-Awareness: A Qualitative Case Study**

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### **Abstract**

Mental health education for prospective counselors is still dominated by cognitive-oriented learning and has not optimally integrated reflective practices and structured peer support. This condition is important because self-awareness is a fundamental competency that must be possessed by prospective counselor students. Therefore, this study aims to explore how peer support can be integrated into the Mental Health course to strengthen the self-awareness of students of the Islamic Guidance and Counseling Study Program. This research uses a qualitative approach with an intrinsic case study design that is carried out in a class of Mental Health courses at UIN Siber Syekh Nurjati Cirebon. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, participatory observations, reflective journals, and document analysis, then analyzed using the Miles, Huberman, and Saldana interactive models. The results of the study show three patterns of peer support integration embedded in the curriculum, namely Experiential Learning Circle, Project-Based Digital Muhasabah, and Peer Counselor Mentoring. These various learning activities facilitate the development of student self-awareness through four interrelated phases, namely recognizing emotions, identifying cognitive patterns, building meanings based on Islamic values, and developing adaptive self-regulation strategies. The findings also show that peer support not only serves as a source of social support, but also as a reflective learning mechanism that encourages students' personal growth. This study concludes that the integration of peer support in mental health education is a meaningful pedagogical approach to strengthen students' self-awareness and offers a potential mental health learning model for Islamic religious universities.

**Keywords:** *Islamic Guidance and Counseling; Mental Health Education; Peer Support; Reflective Learning; Self-Awareness.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

College has become a hot spot for a global mental health crisis. World Mental Health Report WHO (2022) confirms that one in three college students experience symptoms of clinical anxiety-depression due to the transition from late adolescence to early adulthood, academic burden, and financial stress. In Indonesia, the National Mental Health Survey Ministry of Health of the Republic of Indonesia (2023) showed a prevalence of depression of 9.8% and anxiety of 14.2% in college students, an increase of 3.1% compared to 2018, especially post-pandemic.

Students of the Islamic Guidance and Counseling (BKI) study program face a unique paradox: they are prepared to help other individuals, but often experience compassion fatigue even before graduating due to a lack of self-awareness. Coaston & Lawrence (2024) examine this paradox specifically in the context of counselor education and argue that prospective counselors with personal injury experiences have unique vulnerabilities that can exacerbate stress and burnout during the training period. Initial assessment data at the Department of BKI UIN Siber Syekh Nurjati Cirebon in February 2026 on 20 fourth-semester students strengthened the findings: 55% showed moderate to severe anxiety

based on DASS-21, with narratives such as "fear of being incompetent during PPL" and "tired of being a place to vent but have no place to tell stories."

The root of this problem can be traced to the tendency of the counselor education curriculum to still place the mastery of conceptual knowledge as the main focus, while the development of self-reflection has not received equal attention. Campbell & Babb (2023) emphasized that experiential learning has developed into a signature pedagogy in counselor education because it has been proven to support the formation of professional identity, increase self-efficacy, and complement curricular learning which has been dominated by knowledge transfer. Correspondingly, previous studies have shown that regular reflective practice improves students' mental health outcomes (Scarlet Witch (2025)), reflective writing effectively increases emotional awareness (Wulansari & Qiptiah, 2026), and mindfulness courses strengthen awareness of personal values (Dunuwila et al., 2025).

On the other hand, the potential for peer support is very large but has not been capitalized on in the curriculum. The need assessment of the BKI UIN Cyber Study Program in 2025 on 87 students revealed that 78% chose "classmates" as the first place to share problems, far exceeding "guardian lecturers" (11%) and "Counseling Service UPT" (7%). Systematic review Pointon-Haas et al. (2024) shows that peer support interventions have the potential to increase students' access to mental health services. Research at the University of Muhammadiyah Semarang found a positive relationship between peer support and the mental health of new students (Nashihah et al., 2025), while Richard et al. (2022) Linking peer support to increased self-esteem and effective coping

However, the integration of peer support into the mental health curriculum has not been carried out systematically. Study Pointon-Haas et al. (2023) uncover various implementation challenges that require lesson learnt, and Osborn et al. (2022) found that the difficulty of continuous implementation is an obstacle to the scalability of peer support in universities. Previous research has tended to place peer support outside the curriculum (Fortuna et al., 2020; Primary, 2022), so that until now there is no peer support model that is integrated in the curriculum (curriculum-embedded) and integrated with Islamic values (faith-integrated) at State Islamic Religious Universities (PTKIN). Independent Campus Policy through Permendikbudristek No. 53 of 2023 in fact, it opens up space for this kind of curriculum innovation, but its implementation at PTKIN is still very minimal. In addition, WHO (2022) Through the whole-university approach, it is recommended that mental health issues be included in compulsory courses.

