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REINFORCING ISLAMIC MORAL VALUES THROUGH CONTEMPORARY PESANTREN EDUCATION: A PATHWAY TO CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRAK

Tujuan: Penelitian ini mengeksplorasi strategi dan praktik yang diterapkan oleh pesantren kontemporer dalam memperkuat nilai-nilai moral Islam pada santri. **Metode:** Melalui pendekatan studi kasus kualitatif, penelitian ini mengkaji bagaimana pendidikan pesantren membentuk karakter yang sejalan dengan etika Islam. **Hasil:** Temuan menunjukkan bahwa pesantren mengintegrasikan pengajaran agama, rutinitas harian, dan keteladanan sebagai mekanisme utama dalam membentuk perilaku moral santri. Selain itu, budaya institusi, konsistensi guru, dan keterlibatan komunitas memiliki pengaruh signifikan terhadap keberhasilan pendidikan moral. **Kesimpulan:** Studi ini memberikan kontribusi terhadap pemahaman yang lebih dalam tentang pendidikan karakter Islami dalam sistem pesantren dan menawarkan wawasan strategis bagi lembaga pendidikan Islam dalam memperkuat pendidikan berbasis nilai.

Keywords:

Islamic Moral Values,
Pesantren Education,
Character Formation,
Islamic Ethics,
Contemporary
Pesantren, Moral
Education Strategy.

ABSTRACTS

Purpose: This study aims to explore how contemporary Pesantren education reinforces Islamic moral values and contributes to character development among students. It investigates the methods and strategies employed by Pesantren in instilling moral principles such as integrity, social responsibility, and spiritual growth. **Method:** Through a qualitative case study approach, the research investigates how pesantren education fosters character development aligned with Islamic ethics. **Result:** The findings reveal that pesantren integrate religious teachings, daily routines, and role modeling as key mechanisms in shaping students' moral behavior. Moreover, institutional culture, teacher consistency, and community involvement significantly influence the success of moral education. **Conclusion:** This study contributes to a deeper understanding of Islamic character education within the pesantren system and offers strategic insights for Islamic educational institutions in enhancing value-based education.

A. INTRODUCTION

Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) have long played a central role in Indonesia's Islamic education system, functioning not only as institutions of religious learning but also as environments for shaping moral and spiritual character. In today's rapidly changing world, the reinforcement of Islamic moral values among students is more important than ever. Pesantren (Islamic boarding schools) have long been central to Islamic education, shaping students' character and reinforcing moral values. However, with the rise of modern influences such as technology and global culture, there is a need to understand how Pesantren continue to instill these values in students. This study explores how contemporary Pesantren education reinforces Islamic moral values and contributes to character development.(Harahap and Sandhya 2024). However, contemporary pesantren face new challenges in maintaining and internalizing Islamic moral values among students(Muslim et al. 2024).

Several studies indicate that moral degradation among Muslim youth is increasing, marked by rising deviant behavior, weakened spirituality, and the widespread negative influence of digital culture (Hidayat & Khalika, 2019; Madjid, 2002). These issues underscore the urgent need for an educational approach that goes beyond cognitive development and addresses emotional and spiritual growth(Nursalim, Zurqoni, and Khojir 2024). Contemporary pesantren—with their boarding structure, teacher role models, and communal living—have great potential to address these challenges(Fitria Dewi et al. 2023).

Many pesantren still lack structured curricula for character education. Much of the moral guidance is delivered informally and is not supported by formal evaluation systems(Kurniasih, Sastradiharja, and Syaidah 2024). Additionally, many educators have not received adequate training to convey Islamic values contextually and relevantly(Nurjanah et al. 2024). As such, reinforcing character education in modern pesantren must be studied more comprehensively in terms of both strategy and practice (Fifi, 2015).

The purpose of this study is to explore the strategies and practices used in reinforcing Islamic moral values within contemporary pesantren, analyze the enabling and inhibiting factors, and formulate educational implications that can be adopted by other Islamic institutions. This research applies a qualitative case study approach focusing on the process of value internalization, the role of the pesantren environment, and the effectiveness of Islamic character-building models.

B. METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach using a case study method, aiming to explore the strategies and practices of strengthening Islamic moral values in contemporary pesantren. This approach was chosen to allow the researcher to understand the phenomenon of character education in a holistic and contextual manner within the daily realities of the pesantren environment. The study was conducted at a modern pesantren located in Yogyakarta, Indonesia(Ula and Suwarno 2023). This pesantren was purposively selected due to its reputation for implementing an integrated character education program within both its formal curriculum and boarding life. Research participants included: the head of the pesantren (kyai), caregivers (ustadz), Islamic subject teachers, and selected students actively involved in character development program. A qualitative case study approach was chosen for this study to

allow an in-depth exploration of how Pesantren reinforce Islamic moral values and contribute to character development. This approach is suitable for understanding the complex social processes within the Pesantren environment, capturing the experiences and perspectives of key stakeholders, including teachers, students, and Pesantren leaders. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis, including data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Data validity was ensured through source triangulation and methodological triangulation, comparing findings from interviews, observations, and document reviews. This study adhered to ethical standards by obtaining informed consent from all participants, ensuring confidentiality, and minimizing interpretive bias throughout the data collection and analysis process.

C. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Findings

The study revealed that contemporary *pesantren* implement a comprehensive and deliberate set of strategies to strengthen Islamic moral values among students. In contrast to conventional assumptions that moral development occurs passively or informally in boarding schools, this research demonstrates that the cultivation of moral character in *pesantren* is the result of intentional and structured educational planning. These strategies are not merely incidental or supplemental to religious instruction but are strategically embedded within the students' daily routines, the institutional ethos, and the formal and informal curriculum. The *pesantren* environment—characterized by a strong religious culture, communal life, and close teacher-student relationships—serves as a fertile ground for the holistic internalization of values(Wahid 2023).

Moral education in these institutions is designed to operate continuously and cohesively, transcending the boundaries of formal classroom settings. Students are immersed in a learning ecosystem where moral norms are lived, practiced, and reinforced through spiritual discipline, social responsibility, and pedagogical integration(Kurniawan and Marzuki 2021). The findings suggest that moral formation in *pesantren* is not a peripheral concern but lies at the core of their educational philosophy, positioning them as unique and resilient models of Islamic character education in the face of modern ethical challenges.

Broadly, the strategies adopted by *pesantren* to foster moral values can be categorized into three interrelated and mutually reinforcing approaches(Sarip et al. 2023)s:

1. Spiritual and religious practices that shape students' internal piety and consciousness of God (taqwa);
2. Sociocultural engagement that cultivates interpersonal ethics and communal responsibility; and
3. Curriculum and instructional integration, which embeds moral content into teaching methods and subject matter.

These three domains form an integrated moral framework that is both rooted in Islamic tradition and responsive to contemporary educational needs. Each approach will be elaborated in the following sections.

1. Spiritual and Religious Practices

Pesantren place a strong emphasis on religious habituation as the foundational element of moral education. Students engage in structured religious routines, including:

- a. Daily obligatory (fardhu) and non-obligatory (sunnah) prayers performed in congregation, which nurture discipline, punctuality, and humility before God.
- b. Qur'an recitation and memorization (tahfidz) that serve not only to develop religious knowledge but also to build emotional connection with divine guidance.
- c. Dzikir (remembrance of Allah) after prayers or in special gatherings (majelis), which cultivates inner calmness and spiritual mindfulness.
- d. Routine moral and spiritual counseling (tauisyah) by the kyai or senior teachers, where students reflect on their behavior and moral decisions.

These practices create a moral-spiritual ecosystem, where students' daily lives are immersed in an environment that reinforces values such as sincerity (ikhlas), patience (sabr), honesty (shidq), and respect (adab)(Kholiq 2022). Moreover, spiritual practices are not taught as abstract doctrines but lived experiences, which greatly enhance their internalization.

This finding supports the concept of embodied learning in Islamic pedagogy, where knowledge (ilm), action (amal), and intention (niyyah) are unified through consistent religious practice.

2. Sociocultural Engagement

The second domain of character building in pesantren is embedded in the students' social life. As students live together in dormitories, they undergo constant social interaction and peer regulation, which shape their behavior in practical ways.

Key aspects identified include:

- a. Daily communal tasks such as cleaning, cooking, and organizing events, which instill a sense of responsibility and cooperation.
- b. Peer mentoring systems, where senior students (musyrif/musyrifah) supervise and guide juniors, fostering leadership, empathy, and conflict resolution.
- c. Organized student associations (OSIS or organisasi santri) that promote participation in decision-making and social responsibility.
- d. Disciplinary culture that is enforced not through coercion but through peer accountability, nurturing self-discipline and ethical consistency.

Teachers and caregivers play a significant role as moral exemplars. Their consistency in speech, attitude, and behavior reinforces the values being taught. In many cases, students express that they "learn by watching" how their mentors handle ethical dilemmas and social challenges.

This aligns with Bandura's social learning theory, which posits that observational learning and modeling are crucial in value acquisition (Amalia et al. 2025). In pesantren, learning moral values happens not just through instruction but also through the daily modeling of those values in practice.

3. Curriculum and Instructional Integration

The third approach involves the intentional integration of moral values into both formal curricula and informal learning. Moral education is not treated as a separate subject but is woven into the overall pedagogical strategy.

