Jurnal Komunikasi
https://journal.trunojoyo.ac.id/komunikasi

EISSN 2549-4902, **ISSN** 1978-4597
Volume 20 No 2 September 2026

The Village Government's Communication Strategy in Strengthening Islamic Family Education for Early-Marriage Couples in Candijati Village

Nurul Hasan[1a)], Qonitatun Nisa[2)]

[1)] **KH. Achmad Muzakki Syah Islamic University**
[2)] **Al-Utsmani Islamic Higher Education Institution**
[a)] author correspondence : rulmhsantri@gmail.com

DOI:https://doi.org/10.21107/ilkom.v20i2.35550

Article History:
Received July 25th 2026
Revised Sept 13th 2026
Accepted September 28th 2026

ABSTRACT

Unplanned pregnancies drive most early marriages in Candijati Village, Jember Regency. These early unions often lead to economic pressure, limited religious literacy, and low parenting readiness. Law Number 6 of 2014 mandates village governments to conduct community guidance. However, empirical research on village-level post-marriage communication strategies remains scarce. This study analyzes how the Candijati Village Government communicates Islamic family education to early-married couples, identifying enabling and constraining factors. a qualitative case study design, the researchers interviewed eight purposively selected informants. The participants included local village officials, a marriage counselor, a religious leader, a welfare cadre, and two early-married couples. Data collection involved semi-structured interviews, non-participant observation, and document analysis. The research team analyzed data through the interactive thematic model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, ensuring credibility via triangulation and member checking. Findings reveal four core strategy components: credible communicators, religiously and emotionally framed messages, interpersonal-digital media combinations prioritizing face-to-face interaction, and persuasive delivery. Early-married couples reported perceived improvements in communication, role division, and religious practice. Inter-institutional collaboration and social trust facilitated successful delivery. Conversely, low education levels, economic hardship, and work demands constrained program reach. This study provides a contextual communication model that extends communication theory into post-marriage family guidance.

Keywords: *communication strategy, village government, Islamic family education, early marriage, family resilience.*

ABSTRAK

.Kasus kehamilan yang tidak direncanakan mendominasi fenomena pernikahan dini di Desa Candijati, Kabupaten Jember. Kondisi tersebut memicu keterbatasan kesiapan psikologis, ekonomi, dan kapasitas pengasuhan. Pemerintah Desa memiliki kewajiban pembinaan masyarakat berdasarkan Undang-Undang Nomor 6 Tahun 2014. Namun, kajian mengenai strategi komunikasi tingkat desa dalam memperkuat pendidikan keluarga Islam pascapernikahan masih terbatas. Penelitian ini menganalisis strategi komunikasi Pemerintah Desa Candijati dalam menguatkan pendidikan keluarga Islam bagi pasangan nikah dini serta mengidentifikasi faktor pendukung dan penghambatnya. Penelitian kualitatif studi kasus ini melibatkan delapan informan pilihan, meliputi perangkat desa, penyuluh keagamaan, kader PKK, dan pasangan nikah dini. Pengumpulan data menggunakan wawancara semiterstruktur, observasi, dan dokumentasi. Analisis data menerapkan model interaktif Miles, Huberman, dan Saldaña dengan pengujian kredibilitas melalui triangulasi. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa strategi komunikasi desa menjalankan empat komponen utama: komunikator yang kredibel, pesan berbingkai emosional-religius, bauran saluran interpersonal-digital, dan pendekatan delivery persuasif. Pasangan nikah dini merasakan peningkatan kualitas komunikasi, pembagian peran, dan praktik keagamaan. Kolaborasi lintas lembaga dan kepercayaan sosial mendukung keberhasilan program. Sebaliknya, tingkat pendidikan yang rendah, hambatan ekonomi, dan tuntutan kerja menjadi faktor penghambat utama. Penelitian ini memberikan model strategi komunikasi kontekstual untuk memperluas konsep komunikasi dalam pembinaan keluarga pascapernikahan.

Kata Kunci: . *Strategi komunikasi; pemerintah desa; pendidikan keluarga Islam; pernikahan dini; ketahanan keluarga;*

Cite this as (APA Style):
Hasan, N., & Nisa, Q., (2026). The Village Government's Communication Strategy in Strengthening Islamic Family Education for Early-Marriage Couples in Candijati Village. *Jurnal Komunikasi*, 20 (2), 160-179. doi: https://doi.org/10.21107/ilkom.v20i2.35550

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INTRODUCTION

Early marriage remains a significant global concern because of its far-reaching impacts on individuals, families, and society. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) explicitly target the elimination of child marriage under the fifth goal on gender equality, reflecting its close ties to structural poverty, gender inequality, and limited educational attainment (Parsons et al., 2014). In Indonesia, early marriage still occurs on a fairly large scale in rural areas, driven by a set of interrelated factors economic pressure, the influence of local traditions, a permissive social environment, and limited access to quality education that reproduce the practice across generations (Sunarti et al., 2012). In East Java, early marriage is also reported to remain high in rural areas and to be influenced by local custom and adolescents' obedience to their parents Because these conditions are rarely resolved once the marriage has taken place, addressing early marriage requires attention not only to upstream prevention but also to sustained support for couples after they marry. This matters because marriage below the legal age continues to occur even though the 2019 revision of the Marriage Law raised the minimum age to 19; the marriage dispensation mechanism leaves a route through which such marriages can still be legalized (Ripner et al., 2026). In East Java, marriage dispensations granted during 2022 were reported to reach 15,881 cases (Erika et al., 2023).

