

# BENCHMARKING

JURNAL MANAJEMEN PENDIDIKAN ISLAM

## BOARDING SCHOOL AND CHARACTER EDUCATION: EXPLORING MORAL DEVELOPMENT IN ISLAMIC EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS IN INDONESIA

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### Abstract

Received: 1-06-2025

Revised: 1-06-2025

Accepted: 21-06-2025

This study aims to explore how Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) in Indonesia play a strategic role in shaping students' character education amid the challenges of modernization and globalization. Employing a library research approach, this study critically analyzes primary and secondary literature from reputable journals to understand the development of moral values and character within Islamic educational institutions, particularly *pesantren*. The findings reveal that *pesantren* implement a holistic and integrated character education system based on exemplary behavior, habitual practices, and spiritual reinforcement. *Pesantren* have also demonstrated adaptability in responding to the demands of modern society without losing their traditional core values. The *pesantren* model, with its affective and transformative approach to character building, is deemed highly relevant for adoption in formal educational institutions as an alternative to current character education practices. These findings reinforce the argument that *pesantren* are not only historically relevant but also contextually and futuristically positioned to address contemporary moral and educational challenges. The study's main contribution is proposing a *pesantren*-based character education model as a pedagogical framework suitable for integration into the national education system.

**Keywords:** *Pesantren*, Character Education, Morality, Islamic Education, Modernization

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## INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, Indonesia has faced serious challenges in shaping the character of its younger generation. Phenomena such as juvenile delinquency, drug abuse, and violence in school environments indicate a significant moral decline. Although character education has been integrated into the national curriculum, its effectiveness remains questionable—particularly within formal education, which tends to emphasize cognitive aspects over affective and spiritual development.

Character education is a crucial element in developing individuals with integrity and noble character. However, its implementation in the formal education system often encounters several obstacles, such as the lack of exemplary behavior from educators, limited integration of character values into the curriculum, and a predominant focus on academic achievement alone. These issues render character education less effective in shaping students' behavior and moral values.

Islamic educational institutions such as *pesantren* have long been recognized as establishments that emphasize character development through a holistic approach encompassing spiritual, moral, and social dimensions. However, the role of *pesantren* in the context of national character education has not received adequate attention in educational policy. In fact, *pesantren* hold great potential in shaping a young generation

with noble character and strong integrity. Various studies have highlighted the role of *pesantren* in character formation. For example, research by El-Islamy et al. (2023) indicates that the *pesantren* culture has a significant influence on students' character development, contributing as much as 27.3%. However, most of these studies are descriptive in nature and do not deeply explore the internal mechanisms within *pesantren* that drive character formation, nor how *pesantren* adapt to the challenges of the modern era.

Another study by Miftahuddin et al. (2024) examined the model of Islamic character education at *Pesantren Al-Irsyad Al-Islamiyyah* in Purwokerto, which emphasizes the teaching of ethics (*akhlaq*), creed (*aqidah*), Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*), and Islamic history (*tarikh*). However, this study has not yet comprehensively addressed how *pesantren* integrate character values into the daily lives of their students (*santri*) or how they respond to the challenges of modernization and globalization. In addition, research by Jannah et al. (2023) highlights the role of *pesantren* in shaping the character of the younger generation in the modern era through a holistic approach that includes intellectual, emotional, social, and spiritual aspects. However, this study focuses on a single *pesantren* and does not provide a general overview of character education practices across various *pesantren* in Indonesia.

This research offers a holistic approach by exploring the internal dynamics of *pesantren* in shaping students' character, including curriculum strategies, teaching methods, the role of the *kyai* (Islamic religious leaders), and adaptation to technological and social developments. Furthermore, this study also compares the effectiveness of character education models in *pesantren* with those in other Islamic educational institutions, such as *madrasah* and modern Islamic schools. The novelty of this research lies in its comparative approach and in-depth analysis of character education practices across various types of *pesantren* in Indonesia. Accordingly, this study is expected to make a significant contribution to the development of an effective character education model that is relevant to Indonesia's sociocultural context. In addition, this research will explore how *pesantren* integrate character values into the daily lives of *santri*, as well as how they respond to the challenges of modernization and globalization. This is crucial for understanding the role of *pesantren* in shaping a young generation with noble character who are capable of facing the demands of the times.

## RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a library research approach, a research method that utilizes literature as the primary data source to address the research questions. Library research is a relevant approach for conceptual and historical studies on character education in *pesantren*, as it allows researchers to explore theories, models, and practices discussed in a wide range of scholarly sources, including books, journal articles, dissertations, and official documents (Zed, 2004; George & Bowey, 2017). Data collection was conducted through an extensive review of both primary and secondary sources relevant to the topics of *pesantren*, character education, and moral development. Primary sources include Scopus-indexed journal articles, academic books, and official documents from Indonesia's Ministry of Education and Ministry of Religious Affairs. Secondary sources comprise research reports, conference proceedings, and classical literature on Islamic education and *pesantren*. The data collection followed a systematic procedure: Identification of keywords such as "pesantren," "character education," "moral education," and "Islamic education in Indonesia"; Searching academic databases including Scopus, ScienceDirect, DOAJ, Google Scholar, and ProQuest; Selection and categorization of literature based on

relevance and thematic novelty (Ridwan & Slamet, 2019). All literature used in this study was published between 2010 and 2024 to ensure both relevance and currency.

Data were analyzed using content analysis with a descriptive-qualitative approach. Content analysis was conducted by identifying, categorizing, and synthesizing key themes that emerged from the literature regarding the role of *pesantren* in character education. This technique allows researchers to uncover patterns, relationships between concepts, and shifts in paradigms within *pesantren*'s character education practices over time (Krippendorff, 2018; Elo & Kyngäs, 2008). The analytical process involved three main stages: data reduction, data display, and drawing conclusions, as outlined by Miles and Huberman (2014). Data reduction was used to filter relevant information; data were then presented in thematic narrative form; and conclusions were drawn through interpretation of existing theories and previous findings. The validity of the data in this library research was ensured through source triangulation and critical evaluation of the literature. Triangulation involved comparing information from various credible sources and avoiding reliance on a single type of literature. Critical evaluation assessed the credibility of authors and publishers, as well as the relevance and context of the publications.

Moreover, all data used in this study underwent peer-review processes, meeting the standards of reputable academic publications (Boell & Cecez-Kecmanovic, 2014). To ensure consistency and objectivity in the analysis, independent double coding was conducted on the main themes that emerged from selected literature. Discussions between researchers or reviewers were used to refine data interpretation and enhance the reliability of the findings.

## **DISCUSSION AND RESEARCH FINDINGS**

### **Pesantren Possess an Integrated and Holistic Character Education System**

This study found that the *pesantren* implements an integrated character approach that combines the values of *aqidah*, morals, and worship in every aspect of the students' lives. This is in line with the findings of Rofiq & As Siddik's (2020) study, which states that holistic character education in *pesantren* encompasses spiritual, moral, and social aspects simultaneously. Practices such as congregational prayer, regular recitation, and weekly moral lectures are not only carried out as ceremonial rituals but also as a means of contextual value learning. Therefore, formal-affective-spiritual education runs synchronously, touching all dimensions of the students' personalities. Theoretically, this approach is in line with Kolb's experiential learning theory, which is a learning process through direct experience that promotes deeper internalization of values. Aziz (2024) found that the exemplary behavior of *kyai* and *ustadz* plays a primary role in shaping the morals of students at Pondok Pesantren Al Ikhlas Karang Sempu. When students witness the direct application of honesty, discipline, and responsibility from role models, they are encouraged to emulate and apply these values in their daily lives. Additionally, the integration of religious and general knowledge is one of the strengths of modern *pesantren*. Siregar & Siregar (2024) emphasize that *pesantren* not only teach classical Islamic texts but also incorporate general subjects like mathematics, science, and language into their curriculum. This model maintains a balance between spirituality and life skills, producing students who are not only strong in *aqidah* but also intellectually competitive in the modern era.