Based on these conditions, this research embeds peer support into the Mental Health course (2 credits) with three academic justifications, namely: (1) sustainability because it is attached to the regular curriculum, (2) equity because it reaches all students without selection, and (3) pedagogical fit with the experiential learning framework Kolb (2014). In more detail, this study aims to: (1) map the pattern of peer support integration in the Semester Learning Plan (RPS), teaching methods, and assessments in Mental Health courses; (2) analyze the dynamics of strengthening students' Islamic self-awareness, starting from the phase of naming emotions to self-regulation based on Islamic values; (3) identify the factors that support and inhibit implementation; and (4) recommend MBKM curriculum policies for other PTKINs. The novelty of this study lies in the development of a curriculum-embedded, faith-integrated peer support model that integrates peer support, reflective learning, and Islamic values into Mental Health courses within PTKIN. This model expands on previous studies that generally placed peer support as a mentoring service or program outside of the formal curriculum.

## **METHOD**

This study uses a qualitative approach with an intrinsic case study design to explore the implementation of peer support integrated into Mental Health courses and its contribution in strengthening student self-awareness. The case study approach was chosen because it allows researchers to deeply understand social and educational phenomena in their natural context (Yin, 2021). The research

was carried out in the Mental Health Course Class B of the Islamic Guidance and Counseling Study Program UIN Siber Syekh Nurjati Cirebon in the even semester of the 2025/2026 academic year.

The research participants consisted of seven fourth-semester students, two senior peer counselors, two lecturers in charge of courses, and one study program head (a total of 12 participants). Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, two focus group discussion sessions, participatory observations at eight of the fourteen meetings, and reflective journal analysis and learning documents.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs), participatory observations, and documentation studies. The interview was conducted for 60–90 minutes with a focus on the participants' experiences in participating in peer support activities and the process of self-awareness development. Two FGD sessions were held to gain a collective perspective on the implementation and challenges of integrating peer support in learning. Participatory observations were conducted at eight of the fourteen meetings to observe the reflective learning process and interaction between students. Meanwhile, the documentation data includes the Semester Learning Plan (RPS), student reflective journals, reports on peer support activities, mentoring logs, and learning modules used during the research.

This study applies the criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability to ensure the validity of the data. Credibility is gained through member checking and triangulation of sources and data collection techniques. Dependability is maintained by preparing a trail audit that documents the entire research process. Confirmability is carried out through peer debriefing with academics in the field of Islamic Guidance and Counseling from other universities. The transferability is strengthened by presenting a detailed description of the institutional context and the program implementation process.

Data analysis was carried out using an interactive analysis model Miles, Huberman & Saldana (2018) which includes data condensation, data presentation, and drawing conclusions. Interview transcripts, observation notes, and reflective journals were analyzed through an inductive coding process to identify themes related to peer support practices and the development of students' Islamic self-awareness. The encoding process is assisted using NVivo 14 software to facilitate data organization and thematic interpretation.

This research has received ethical approval from the Research Ethics Committee of UIN Siber Syekh Nurjati Cirebon with Number 042/LPPM/II/2026. All participants signed an informed consent form before data collection was carried out. The confidentiality of participants' identities was maintained through the use of pseudonyms and the process of data anonymity during the study.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

This study implements a qualitative approach of intrinsic case studies to explore the implementation of peer support integrated into Mental Health courses and its contribution in strengthening student self-awareness. Based on an analysis of data collected from 12 participants through semi-structured interviews, two FGD sessions, observations at 8 out of 14 meetings, as well as 60 reflective journals and learning documentation, this study identified three patterns of integration of supportive fellow students structured in the curriculum. In addition, the analysis of 60 reflective journals and FGDs revealed the dynamics of the development of student self-awareness which took place gradually through four phases that were mutually sustainable. This part of the results presents three patterns of peer support integration, the dynamics of the four phases of self-awareness development, the factors that support and hinder the implementation and recommendations of the MBKM Curriculum Policy for Other PTKIN.