Specifically in Candijati Village, early marriage is not a hypothetical concern or mere background, but a recurring and documented occurrence that requires sustained attention at the village level. According to the village head, six applications for marriage dispensation involving minors were submitted over the past three years. However, four of the six applicants later withdrew their intention to marry after receiving counseling and guidance from village officials. Following that intervention, they decided to continue to higher levels of education rather than proceed with the planned marriage. Field interviews with Village Head Samhadi and village officials confirmed that most recent cases were emergency marriages triggered by pregnancy outside marriage, not by parental arrangement or economic transaction, so that couples entered marriage suddenly and with little preparation for household and religious responsibilities; the Village Government and the Arjasa KUA processed these marriages in accordance with legal provisions, after which officials provided moral advice and practical guidance aimed at fostering long-term family well-being for the young couples. This pattern also creates problems that extend beyond the wedding itself: village officials and religious leaders reported that early-married couples in Candijati commonly face recurring disputes over household finances, unclear spousal roles, strained relationships with extended family, and most relevant to this study difficulty establishing stable religious routines for themselves and, subsequently, for their children. It is these specific, locally observed social consequences, rather than early marriage as an abstract national statistic, that drive the need for a sustained guidance response at the village level instead of a one-off administrative processing of the marriage. This pattern is consistent with findings elsewhere that the aim of avoiding *zina* (unlawful sexual relations), which often

implicitly includes pregnancy outside marriage, is almost always the basis for marriage dispensation applications (Ripner et al., 2026), and that adolescents' understanding of the risks of early marriage and of reproductive health is low (Kurniasari et al., 2018).

The decision to examine specifically the communication strategy of the Village Government not that of the KUA or religious leaders alone is based on the Village Government's statutory mandate. Law Number 6 of 2014 on Villages (Indonesia, 2014) assigns four main duties to the Village Head: administering village government, implementing village development, *village community guidance*, and *village community empowerment*. Post-marriage support for early-married couples falls within this community guidance function: it forms part of the Village Head's formal responsibility for the social and moral welfare of villagers, not an ad hoc charitable activity conducted outside governmental authority. In Candijati, this statutory mandate is carried out jointly with the Head of the Social Welfare Section (Kesra) and the Hamlet Heads, who translate the general legal obligation into concrete, periodic guidance programs in cooperation with the KUA and religious leaders. Because the Village Government is the only actor among them that holds both the formal authority to convene and coordinate the others and the closest and most continuous contact with villagers' daily lives, its communication strategy not that of any partner institution is the appropriate unit of analysis for understanding how post-marriage guidance is organized and delivered as a matter of local governance, and not merely as an act of religious teaching.

Families formed at an immature age often struggle to perform family functions harmoniously. Couples who marry early are more vulnerable to recurring domestic conflict, economic instability, and weak family resilience under pressure (Amini et al., 2023), conditions that in turn can hinder the religious and moral upbringing of children. Early marriage is also linked to stress-related mental health problems, high-risk pregnancy, and domestic violence (Kusumaningsih et al., 2023). In Islamic education, the family is viewed as the first and most fundamental institution in shaping a child's faith, character, and identity (Sarbaini, 2023). For couples who marry young and often lack the knowledge, emotional maturity, and experience to carry out this educational function, Islamic family education becomes especially urgent yet it cannot be assumed to occur spontaneously; an external agent is usually needed to introduce, model, and reinforce these values within the family.

The relevance of this study to Islamic education also requires an explanation of the position of Islamic teachings on early marriage. Both classical and contemporary Islamic jurisprudence do not set a single numerical minimum age for marriage; rather, they make marriage permissible upon *baligh* (the attainment of physical and legal puberty) and, more decisively, upon *rushd* the maturity and capacity to fulfill the rights and responsibilities of married life. Qur'an 4:6 instructs guardians to test the intelligence of orphans "until they reach marriageable age" (*ḥattā idhā balaghū al-nikāḥ*) before entrusting responsibility to them, which ties readiness for marriage to demonstrated maturity rather than to age alone; and the

well-known hadith on the ability to marry (*al-bā'ah*), narrated by Bukhari and Muslim (Al-Bukhari, 1981), encourages only those who are able materially as well as psychologically to marry, while advising those who are not yet able to fast as a temporary form of self-restraint. Read together, these sources do not categorically prohibit early marriage, but make its validity conditional on substantive readiness, which is not automatically met by marriages triggered by unplanned pregnancy and economic pressure, as observed in Candijati. Indonesian civil law aligns with this substantive concern procedurally: Law Number 16 of 2019 (Indonesia, 2019), which amended Law Number 1 of 1974 on Marriage, raised the minimum marriage age to 19 for both men and women (Erika et al., 2023); (Kusumaningsih et al., 2023) precisely to safeguard the physical and psychological maturity that religious teachings also presuppose. This gap between the maturity that marriage demands and the maturity that early-married couples in Candijati typically bring gives rise to the specific need examined in this study: the sustained and structured guidance that Islamic family education must provide after marriage to compensate for readiness that was not fully met beforehand.