Notable practices include:

- a. Islamic subjects such as *Akhlaq*, *Tafsir*, *Hadith*, and *Fiqh* are taught with practical relevance, often linked to real-life moral challenges faced by students.
- b. Collaborative classroom methods, where group tasks are designed to foster values like fairness, mutual help (ta'awun), and accountability.

- c. Extracurricular activities such as scouting (pramuka), social work, and public speaking forums (muhadharah), which are used as platforms for building confidence, communication ethics, and public responsibility.
- d. Some pesantren have begun implementing thematic learning models, where weekly themes (e.g., honesty, trustworthiness, humility) are reinforced through all subjects and activities.

Teachers are trained to act not only as instructors but also as character mentors. They are expected to embed values in their interactions, feedback, and even assessment processes. This instructional strategy corresponds to integrated character education, which blends cognitive, affective, and behavioral domains into the learning process. It also resonates with Islamic views on *tarbiyah* (holistic nurturing), which regards moral formation as inseparable from intellectual development (Rahmi et al. 2025).

the findings of this study demonstrate that contemporary pesantren offer a robust and holistic model for Islamic moral education. The synergy of spiritual immersion, communal life, and curricular integration creates a learning ecosystem where values are not only taught but lived and reinforced consistently. This triadic framework supports the holistic development of students' moral identity grounded in Islamic ethics (*akhlaq*), spiritual awareness (*taqwa*), and social responsibility (*mas'uliyah*) (Sahari et al. 2025). These findings reaffirm the long-standing belief that pesantren are not merely religious institutions, but serve as powerful moral agents that sustain Islamic values in the face of moral degradation and modern ethical dilemmas. Their integrated model of character education offers insights for wider Islamic and moral education reform.

Strategic Domain	Main Activities/ Mechanisms	Targeted Moral Values	Supporting Factors
Spiritual & Religious Practice	Daily prayers in congregation Qur'an recitation and memorization Collective <i>dzikir</i> - Moral lectures (<i>tausiyah</i>)	Sincerity (<i>ikhlas</i>), Taqwa, Patience (<i>sabr</i>)	Kyai role modeling Ritual regularity
Sociocultural Engagement	Dormitory life Peer mentoring Student Organization Daily communal tasks	Responsibility, Empathy, Discipline	Strong peer culture Informal moral supervision
Curriculum & Instructional Integration	Contextual <i>akhlaq</i> teaching Value-based problem solving Extracurricular leadership training	Integrity, Cooperation, Critical moral thinking	Trained teachers Value-infused lesson plans

Analysis/Discussion

The findings of this study highlight that contemporary pesantren continue to demonstrate resilience and adaptability as institutions that foster Islamic moral values amidst the shifting educational and social landscape. Far from being static or archaic, pesantren have shown a remarkable ability to preserve core Islamic teachings while simultaneously responding to the moral, cultural, and technological challenges of the 21st century (Ula and Suwarno 2023). Their strength lies in the integration of spiritual discipline, communal social life, and pedagogical strategies that are both rooted in Islamic tradition and attuned to the developmental needs of modern students.

This dynamic balance between continuity and change positions pesantren as a unique educational model—one that not only instructs but immerses students in a moral ecosystem where values are not merely taught but internalized through lived experiences (Kholiq 2022). The findings suggest that such integration is neither incidental nor informal; rather, it is deliberately structured into the rhythms of daily life, institutional practices, and the curriculum framework. As a result, pesantren offer a comprehensive moral formation process, one that engages students intellectually, emotionally, socially, and spiritually (Amalia et al. 2025).

Moreover, in an era where moral relativism, individualism, and digital culture increasingly influence youth behavior, pesantren stand out as countercultural moral spaces that aim to cultivate integrity, discipline, empathy, and religious commitment (Rahmi et al. 2025). This positions them as vital institutions not only within the landscape of Islamic education but also within broader conversations on character education and ethical formation in a globalized context.

1. Reaffirming the Role of Pesantren as Moral Institutions

These findings strengthen the classical view that pesantren are not simply religious schools, but rather ecosystems of value transmission, where learning occurs through immersion, modeling, and communal interaction. This aligns with the Islamic concept of *tarbiyah*, which views education not only as intellectual cultivation but as a process of nurturing the whole person (*insan kamil*) (Sirojuddin, Maskuri, and Ghoni 2025). In this context, pesantren function as value communities, as defined by Kohlberg and Lickona, where moral norms are reinforced through everyday practice and interaction. Moreover, the pesantren system echoes the model proposed by Thomas Lickona (1991), which emphasizes the need for schools to be deliberate communities of virtue. Lickona's framework of moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action finds a parallel in pesantren life:

- a. Moral knowing is cultivated through formal religious instruction;
- b. Moral feeling through collective worship, peer support, and daily reflection;
- c. Moral action through tasks, responsibilities, and behavioral expectations woven into the students' daily routine.