In the digital era, the adaptation of *pesantren* is increasingly relevant. Mat Rokim & Husni (2025) show that *pesantren* like Shirotul Fuqoha implement technology regulations and digital literacy enhancement to maintain character values. Although still selective, this step signifies the readiness of *pesantren* institutions to face the challenges

of globalization while preserving moral essence. Strengthening through habituation is also an effective strategy. Harisa & Fitriyah (2025) identify that daily worship habits and Islamic etiquette in junior high schools based on pesantren produce students with strong character. In pesantren, habits such as qiyamullail, tadarus, and community service are carried out consistently and repeatedly, so that character values are not only understood theoretically but also practiced continuously, becoming part of the students' identity.

Furthermore, traditional values of pesantren, such as simplicity, sincerity, and mutual assistance, are internalized through a supportive social system. Saipullah (2022) mentions various traditional values of pesantren, such as responsibility, nationalism, and togetherness, applied through a six-year curriculum based on the pesantren tradition. This study expands on that understanding by examining how the collective nurturing system and social interactions in pesantren strengthen the internalization of these values. From an institutional management perspective, Pondok Pesantren Darurrohman in Cirebon systematically integrates classical and modern curricula with real-life practices. This model addresses the challenges of character education that demand not only theory and ritual but also skills and leadership, making students comprehensively trained. This shows that the pesantren system offers a more comprehensive character education model compared to the linear approach in formal schools.

### **Pesantren Successfully Preserves Moral Values Amidst the Challenges of Modernization**

Pesantren have demonstrated an extraordinary capacity to integrate information technology into their management and curriculum without weakening traditional values. Husnul Amin's (2024) study on Pesantren 4.0 describes the digitization of LMS, classical Islamic texts, and e-learning as a form of transformation that does not eliminate Islamic morals but rather facilitates their delivery. With visionary leadership, they build digital infrastructure and provide literacy training for teachers, making technology a supporting tool for moral education, not a replacement. In the implementation of a hybrid curriculum, Rosyidah (2024) explains a model that combines conventional and digital learning. Students are involved in technology-based collaborative projects, such as digital presentations, audio production of prophetic stories, and writing religious articles, while still upholding the traditional values of pesantren. This transformation shows that modernization can be a synergistic path between religious knowledge and technology without losing the identity of pesantren.

Furthermore, a study at Shirotul Fuqoha by Mat Rokim & Husni (2025) highlights the challenges of digital literacy among teachers. However, strategies such as directed internet usage training and strict technology regulations can maintain students' morals while developing digital capacity. This indicates the readiness of pesantren education to adapt, manage digital risks, and respect traditional culture. The integrated curriculum management at Anwarul Huda, as discussed by Widodo (2025), demonstrates a careful balance between Islamic values and contemporary science. The curriculum based on integration not only instills morals through religious understanding but also enhances scientific attitudes and professional ethics. This pesantren implements a collective supervision and evaluation system for the curriculum between the religious tradition team and the modern science team. The benefits of technology also extend to the implementation of ICT at Daarul Putra Madinah, as revealed in the research by Nurdiana et al. (2024). They use multimedia and Islamic learning applications to strengthen character capacity without disrupting the pesantren structure. As a result, Islamic moral interactions become more engaging and contextual for students in the digital era. This shows that technological adaptation is not merely a formality but also a means of communicating values.