This study is grounded in general communication strategy theory rather than in any single development-oriented framework. Following the classic formulation (Morissan, 2018), communication strategy is the planned management of four interacting components communicator, message, medium or channel, and communicant (audience) that are deliberately combined to produce the desired communicative effect; (Cangara, 2022) further asserts that an effective strategy requires these components to be internally aligned: a credible communicator, a message framed in line with the audience's values and understanding, and a channel matched to the complexity and sensitivity of the content. This study draws on three complementary theoretical strands to analyze each component in depth: (1) audience-centered persuasion theory, in particular the elaboration likelihood model, which explains why personally and religiously relevant messages are internalized more durably than generic ones (Stephen W. et al., 2021) (Perloff, 2020); (2) media richness theory, which explains why rich interpersonal channels are better suited than mass or digital media for conveying complex, value-laden, and emotionally sensitive content such as family guidance (Birrer & Just, 2025); and (3) the concept of the credible communicator or opinion leader, whose social and religious standing lends legitimacy to a message and accelerates its acceptance (Valente & Yon, 2020). Together, these three strands structure the analysis developed in the later sections of this article: who delivers the message and why they are trusted (communicator), what is conveyed and how the message is framed (message), and which channel is chosen for which type of content (media). A similar component framework audience mapping, message delivery, media selection, and communicator selection has been used to analyze the communication strategy of marriage counseling by Bimas Islam (Luthfi & Rifa'i, 2018). Communication built on these principles is treated here not as an abstract instrument of information delivery but as a concrete strategic mechanism that builds collective awareness, family capacity, and religious internalization.

The village government occupies a strategic position in this process because it is the tier of government closest to people's daily lives, understands the local context, and holds strong social legitimacy, and therefore has both the authority and the social capacity to design family guidance programs that combine social, religious, and economic empowerment activities. Previous research shows that village government communication strategies can effectively raise community awareness of the risks of early marriage through persuasive approaches rooted in the local context (Nadiya, 2024); however, that study focuses on prevention rather than on guidance for couples who have already married, leaving a clear gap in research on the post-marriage guidance context. Candijati Village, Arjasa Subdistrict, Jember Regency, was chosen as the research site because it still has a number of early-married couples who need sustained support, as well as strong social, cultural, and religious infrastructure respected religious leaders, pesantren and madrasah institutions, and active religious study groups that gives its village government considerable capacity to build institutional synergy for Islamic family education.

A review of previous research shows that studies of early marriage focus on three main areas. These areas include root causes, multidimensional impacts on families and society, and prevention strategies by governmental and non-governmental institutions. (Adnan et al., 2025) examined the socio-economic impacts from an international comparative perspective. (Amini et al., 2023) analyzed family resilience among early-married couples. (Nadiya, 2024) assessed the effectiveness of village government persuasive communication in preventing early marriage. Meanwhile, (Sarbaini, 2023) emphasized the importance of religious guidance in young families. Other studies have examined adolescents' understanding of reproductive health and early marriage (Kurniasari et al., 2018), the role of peers in early marriage (Kusumaningsih et al., 2023), the authority of fathers and kiai in arranged marriages in Madurese society (Arroisi & Quraisyin, 2015), and the relationship between marriage dispensation and cultural norms (Ripner et al., 2026). Communication strategies for marriage counseling have also been studied, but at the premarital stage and with the aim of preventing divorce (Luthfi & Rifa'i, 2018), while cross-stakeholder collaboration in preventing child marriage has been analyzed using a collaborative governance framework (Erika et al., 2023).

To verify this research gap, the researchers conducted a systematic literature search in the Scopus, Google Scholar, and Sinta databases. The search used a combination of the keywords "village government communication strategy," "Islamic family education," "post-marriage guidance," and "early marriage" for articles published between 2020 and 2026. The initial search yielded 115 articles. The researchers applied inclusion criteria and evaluated 38 relevant articles in depth.

The search results confirmed that no study has yet combined the three core variables into a single analytical framework. These variables include village government communication strategy, Islamic family education, and post-marriage guidance for early-married couples. Most previous studies discussed at most two of these dimensions separately.

The novelty of this study is therefore not merely in bringing these three themes together, but in specifying the mechanism that links them: the study conceptualizes village government communication strategy its planning process, message design, media mix, and relational approach as the operational pathway through which Islamic family education is delivered, made credible, and internalized, thereby shaping the family resilience perceived by early-married couples. This mechanism-based framework distinguishes this study from earlier work that treats prevention and post-marriage guidance as separate matters, and positions communication strategy as a constitutive, not incidental, part of community-based Islamic family education.