## Findings

### Three Patterns of Embedding Peer Support in Mental Health Courses

This section outlines three patterns of integrating peer support into Mental Health courses that contribute to strengthening students' self-awareness. Based on RPS analysis, observations, and interviews, the three patterns include Experiential Learning Circle, Project-Based Digital Muhasabah, and Peer Counselor Mentoring with the main activities, weight of values, and Islamic values implemented. Details of the three patterns of peer support integration can be seen in Table 1.

**Table 1. Three Patterns of Peer Support Integration in Mental Health Courses**

No.	Integration Pattern	Main Activities	Weight Value	Implemented Islamic Values	Key Findings
1.	Experiential Learning Circle	6 of the 14 sessions were converted into 100-minute support circles. Lecturers are the main facilitators, 2 senior peer counselors are co-facilitators. Themes: "Recognize Anxiety", "Automatic Thoughts", "Inner Child", "Healthy Boundaries". Reflective essay 500 words each completed circle.	Weight 15%. Rubric: depth of feeling 40%, theoretical relevance 30%, action plan 30%	Ta'awun (help you), Qalbun Salim (pure heart), Sattar (cover up disgrace)	Students expand their emotional vocabulary. M3: "I just understood the difference between fear and anxiety. In the past, I used to call it chaotic"
2.	Project-Based Digital Muhasabah Project	UTS: 30-day Google Form mood tracker (20.00 emotions, triggers, body responses, strengthening verses/hadiths). UAS: Self-pattern analysis, peer feedback 1 friend. 10-minute "Map of Me" presentation and poster.	Weight 25%. Rubric: data accuracy 30%, analysis 40%, Islamic reframing 30%	Muraqabah (feeling cared for by Allah), Muhasabah (self-evaluation), Patience	9 out of 12 students (75%) were able to map out stress triggers. Mhs7: "I just realized that anxiety always appears on Sunday nights because of overthinking tasks"
3.	Peer Counselor Mentoring	Each 5 students is accompanied by 1 senior peer counselor. Peer counselors get 1 credit of recognition through the MK Peer Counseling Practice. Logbook Notion. Supervise lecturers 2 times/month. Case report and reflection 2000 words (peer counselor). Feedback form (fostered students).	10% (participation)	Rahmah (affection), Amanah (trustworthy), Tabayyun (clarification)	Peer counselors experience dual awareness. M10: "Listen to the story of my classmates, I have opened my old wounds that have not been healed"

The quote shows that learning circles help students expand their emotional vocabulary and distinguish psychological experiences that were previously generally perceived as "chaotic". One participant stated, "I just understood the difference between fear and anxiety. I used to call everything chaotic" (M3). These findings indicate the development of emotional labeling skills as the basis for self-awareness.

**The Dynamics of Strengthening Self-Awareness: From Naming to Giving Meaning**

This section outlines the four phases of student self-awareness development found from an analysis of 60 reflective journals and FGDs. The phase takes place gradually from naming emotions (Phase 1), reading cognitive patterns (Phase 2), Islamic framing (Phase 3), to data-driven actions (Phase 4). Details of the four phases of self-awareness development can be seen in Table 2.

**Table 2. Four Phases of Student Self-Awareness Development**

No.	Phase	Time	Key Characteristics	Sample Findings from Participants
1.	Surprise & Naming Phases	Weeks 1-3	Students were surprised to be asked to "feel". Minimal emotional vocabulary (happy, sad, angry, upset). Circle demands specific naming.	M1: "It turns out that what I feel is overwhelmed is not just dizzy"
2.	Pattern Reading Phase	Weeks 4-8	"Map of My Self" dismantles cognitive distortions: labeling ("I'm a total failure"), catastrophizing ("B grade, not cum laude, a bleak future"), should statement ("BKI children must always be patient"). A friend's feedback becomes a mirror.	M4: "A friend said I was very cruel to myself"
3.	Islamic Framing Phase	Weeks 9-12	The "strengthening verse" column trains ma'na (meaning). Stress is reframed not a disaster, but a loving rebuke of Allah.	M5: "Q.S. Al-Insyirah: 6 is very huge. So dare to go through PPL". The statement shows that students interpret Qur'anic verses as a source of psychological support and strengthening of meaning in the face of academic pressure.
4.	Acting Phase	Weeks 13-14	Students develop a data-driven coping plan. Achieve a level of self-regulation.	M2: "If it's Sunday night I'm anxious, I'll recitation 1 page and write a journal, not scrolling IG"