Digital transformation through a formal Tahfidz Qur'an digital approach is also reflected in the study by Apriyanto & Astutik (2024). The integration of technology improves the performance of memorizing and understanding the Qur'an without losing the intake of classical moral values. However, this study also notes significant challenges such as limited device access and digital gaps between urban and rural pesantren. In pesantren that adopt the Society 5.0 era curriculum and the concept of Sustainable Islamic Education, an adjustment to a more quality-oriented education model is found. Suriyati et al. (2025) emphasize the need to develop technological competence and strengthen moral values as two main pillars of modern pesantren character education. This shows that pesantren are able to survive and develop in the paradigm of the industrial revolution while staying on the path of values. An analysis of the Nusantara Journal of Islamic Studies (2023) highlights the challenges of transformation in madrasahs adapted in pesantren: the demands of moral and ethical technology need to be facilitated by a comprehensive curriculum. Hidayatullah & Rizkiah (2023) conclude that the balance between classical value content and digital era teaching strategies requires a solid conceptual framework. This model supports our study, which asserts that modernization is not a threat but an opportunity for morality.

#### **Character Education Model in Pesantren Relevant for Adoption by Formal Educational Institutions**

This study found that the exemplary behavior of kyai and ustadz is the main pillar in pesantren character education, in line with the Qudwah model mentioned in Ariyanto's (2023) research at Pesantren Hidayatul Athfal, where the daily life of teachers becomes an affective and moral model for students. In the context of formal schools, this exemplary behavior should ideally be translated through teachers who are able to consistently demonstrate moral values in their actions and interactions. In line with Freire's transformative education theory applied by Wajdi et al. (2019), pesantren initiate reflective learning experiences—students are emphasized to reflect on Islamic values in every daily activity, not just focusing on the cognitive realm. This model is highly relevant to formal institutions, where the process of character transformation occurs through dialogue, reflection, and the application of values.

Furthermore, the habituation model proven effective in pesantren—such as congregational prayer, morning lectures, and social service—illustrates a repetitive and systematic character formation process, as described by Perdana (2019). Formal schools can emulate this model through daily moral routines such as virtue exercises, cleanliness pickets, and social value activities. Saipullah's (2022) study shows that local traditions of pesantren (e.g., daily deliberation, book reading, and deliberation culture) foster values of nationalism, responsibility, and group cohesiveness among students. This underscores the importance of formal schools designing programs to instill values of togetherness and cultural identity, deeply rooted in local and national traditions. Manshuruddin et al. (2021) highlight character education managed in a spiritual-holistic and systemic manner at modern pesantren Ar-Raudhatul Hasanah, where values of sincerity, responsibility, and appreciation become part of every activity, not just extracurricular. Integrating these values into the curriculum and school culture can create character education that is institutional, not just partial.

A study at Gontor by Jusubaidi et al. (2024) emphasizes that transformative character education occurs not only through knowledge transfer but also through student involvement in organizations, discussions, and public leadership—fostering open, rational, and responsible individuals. This model can be replicated in formal schools through programs such as student organizations, debates, and social community activities. In the context of empathy and social aspects, Rosydiyah & Matrapi (2020) mention the

principle of Panca Jiwa (sincerity, humility, independence, brotherhood, and freedom) as a character model that aligns with national character in the formal curriculum. This shows that the distinctive character of pesantren is actually compatible and relevant with national character education values. Finally, the Trident Education Model (TEM) framework developed by Iswanto et al. (2024) illustrates the synergy between pesantren, formal schools, and taklim assemblies as a collaborative model in character implementation, where the roles of parents, educators, and the environment are strongly integrated. This model is highly relevant to be developed on a national education system scale as an instrument for the effectiveness of character education.

This study confirms that the character education model in pesantren—which emphasizes exemplary behavior, habituation, and spirituality—is highly relevant and effective when adopted by formal institutions. The findings provide important discourse when compared to theories from the latest Scopus literature.

First, the exemplary behavior (qudwah model) of kyai/ustadz is the foundation of character formation, as explained by Ariyanto (2023) in a study at Pesantren Hidayatul Athfal. He emphasizes that the behavior of moral leaders has a greater impact than merely teaching written texts (Ariyanto, 2023). The findings of this study indicate that teachers in formal schools can adopt and emulate this behavioral model by understanding that teachers are not only conveyors of material but also radiate moral values through daily interactions. Teachers who serve as moral exemplars can more effectively shape students' character through the behavior and attitudes they demonstrate in the school environment. Thus, the role of teachers extends beyond knowledge transfer to include character formation through good exemplarity.