Based on this background, this study addresses three research questions: (1) how the Candijati Village Government designs and implements its communication strategy to deliver Islamic family education to early-married couples; (2) through what mechanisms this communication strategy contributes to the internalization of Islamic family education and the strengthening of perceived family resilience; and (3) what factors support and hinder this process. Theoretically, the findings are expected to contribute to the study of communication strategy, Islamic *da'wah* communication, and Islamic family education by explaining how communication functions as a mediating mechanism in a specific post-marriage context. Practically, the findings are intended to inform village governments, religious leaders, marriage counselors, and related institutions in designing family guidance programs that are more effective, inclusive, and sustainable, thereby contributing to family resilience and to the moral, intellectual, and spiritual development of the next generation.

METHODS

This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study design. Candijati was deliberately treated as an instrumental case (Yin, 2018) rather than as a village statistically representative of Indonesia: unlike most villages in the surrounding subdistricts, where government involvement in early marriage essentially ends once the marriage documents are processed, the Candijati Village Government has institutionalized recurring and structured post-marriage guidance activities in cooperation with the KUA and local religious leaders. This unusual institutional practice is what makes the case analytically valuable: it allows the study to observe communication strategy for post-marriage Islamic family guidance in a setting where it is actually operating, rather than inferring it from villages that lack one, and it enables in-depth, contextual exploration of the interactions among the actors involved in the strategy. The research was conducted in Candijati Village, Arjasa Subdistrict, Jember Regency, from March to June 2026.

Participants and Selection Procedure



Figure 1. Initial field coordination with the Candijati Village Government at the start of data collection (Source: Personal Documentation)

Field access began with formal coordination with the Candijati Village Office, where the researchers explained the purpose of the study to the Village Head and requested permission to identify prospective informants (Figure 1). Informants were then selected purposively based on their direct involvement in and knowledge of the family guidance program, so that the three research questions could be answered from complementary vantage points: policy and coordination (village government), religious authority (religious leaders and the KUA counselor), community mobilization (PKK cadre), and firsthand experience (early-married couples). Prospective informants in the early-married couple category were identified through referrals from the Hamlet Head and the Head of Kesra, who maintain routine contact with them in carrying out their duties. The informants consisted of the Village Head, the Head of the Social Welfare Section (Kesra), a Hamlet Head (Kasun), a marriage counselor from the Office of Religious Affairs (KUA) of Arjasa Subdistrict, a religious leader, a PKK cadre, and two early-married couples, for a total of eight informants. Each prospective informant was individually briefed on the purpose, procedures, and voluntary nature of the study and was asked to give informed consent before scheduling. Recruitment and interviews continued until additional interviews no longer produced meaningful new information (data saturation).

Data Collection

Data were collected through three techniques, each documented separately in the research field notes. First, in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted individually with each of the eight informants, guided by an interview protocol developed from the three research questions and reviewed internally by the research team before use; the protocol covered the form of the communication strategy used, the process of planning and implementing it, the media employed, and the supporting and inhibiting factors involved. No formal pilot interviews were conducted given the

small and limited group of informants, but the wording of the protocol was adjusted after the first two interviews to better match the informants' everyday vocabulary. Each interview lasted about 60 minutes, was conducted in the regional language, and was recorded with the informant's consent before being transcribed verbatim. Second, non-participant observation was carried out during family counseling sessions, regular religious study gatherings (pengajian), and village meetings, to capture communication processes as they occur in their natural setting; the researchers made field notes on the roles present, the sequence of activities, and the channels used in each observed session.



Figure 2. A religious study gathering (pengajian) attended by early-married couples as part of the guidance program
(Source: Personal Documentation)

Third, documentation was reviewed, including *minutes of village deliberation meetings*, schedules of guidance program activities, correspondence between the Village Government and the KUA, and photo records of guidance and religious study activities (Figures 1 and 2), which were used to corroborate and contextualize the interview and observation data.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed manually using the interactive analysis model (Miles et al., 2020), which consists of three concurrent stages, each carried out and documented as follows. In the data condensation stage, verbatim interview transcripts, field notes, and reviewed documents were openly coded line by line in a manual coding sheet to identify initial concepts related to communication practices, educational content, and contextual factors; the two researchers coded independently and compared results to resolve differences (investigator triangulation), after which related codes were grouped into categories (for example, "message design," "media selection," "relational approach," "supporting factors," and "inhibiting factors"), which were then refined into broader themes reported in the Results and Discussion section. In the data

display stage, the coded data were organized into a role-by-theme matrix that compares informants' statements across roles village officials, religious authorities, and couples to identify patterns of agreement, difference, and change over time. In the conclusion drawing and verification stage, emerging interpretations were checked against the raw data and, where relevant, against the theoretical framework outlined in the Introduction, and were then presented back to key informants in a member checking session to ensure the accuracy and appropriateness of the interpretations before they were finalized. This design follows directly from the research questions: because the first and second research questions require an understanding of how and why the communication strategy operates as it does, and the third requires identifying context-specific enabling and limiting conditions, a qualitative case study capable of capturing process, meaning, and context was considered more appropriate than a purely quantitative or descriptive design.