In the pattern reading phase, students begin to recognize cognitive distortions that arise in their daily academic lives. One participant said, "A friend said, I'm very cruel to myself" (M4). Feedback from peers serves as a social mirror that helps students see previously unconscious mindsets.

**Supports and Barriers to Peer Support Implementation**

This section outlines the factors that support and hinder the implementation of three peer support integration patterns in Mental Health courses in the context of PTKIN. Supporting factors include MBKM policies, lecturer capacity, digital infrastructure, study program culture, and policy umbrella, while blocking factors include the excessive burden of peer counselors, resistance to openness, assessment bias, and crisis cases along with the specific solutions offered. Details of the supporting and blocking factors along with the solutions can be seen in Table 3.

**Table 3. Supports and Barriers to Peer Support Implementation**

No.	Categories	Factors	Description	Solutions (for obstructions)
1	Supports	MBKM Flexibility	Credit recognition for peer counselors as an incentive	-
		Lecturer Capacity	Two certified Peer Educator educators	-
		Digital Infrastructure	Siber Class LMS makes it easy to tracker and monitor	-
		Study Program Culture	The value of "counselors get it right first" is already entrenched	-
		Policy Umbrella	Rector's Decree No. 120/2025 concerning Peer Support in the Curriculum	-
2.	Barriers	Peer Counselor's Overload	24 credits and accompanied by 5 people	1:3 ratio, proportionate academic or financial incentives
		Resistance to Self-Opening	3 students are afraid of disgrace spreading	First meeting specifically for contracting & simulating confidentiality
		Rating Bias	Lecturers are hesitant to judge "venting"	The rubric assesses the process (presence, quality of reflection) adapted from the Reflective Practice Rubric Lucas & Fleming (2021)
		Crisis Cases	Suicidal ideation emerged	SOP referral to UPT LK 1x24 hours. Peer counselor is only a psychological P3K

**MBKM Curriculum Policy Recommendations for Other PTKIN**

This section outlines 7 MBKM curriculum policy recommendations that can be adopted by other PTKIN for the implementation of peer support in Mental Health courses. Recommendations include the integration of peer support into the Mental Health Constitutional Court, recognition of credits for peer counselors, mentoring ratios adjusted to the capacity of the institution, mentoring ratios, provision of academic or financial incentives that are proportionate to incentives, SOPs for 1x24-hour crisis case referrals, contracting & confidentiality simulations, and rubrics assessing processes. Details of the 7 policy recommendations can be seen in Table 4.

**Table 4. MBKM Curriculum Policy Recommendations for Other PTKIN**

No.	Policy Recommendations	Description	Implementation
1.	Integration of peer support into the Mental Health Constitutional Court	Embedding peer support in the RPS of Mental Health courses with the weight of the score adjusted to the characteristics of the institution	RPS that is ready to replicate with 3 patterns: Experiential Learning Circle (15%), Project-Based Digital Muhasabah (25%), Peer Counselor Mentoring (10%)

No.	Policy Recommendations	Description	Implementation
2.	Recognition of credits for peer counselors	Peer counselors receive 1 recognition credit through the MK Peer Counseling Practice	Permendikbudristek 53/2023 Article 15 as a policy umbrella
3.	The ratio of mentoring is adjusted to the capacity of the institution.	Each peer counselor accompanies a number of students according to the capacity of the institution, the complexity of the case, and the availability of mentoring resources.	Overcoming the excessive burden of peer counselors (24 credits + accompanying 5 people)
4.	Proportionate academic or financial incentives	Peer counselors receive proportionate academic or financial incentives	As a novel incentive mechanism to increase participation
5.	SOP for 1x24-hour crisis case referral	SOP for referral of crisis cases to UPT LK within 1x24 hours	Peer counselors only do psychological P3K, not crisis case handling
6.	Contracting & Simulating Confidentiality	First meeting specifically for contracting and confidentiality simulation	Overcoming the resistance of opening up 20% of students who are afraid of disgrace spreading
7.	Rubric assesses the process	Rubric assesses the process (attendance and quality of reflection)	Adapted from the Reflective Practice Rubric Lucas & Fleming (2021) to overcome assessment bias