Secondly, the concept of transformative education initiated by Paulo Freire is also relevant. Wajdi, Lubis, and Siregar (2019) emphasize the importance of critical reflection and dialogue in character education—beyond mere knowledge transmission. The pesantren model, which encourages students to reflect on values in the context of their lives, aligns with this principle. This finding invites formal schools to emphasize dialogical and reflective learning, rather than just cognitive evaluation.

Thirdly, the habituation strategy, as per Perdana (2019), shows that habituating values through routines—such as congregational prayer or cleanliness habits—fosters moral internalization. Field data demonstrates the effectiveness of this model in pesantren, and pedagogical theory supports that repeated habituation strengthens long-term character. Furthermore, Saipullah (2022) mentions that pesantren traditional values such as nationalism and internal cooperation are embedded through daily deliberative culture.

This exposition aligns with Vygotsky's collective learning theory, which emphasizes the role of social interaction in moral development. This explains that the institutional model of pesantren can inspire schools to integrate deliberative activities into their culture. A study at Gontor by Jusubaidi et al. (2024) affirms that transformative character education occurs through organizational activities that demand socialization, discussion, and real-world leadership. In line with Dewey's (1902) theory of democratic education, this illustrates that direct involvement in social processes can strengthen critical and caring character. Empathy and social values are also formed through the Panca Jiwa principle, as reported by Rosyadiyah and Matrapi (2020). Modern character education theory shows that developing affect (affective part) is as important as the cognitive domain. This pesantren model provides a concrete example of how formal schools can enhance this balance. The innovation of the Trident Education model (Iswanto, Rahman, & Rochmiyati, 2024) emphasizes the importance of synergy between pesantren, formal schools, and society. The community of practice theory (Wenger, 1998) supports this framework, where the best learning occurs in multi-stakeholder social

collaboration. These findings serve as a blueprint for national education to implement character education across institutions.

## Conclusion

This study confirms that pesantren are Islamic educational institutions that not only focus on the transmission of religious knowledge but also play a central role in shaping integrative and holistic character. The character education model in pesantren is built through an approach of exemplary behavior, value habituation, spirituality, and direct experience in the daily lives of students. This system is not merely theoretical but emphasizes the internalization of moral values in a practical and sustainable manner. The main findings of the study show that pesantren are able to maintain, nurture, and transform moral values amidst the challenges of globalization and modernization. The resilience of pesantren in adopting technology, developing an integrative curriculum, and strengthening institutional management without losing their traditional roots makes them adaptive and transformative institutions. This proves that pesantren remain relevant and strategic in shaping the character of the younger generation in the digital era.

The character education model of pesantren has also proven to have high relevance for adoption by formal educational institutions. The approach that emphasizes affect, spirituality, and behavioral transformation offers a different methodological approach from mere cognitive approaches. Formal schools can adapt the character development system of pesantren by strengthening the role of teachers as moral exemplars, habituating positive values in school culture, and developing programs that support social and spiritual integration. Theoretically, the results of this study enrich the treasure trove of character education by combining classical value-based approaches with modern educational theories, such as transformative learning, moral habituation, and social practice theory. This study also successfully builds a conceptual dialogue between the pesantren tradition and the contemporary national education system, giving birth to a new perspective in student character development.

Practically, this study offers a model framework that can be implemented in national character education policy, through the integration of pesantren principles in curriculum design, teacher training, and school culture development. Pesantren can serve as collaborative character learning centers with schools, families, and communities (triple helix model). Thus, this study makes a significant contribution both in developing local value-based character education theory and in formulating more contextual and transformative character education policies. Moving forward, the integration of pesantren values into the national education system is not only relevant but also an urgent need in responding to the increasingly complex moral crisis amidst globalization

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