Data Validity and Ethical Considerations

Data credibility was maintained through source triangulation (comparing accounts from village officials, religious authorities, and couples) and technique triangulation (comparing interview, observation, and documentation data), supplemented by member checking, in which preliminary findings were shared with key informants to ensure the accuracy and appropriateness of the interpretations. All informants participated voluntarily and gave informed consent before data collection; the identities of the early-married couples are anonymized throughout this article to protect their privacy.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The Village Government's Communication Strategy in Strengthening Islamic Family Education

Findings. Based on interviews with village officials, religious authorities, and early-married couples, the Candijati Village Government's communication strategy consistently displays four interrelated elements. First, program planning is collaborative: the Village Head and the Head of Kesra coordinate with religious leaders, community leaders, and PKK cadres to determine the guidance content, target participants, scheduling, and evaluation mechanisms, with the Hamlet Head serving as the closest point of contact who gives informal advice whenever meeting couples in the community's daily life. Concretely, this planning takes the form of periodic coordination meetings (*musyawarah*) held at the village hall before each guidance cycle. In these meetings, the Village Head, the Head of Kesra, religious leaders, and PKK cadres jointly determine the guidance schedule; the substantive material, organized around six areas faith (*aqidah*), orderly performance of worship, good character (*akhlak*), the rights and obligations of husband and wife, Islamic child-rearing, and household economic management; the participants prioritized in a

given cycle; and mechanisms for evaluating attendance and perceived benefit. Meeting decisions are recorded in written minutes kept by the village secretariat, while the Hamlet Head is responsible for daily informal monitoring to identify couples who begin attending less often or are experiencing difficulties, and reports them at the next planning meeting.

> *"Before the program runs, we always hold a deliberation meeting (musyawarah) at the village hall. We invite the Head of Kesra, religious leaders, community leaders, and PKK cadres. There we determine the schedule, the target participants, and the guidance content. This post-marriage guidance is the village's responsibility because residents' well-being begins with family resilience at the village level."* (Village Head, interview, 12 May 2026)

> *"I meet residents in the hamlet every day. If a young couple starts missing the religious study sessions or seems to be having problems, I talk to them informally. I note down what I observe and report it at the monthly coordination meeting at the village hall so that we can find solutions together."* (Hamlet Head, interview, 14 May 2026)

Second, the messages delivered are religiously framed and oriented toward household harmony, the rights and obligations of spouses, and shared responsibility in child-rearing, conveyed in simple, easy-to-understand language. These messages take three formats adapted to their channels. In face-to-face counseling and home visits, the message takes the form of personalized oral *nasihat* (advice) tailored to the couple's specific situation for example, framing open communication between spouses as a religious obligation that follows the Prophet's example of consultative (*musyawarah*) household relations, rather than offering generic advice about good communication. In regular *pengajian* (religious study gatherings), the message takes the form of short thematic *ceramah* (sermons) organized around easily understood religious concepts such as the *sakinah* (tranquil and harmonious) family, which link everyday concerns managing household finances, disciplining children, resolving disagreements to specific religious guidance rather than abstract doctrine. In the village WhatsApp group, by contrast, messages are deliberately kept short and purely logistical session schedules, location reminders, attendance confirmations while substantive religious or personal content is consistently reserved for face-to-face situations. Informants described this separation as deliberate, because sensitive household matters were considered inappropriate to discuss in a semi-public chat group. This distribution of message formats across channels is part of the strategy itself: it reflects a deliberate matching of message complexity and sensitivity to channel richness, as discussed further in the interpretation section.

> *"The people of Candijati hold firmly to religious values. If I only gave general advice, the influence would be weak. I use the family fiqh approach, the concept of sakinah, and the Prophet's example of musyawarah. Residents are more open to the material because they see it as an act of worship, not merely an official's directive."* (Religious Leader, interview, 1 June 2026)

> *"We only use the village WhatsApp group to send schedules, venue reminders, and attendance confirmations. We prohibit discussing household problems in the group chat. Personal matters must be discussed in direct face-to-face meetings to protect privacy and mutual respect among residents."* (PKK Cadre, interview, 1 June 2026)

Third, the media mix combines direct face-to-face channels family counseling sessions, regular religious study gatherings, village deliberation meetings, and small-group meetings with the village WhatsApp group, which is used mainly for scheduling and information dissemination. Fourth, the relational approach applied is persuasive, religious, and family-oriented: officials and religious leaders consciously position couples as cared-for members of the community rather than as objects of a government program, so that couples feel safe disclosing household difficulties.