## Discussion

This section discusses three main findings of the study: the pattern of peer support integration in the Mental Health MK, the dynamics of strengthening students' Islamic self-awareness, and the factors that support and inhibit implementation in the context of PTKIN. The discussion interprets the findings by integrating experiential learning theory (Kolb, 2014), theory of self-regulation Zimmerman (2002), theory of reciprocal learning Topping & Ehly (1998), Self-Awareness Theory Goleman (2022), cognitive distortion theory Beck (1979), theory of organizational support (Eisenberger et al. (2002), and Social Cognitive Theory Bandura (1989). This study not only confirms previous findings from Watson et al. (2026), Osborn et al. (2022), Fortuna et al. (2020), and Jaya et al. (2023), but also offers a conceptual model that combines peer support practices with tazkiyatun nafs values as a reflective framework in mental health learning at PTKIN.

### Peer Support-Based Mental Health Education Patterns

This study identifies three patterns of integration of peer support into systematic and measurable Mental Health courses, which are from the perspective of experiential learning theory Kolb (2014) implement the complete cycle: concrete experience (100-minute support circle), reflective observation (500-word reflective essay), abstract conceptualization (related to CPMK theory), and active experimentation (action plan). There are four cycles of experiential learning: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation in which learners move through these cycles to build their knowledge (Scott, 2023).

The Experiential Learning Circle pattern doesn't just confirm Watson et al. (2026) about experiential course learning, but these findings provide a new perspective on the integration of Islamic values in peer support practices. Previously, research Primary (2022), and Fortuna et al. (2020) placing peer support outside the curriculum, so that the findings of this study enrich the literature on the

integration of peer support into the curriculum of mental health courses and show the potential of this approach to be applied more systematically in the PTKIN environment.

Project-Based Digital Muhasabah Pattern Implements the Theory of Self-Regulation Zimmerman (2002) Through three phases: forethought (a 30-day mood tracker with trigger and response planning), performance (real-time self-observation at 20.00), and self-reflection (pattern analysis plus peer feedback). Peer support is a form of emotional, social, and practical support provided by individuals who have similar experiences to the recipient of support, in the context of education involving students who have been specially trained to help their peers deal with various personal, social, and academic problems. The findings of 75% of college students able to map stressors not only confirm Wulansari & Qiptiah (2026) about reflective writing, but shows that the spiritual dimension has the potential to enrich the understanding of the development of student self-awareness in the context of PTKIN. A significant difference from previous research is the use of daily digital trackers with Google Form and Notion which minimizes recall bias as identified Osborn et al. (2022), produce more accurate data than conventional retrospective journaling, thus providing an alternative approach in reflective practice based on digital technology that can be considered in mental health learning in college.

The Peer Counselor Mentoring pattern is based on the principles of peer-assisted learning developed by Topping & Ehl (1998) Where the learning process is not one-way but occurs reciprocally between mentor and mentee. In this pattern, the mentor who helps the mentee learn at the same time also strengthens his or her own understanding and skills, so that both parties benefit from the interaction. Peer involvement creates a more equitable, open, and supportive learning environment for participants' cognitive and social-affective development. The relevance of this approach is increasingly evident in the context of adolescent mental health, because research Salsabila et al., (2020) showed that peer counseling had a significant influence on mental health, with a correlation coefficient of 66.8% indicating a high level of influence.

The phenomenon of dual awareness in peer counselors is in line with the findings of Newlands et al. (2025) and shows that the mentoring process in the context of Islamic education can also be a means of self-reflection and strengthening personal capacity for mentors. The main theoretical contribution of these three patterns is to offer a conceptual model that combines peer support practices with the values of tazkiyatun nafs as a reflective framework in mental health learning at PTKIN. This model addresses gaps in the international literature that do not address the integration of religious values, thus providing a new perspective on the integration of Islamic values in peer support practices.

### **Dynamics of Strengthening Islamic Self-Awareness of Students**

The four phases of self-awareness development found in this study show that the spiritual dimension has an important role in the process of student self-reflection, complementing the emotional and cognitive aspects that have been widely discussed in the self-awareness literature. The self-awareness instrument consists of three main aspects, namely emotional awareness, accurate self-assessment, and self-confidence (Astriningtias, 2019). The Naming Phase confirms the theory of emotional literacy Maurer & Brackett (2004) about the importance of naming emotions for emotional regulation, but this study shows that in the context of Islamic higher education, the process of naming emotions is also related to the practice of muraqabah and students' spiritual reflection.

The Pattern Reading Phase shows the relevance of the concept of cognitive distortion Beck (1979) in helping students recognize less adaptive mindsets through the process of reflection and peer feedback. Peer support is defined as social-emotional support provided by individuals with similar life experiences. According to Richard et al. (2022), students face mental health problems disproportionately compared to other age groups, with barriers that prevent them from seeking professional help. Findings Jaya et al. (2023) About 35.2% of the influence of social support on self-efficacy is strengthened by a specific peer feedback mechanism that helps students see themselves from others' perspective, which is a key component of social cognitive theory Bandura (1989). These findings are in line with research Afridah

et al. (2020) which shows that social support plays an important role in increasing resilience and positive mindsets, thereby helping individuals develop a more adaptive view of themselves and the problems they face.

The Islamic Framing phase provides a new perspective on the integration of Islamic values in peer support practices. In contrast to conventional journaling which is extrinsically motivated, muhasabah as worship produces higher intrinsic motivation, in line with the findings of Dunuwila et al. (2025) regarding the importance of reflective practices and mindfulness in supporting the development of student self-awareness. The theoretical contribution of this phase is that the spiritual dimension has the potential to enrich the understanding of the development of student self-awareness in the context of PTKIN.

The Acting Phase confirms the theory of self-regulation Vohs & Baumeister (2011) about data-based coping plans, and shows that the use of verses and hadith can be an additional source of reflection in the preparation of student self-regulation strategies. An instrument to measure the level of student self-awareness has been developed with the results of a validity test that shows a valid instrument (Fitzgerald, 2025). Findings Fortuna et al. (2020) about effective coping is strengthened by a specific mechanism of Islamic reframing which results in more sustainable coping because it is grounded in faith. The contribution of this research lies in presenting an overview of the process of developing student self-awareness which includes emotional, cognitive, spiritual, and self-regulation aspects in the context of Islamic religious higher education.

#### **Factors Supporting and Inhibiting Implementation**

Supporting factors confirm the theory of organizational support Eisenberger et al. (2002) which shows that institutional support through the Rector's Decree, credit recognition, and lecturer capacity improves program implementation. The development of self-character measurement instruments has been carried out to produce valid and reliable instruments (Nurislami et al., 2021). However, the findings of this study show that MBKM policy support and a supportive academic culture play an important role in the successful implementation of peer support programs within PTKIN. Inhibitory factors and solutions confirm Osborn et al. (2022) about sustained implementation difficulties, but expanding with the ratio of mentoring adjusted to the capacity of the institution and the number of students accompanied, the provision of proportionate academic or financial incentives as a strategy to increase the sustainability of peer counselor involvement, and 1×24-hour referral SOPs as operational procedures that help the initial handling of crisis cases in a more structured manner. This solution develops an implementation framework for peer support in PTKIN that is more comprehensive than the previous framework. The main theoretical contribution of this supporting and inhibiting factor is the spiritual dimension which has the potential to enrich the understanding of the development of student self-awareness in the context of PTKIN.