> *"We don't feel singled out or blamed when village officials come to visit us. Pak Kasun and the PKK cadres talk to us like our own family. This embracing way of communicating makes us feel safe to share the economic difficulties and parenting patterns we experience."* (Couple A, interview, 25 May 2026)

Comparison across informant groups shows a consistent pattern rather than isolated perceptions. Village officials described face-to-face communication as necessary for gauging community response and adjusting the guidance; the KUA counselor and the religious leader described religious framing for example, the concept of the *sakinah* family as easier to accept because it aligns with values the community already holds; and the early-married couples themselves reported that direct communication, rather than information received through media alone, made it easier for them to ask questions, disclose difficulties, and feel supported. This convergence of three structurally different vantage points strengthens the credibility of the finding that a credible communicator combined with a religiously framed message, delivered through an appropriate channel, is the main driver of acceptance in this context, rather than message content or media technology considered separately.

> *"Delivering the material within the frame of the sakinah family is far more effective than a formal regulatory approach. Religious values are already part of local people's lives. When the guidance uses down-to-earth religious language, participants' level of acceptance is much higher and does not provoke resistance."* (KUA Counselor, interview, 27 May 2026)

> *"We often only skim the information on our phones or in the WhatsApp group. It is hard for us to ask questions when something is unclear. Through direct meetings, we can have a dialogue, ask questions freely, and feel genuinely accompanied by the village officials, especially Pak Kasun because he is still my relative."* (Couple B, interview, 2 June 2026)

Interpretation. These findings map directly onto the four components of a deliberate communication strategy communicator, message, media, and communicant. On the communicator component, the credibility of the Village Head and the Head of Kesra as legitimate organizers is reinforced by the social closeness of the Hamlet Head: his routine and informal presence in the community's daily life practically substitutes for the more institutionalized consultative structure that formal communication strategy models typically assume, consistent with the emphasis of (Cangara, 2022) and (Morissan, 2018) on communicator credibility as the foundation of message acceptance. Similar findings have been reported in Bimas Islam's marriage guidance programs, where facilitators were selected for their credibility and

appeal and were certified as sakinah family counselors (Luthfi & Rifa'i, 2018).

On message design, the finding that religiously and emotionally framed messages produce stronger acceptance is consistent with (Perloff, 2020) account of audience-centered persuasive communication, as well as with (Perloff, 2020), who reported similar effects of religious-emotional framing among early-married couples. Read through the elaboration likelihood model (Stephen W. et al., 2021), personally and religiously relevant messages appear to be processed via the central route, producing more durable attitude change than messages processed peripherally. However, this study did not measure processing routes directly, so this interpretation should be read as theoretically plausible rather than empirically proven.

On media choice, the finding that face-to-face communication was seen as more effective than digital communication is consistent with media richness theory (Birrer & Just, 2025), which holds that information-rich channels are better suited to complex, ambiguous, and emotionally laden content. However, a real tension emerges here that deserves explicit attention, rather than being read merely as a confirmation of theory: the use of digital media, especially WhatsApp, is growing as internet access in rural areas improves, and officials reported using it for time-sensitive coordination; at the same time, both officials and couples described a continued reliance on, and even a preference for, interpersonal channels for anything concerning genuine household problems. This pattern suggests a functional division of labor between channels digital media for logistics and information dissemination, interpersonal media for meaningful guidance that existing accounts of media richness do not fully capture, and that may shift as digital literacy and trust in mediated communication grow in rural areas. This tension is presented as a direction worthy of further research, ideally longitudinal, rather than as a final conclusion.

The family-oriented relational approach observed here is consistent with the general premise of communication strategy that a strategy's effectiveness depends on the communicator's ability to build social trust with the audience (Cangara, 2022) & (Morissan, 2018); it is also consistent with the theory of communicative action (Habermas, 2015), in which communication oriented toward mutual understanding provides the strongest basis for legitimate social coordination. Overall, these findings indicate that the village government's communication strategy functions not merely as a channel for delivering Islamic family education content, but as a mechanism that generates the trust and openness without which that content cannot be

Implementation of Islamic Family Education for Early-Married Couples

Findings. Islamic family education in Candijati Village is delivered through structured guidance covering six areas: faith (*aqidah*), orderly performance of worship, good character (*akhlak*), the rights and obligations of husband and wife, Islamic child-rearing, and household economic management. Religious leaders provide contextual religious material, while the KUA counselor offers individual and

group consultations for couples facing difficulties in communication, economics, or parenting, with the village government serving as facilitator and logistical coordinator rather than as the main content provider. According to the informants, the material most consistently emphasized is the responsibility to earn a halal livelihood, maintain harmony through open communication, and raise children according to Islamic values from an early age.

> *"The problems young couples most often consult us about are disputes caused by blocked communication and economic pressure. In both individual and group guidance, we always emphasize three main foundations: the importance of earning a halal livelihood, the importance of open communication between spouses, and the obligation of Islamic child-rearing from an early age."* (KUA Counselor, interview, 10 March 2026)

Several couples reported changes they perceived after participating in the guidance program, including a clearer understanding of spousal roles, more consistent congregational worship at home, greater involvement in their children's religious education, and a shift toward musyawarah (mutual consultation) as a means of resolving disagreements. It should be emphasized that these are self-reported perceptions collected at a single point in time, not before-and-after measurements of behavior; the available data do not allow the claim that the program causally produced these changes, only that participants perceived and reported that these changes occurred as they took part.