#### **MBKM Curriculum Policy Recommendations for Other PTKIN**

The recommendations of 7 MBKM curriculum policies formulated from this study provide practical implications for adoption in other PTKIN. The first recommendation on the integration of peer support into courses with the proportion of assessments adjusted to the learning outcomes and characteristics of the study program confirms WHO (2022) about the whole-university approach model where mental health issues must be included in the mandatory Constitutional Court, not a sticker. The second recommendation on credit recognition for peer counselors confirms Permendikbudristek No. 53 of 2023 Article 15 which allows student activities to have an impact is converted into credits. Third recommendation on rASIO Assistance Tailored to the Capacity of the Institution Expands Findings Osborn et al. (2022) about implementing peer support with smaller ratios to overcome overload. The fourth recommendation on providing proportionate academic or financial incentives is one of the alternative strategies to increase the motivation and sustainability of student involvement in peer support

programs. The fifth recommendation on the 1x24-hour crisis case referral SOP offers a referral procedure that can be used as an initial guide in handling crisis cases that require professional assistance.

The sixth recommendation on contracting and simulating confidentiality overcomes the resistance of some students to open up personal experiences in reflective forums. The seventh recommendation on the rubric assesses the process adapted from the Reflective Practice Rubric Lucas & Fleming (2021) to overcome assessment bias. The theoretical contribution of this recommendation is to offer an implementation framework that can be used as a reference in the development of peer support programs within PTKIN.

### **Theoretical Implications**

This research yields four key theoretical implications that enrich the mental health education literature. First, it offers a conceptual model that combines peer support practices with tazkiyatun nafs values as a reflective framework in mental health learning at PTKIN. Second, these findings indicate that the spiritual dimension plays an important role in the process of developing student self-awareness in the PTKIN environment. Third, the findings of this study show that Islamic values can function as a supporting element in the implementation of experiential learning in mental health learning. Fourth, this research offers an implementation framework that can be considered in the development of peer support programs at PTKIN.

### **Practical Implications**

This research provides four practical implications that can be directly implemented in the context of higher education. First, the provision of RPS and SOPs that are ready to be replicated for Islamic Guidance and Counseling Study Programs at other PTKIN, which includes 6 Experiential Learning Circle sessions with a weight of 15%, Project-Based Digital Muhasabah with a weight of 25%, and Peer Counselor Mentoring with a weight of 10%. Second, the development of a 6-session circle module and assessment rubric for lecturers that can be used as a standard-based implementation guide, including a rubric assessing the process (attendance and quality of reflection) adapted from the Reflective Practice Rubric Lucas & Fleming (2021). Third, the creation of a safe space for reflection without stigma for students through contracting and confidentiality simulations at the first meeting, which overcame the resistance of 20% of students who were afraid of disgrace spreading. Fourth, reducing the burden of mild cases in the Counseling Services Unit because peer support functions as an initial support that helps students obtain sharing space and psychosocial support before receiving professional services if needed.

### **Limitations and Recommendations for Further Research**

This research has several limitations. First, the study uses a qualitative case study design in one study program so that the findings are not intended to be generalized statistically to all PTKIN. Second, the duration of observation lasts for one semester so that it cannot describe the sustainability of changes in student self-awareness in the long term. Third, the data is mostly sourced from reflective journals and interviews which have the potential to be influenced by the tendency of participants to display answers that are considered positive. Nevertheless, this study provides an in-depth contextual overview of the practice of peer support integration in Mental Health courses and can be the basis for further research with a multi-site or longitudinal design. The findings of this research can be the basis for the Islamic Guidance and Counseling study program in integrating peer support activities into mental health learning in a more systematic manner. This approach has the potential to support the strengthening of the personal competence of prospective counselors while improving students' mental health literacy.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study concludes that the integration of peer support into Mental Health courses is able to create a meaningful learning environment to strengthen students' self-awareness. Through structured reflective activities and interaction between students, participants are able to develop a deeper understanding of their emotional experiences, mindsets, and personal values. These findings suggest that

peer support not only functions as a form of social support, but also as a pedagogical approach that facilitates reflective learning and personal growth of Islamic Guidance and Counseling students.

This research also indicates that the integration of Islamic values in peer support-based learning contributes to the process of interpreting self-experience and supports the development of more adaptive self-regulation skills. Therefore, the peer support model that is integrated into the curriculum has the potential to be a promising strategy in the development of mental health education in Islamic Religious Universities. Further research is suggested to test the application and sustainability of this model in a more diverse institutional context.

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