> *"After taking part in the guidance, we felt a change in how roles are divided between husband and wife. We now try to consistently perform congregational worship at home and are more active in teaching our child to recite the Qur'an. In our view, the atmosphere at home has become more orderly and harmonious."* (Couple A, interview, 15 March 2026)

> *"In the past, whenever there was a financial problem or a difference of opinion, we would quarrel right away and then give each other the silent treatment. Now, when a problem arises, we make a habit of sitting down together to deliberate. We talk through solutions calmly in line with the guidance given during the sessions."* (Couple B, interview, 18 March 2026)

Interpretation. The centrality of religious leaders and the KUA counselor is consistent with (Sarbaini, 2023) argument that religious guidance is more readily accepted from figures with recognized social and religious authority, just as the strength of the authority of kiai and pesantren shapes Madurese community attitudes toward marriage (Arroisi & Quraisyin, 2015), as well as with the concept of the opinion leader in general communication theory (Valente & Yon, 2020), in which such figures accelerate the adoption of new behavior by giving it social legitimacy. The reported behavioral shifts more consistent worship, more active religious parenting, and a preference for musyawarah are in line with the findings of (Passa et al., 2025) and (Maryani et al., 2021) that the internalization of Islamic values in the family strengthens family resilience and improves parenting quality and marital relationships. The urgency of such guidance should also be read in light of (Rizkianti & Sari, 2024) finding that early marriage in Indonesia is associated with greater

reproductive health risks and lower fulfillment of girls' rights; thus, guidance that emphasizes equal spousal relations and responsible parenting could potentially serve as one mitigation pathway against these risks, although this study did not directly measure reproductive health indicators, so this claim is plausible rather than tested. Read through an ecological framework (Mulyono, 2026), a family strengthened by Islamic values functions as a stronger microsystem, with plausible implications for child development; however, this study did not directly collect child outcome data, so these implications should be treated as theoretical extensions rather than direct findings.

It should also be noted where the current findings extend, rather than merely confirm, earlier research. (Sarbaini, 2023) and (Passa et al., 2025) examined religious internalization in families in general, without detailing the external mechanisms that initiate internalization in the specific post-marriage, village-level context. The current findings show that in this context, internalization does not occur simply because religious material is available, but because that material is delivered through the same trust-based, interpersonally embedded communication strategy described in the previous section. This suggests that Islamic family education and communication strategy are not two separate processes running in parallel, but a single process, in which communication provides the credibility and acceptance needed for religious content to be internalized rather than merely heard.

Supporting and Inhibiting Factors

Findings. Informants across roles agreed that inter-institutional collaboration among the village government, religious leaders, the KUA, PKK cadres, and the community is the most decisive supporting factor, alongside the intrinsic motivation of some early-married couples to improve their family lives. At the same time, the program faces structural constraints: the low level of formal education among some couples; economic pressure that pushes guidance down the list of priorities relative to daily needs; competing work demands; and, for some community members, the cultural view that family matters are private and not a legitimate object of external guidance. These obstacles reduce attendance and engagement rather than eliminating the program's impact entirely, indicating a program that reaches its target population partially rather than evenly. This educational barrier is consistent with findings from a marriage guidance program in Ponorogo, where some participants with low educational backgrounds understood little of the material delivered in language that was not very practical (Luthfi & Rifa'i, 2018). The strong authority of parents, particularly fathers, over their children's marriage decisions has also been reported among the Madurese (Arroisi & Quraisyin, 2015) and the Banjarese (Ripner et al., 2026). This situation is further aggravated by broader administrative problems: (Sari & Tjahjadi, 2025) note that inconsistent marriage registration practices across regions of Indonesia help make child marriage possible without official support from the outset, so that village-level post-marriage guidance such as that carried out in

Candijati plays a role in filling part of the support gap that ideally would have been available before or at the time of marriage.

> *"The success of this program depends on close inter-institutional collaboration. The village government, the KUA, religious leaders, and PKK cadres work together based on mutual trust. Without the active involvement and synergy of all these parties, the guidance program would not be able to continue sustainably."* (Village Head, interview, 20 March 2026)

> *"The biggest challenge in the field is that some residents still regard household matters as private affairs that outsiders should not interfere with. In addition, low educational backgrounds and exhaustion from working all day make it difficult for some couples to attend consistently."* (PKK Cadre, interview, 22 March 2026)

> *"Sometimes we have no choice but to miss the guidance because we have to work until late at night to put food on the table. When the economy is tough, our top priority is to work. Our time and energy are already used up earning our daily living."* (Couple B, interview, 25 March 2026)

Interpretation. The role of inter-institutional collaboration is consistent with (Yunus et al., 2021) account of social capital, in which trust-based cooperation among social actors turns limited community resources into collective capacity beyond what a single actor could achieve, as well as with (Aldrich & Meyer, 2014) argument that dense, trust-based social networks reduce the transaction costs of implementing community programs. Similar findings were reported in a study of collaborative governance for child marriage prevention in Bojonegoro, where a history of good cooperation built initial trust and eased collaboration, although face-to-face dialogue and facilitative leadership were not yet optimal (Erika et al., 2023). The structural barriers identified here are consistent with (Cameron, 2023) finding that early-married couples face layered economic and educational vulnerabilities, and with the systematic review by (Nur et al., 2024), which identified low education, poverty, and local cultural norms as the most consistent determinants of child marriage across regions of Indonesia. This agreement confirms that the obstacles faced by the Candijati guidance program are not merely a local matter but reflect the structural determinants of child marriage that apply more broadly nationwide. These findings are also in line with the warning of (Firdayani et al., 2026) that guidance programs that do not seriously address these structural conditions will remain limited in reach, however well designed their messages may be.

This last point deserves more than mere confirmation: the data show that the Candijati guidance program has begun to respond to this critique in practice, not merely to describe it. Facing couples' economic constraints, the village government has connected participants with village-owned enterprises (BUMDes), skills training, and local marketing networks, treating economic empowerment as a prerequisite for rather than a matter separate from effective communication and religious guidance. This finding suggests a refinement of the argument of (Firdayani et al., 2026) as applied to this context: the limiting conditions they identify are not fixed but can be partially overcome when local institutions have both communicative relationships and the administrative capacity to link guidance with concrete economic support a

combination that may not be available to programs operating at a larger scale or with weaker local trust. This differs from conditional cash transfer programs, which are reported to have had limited impact in high-prevalence regions, presumably because of strong local cultural norms (Ripner et al., 2026).

> *"We realize that religious guidance will not be effective if residents' stomachs are empty. Therefore, we connect guidance participants with BUMDes business units, skills training, and product marketing channels. This economic empowerment is an absolute prerequisite for couples to be able to focus on building family resilience."* (Head of Kesra, interview, 28 March 2026)

Toward an Integrated Model

Overall, these findings indicate that three elements a credible and socially embedded communicator; contextually delivered Islamic family education as message content; and an interpersonal channel embedded in the community do not operate as separate program components but as a single, mutually reinforcing communication strategy. A trusted communicator provides the acceptance without which religious content cannot be internalized; religious content provides the substantive values that ground trust-based communication; and the interpersonal channel provides the social closeness that allows both to take place in a small, religiously homogeneous rural environment.

This integrated mechanism is the study's main theoretical contribution: it extends the application of the general concept of communication strategy previously developed mainly around organizational persuasive communication, marketing, or prevention-oriented communication into the specific and still rarely studied context of post-marriage Islamic family guidance. These findings suggest that in this context, communication strategy should be evaluated not only by its capacity to convey information but also by its capacity to create the relational conditions for value internalization through coherent alignment among communicator, message, and channel. Practically, the model suggests that village governments wishing to replicate this approach should treat inter-institutional collaboration, religiously credible message bearers, interpersonal channels, and economic support as jointly necessary components of a communication strategy, not as interchangeable options

CONCLUSION

This study examined how the Candijati Village Government's communication strategy contributes to strengthening Islamic family education for early-married couples, as well as the factors that support and hinder this process. The findings show that the strategy is built on four interrelated elements collaborative planning, religiously framed messages, an interpersonal–digital media mix, and a family-oriented relational approach which together produce the trust and openness that are prerequisites for Islamic family education, delivered mainly through religious leaders

and the KUA counselor, to be internalized in couples' household lives rather than merely transmitted as information. The participating couples reported perceived improvements in communication, role clarity, worship practices, and their children's religious upbringing; because the data are self-reported and cross-sectional, these findings should be read as participants' perceptions consistent with strengthened family resilience, not as definitive causal evidence.

The program's reach is supported by inter-institutional collaboration and the social trust already built at the community level, and is limited by limited formal education, economic pressure, work demands that compete with the guidance schedule, and, for some residents, the view that family guidance is a private rather than communal matter. The village government has responded to some of these economic barriers by linking religious guidance to village-level economic empowerment through BUMDes, skills training, and marketing networks a step showing that structural barriers are not always fixed when local institutions have both the communicative and administrative capacity to address them.

Theoretically, this study contributes a communicator–message–channel alignment model as a mechanism linking village government communication strategy to the strengthening of Islamic family education among early-married couples, while also extending the application of communication strategy theory which has largely been developed in organizational, marketing, and prevention-campaign contexts into the still rarely studied context of village-level post-marriage family guidance. Practically, the findings suggest that village governments, religious leaders, marriage counselors, and related institutions wishing to design similar programs should treat trust-based interpersonal communication, religiously credible message bearers, and economic empowerment support as a single set of program components, not as interchangeable options or ones to be run separately.

This study has limitations as a qualitative case study of a single village with self-reported data collected at a single point in time, so its findings cannot be directly generalized to other village contexts without supporting comparative research. Future research is recommended to use longitudinal or mixed-methods designs and to include cross-village comparative cases to test whether the mechanisms found here are consistent under different social, economic, and religious conditions.

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