2. Character Formation through Social and Institutional Immersion

What differentiates pesantren from other educational institutions is the totalizing nature of its environment. Students are not only taught about values—they are placed within an immersive environment that demands those values be practiced and internalized (Umar et al. 2024).

This phenomenon supports Bandura's Social Learning Theory (1977), which emphasizes that individuals learn behavior through observation, imitation, and modeling. The

presence of kyai, ustadz, senior students, and institutional rituals creates a multilayered model of moral behavior for students to observe and emulate (Rusydiyah and Matrapi 2020).

Furthermore, the findings reflect Pierre Bourdieu's theory of habitus, where the dispositions, values, and practices of an institution are unconsciously acquired through prolonged participation. In pesantren, repeated engagement with structured routines, symbolic gestures (e.g., honoring teachers, communal meals, structured prayer), and institutional discipline help form a unique moral habitus rooted in Islamic teachings (Khamid et al. 2023).

3. Challenges of Modernization and Moral Consistency

Despite its strengths, the study also reveals several pedagogical and structural challenges faced by contemporary pesantren. These include:

- a. The lack of standardized moral assessment tools;
- b. Teacher variation in implementing character pedagogy;
- c. Student diversity in terms of moral baseline and family influence.

In an era where digital distractions, individualism, and relativistic ethics dominate, pesantren are increasingly pressured to modernize their approaches without compromising core values. This creates a tension between preserving authenticity and adapting to pedagogical innovation (HARDIANTO, SETYANTO, and WULANDARI 2022).

To address this, pesantren must move beyond traditional oral transmission methods and adopt reflective pedagogies such as problem-based learning, value clarification techniques, and experiential moral learning. These methods are not foreign to Islamic pedagogy; in fact, the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) frequently used storytelling, experiential examples, and reflective questioning—approaches which remain deeply relevant today (Mujahid 2021).

4. Toward a Framework of Integrated Islamic Character Education

The convergence of findings points toward the formulation of a framework of integrated Islamic character education. Such a framework would:

- a. Align formal instruction with practical application in real-life contexts;
- b. Promote teacher training programs that emphasize both religious depth and pedagogic innovation;
- c. Encourage collaboration with parents and communities to reinforce pesantren values outside the school walls;
- d. Use formative and authentic assessment tools to measure students' moral development over time.

The pesantren model, if carefully documented and evaluated, can serve as a prototype for Islamic education reform, offering solutions not only for Indonesia but for other Muslim communities grappling with the moral challenges of modernity (Nurlaela et al. 2024).

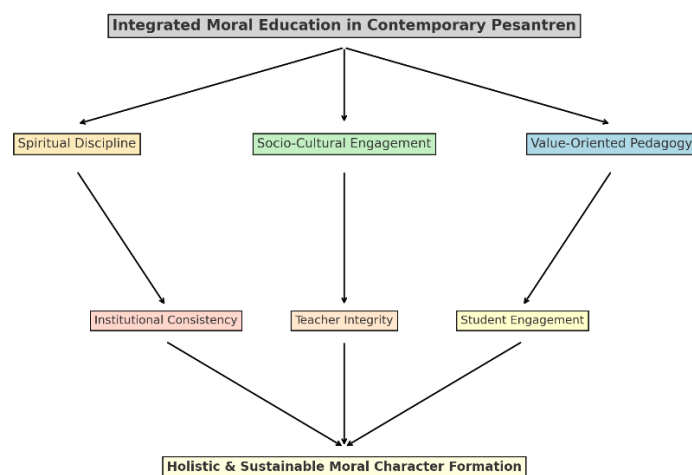
5. Implications for Policy and Practice

From a policy perspective, the findings suggest the need for:

- a. Government and private stakeholders to support pesantren with curriculum development, teacher certification, and facility upgrades;
- b. Research institutions to develop tools for assessing moral growth and institutional impact;

- c. Cross-institutional collaboration between pesantren and formal Islamic schools (madrasah) to share best practices in moral education.

This discussion reveals that pesantren are not static relics of the past, but dynamic institutions capable of navigating tradition and transformation (Kurniawan and Marzuki 2021). They continue to hold a strategic position in shaping morally resilient Muslim youth, provided that their internal capacity is strengthened, their pedagogy is contextualized, and their cultural identity is preserved.



This diagram summarizes how Islamic moral education is structured and implemented in contemporary pesantren. The process of building students' moral character is supported by three key strategies and three enabling factors that work together to form a holistic and sustainable outcome.

1. **Spiritual Discipline**

Pesantren shape students' spirituality through daily practices such as prayer, Qur'an recitation, *dzikir*, and moral talks. These routines develop personal values like sincerity, patience, and God-consciousness (*taqwa*).

2. **Socio-Cultural Engagement**

Life in the boarding school encourages students to develop social responsibility through shared tasks, peer mentoring, and student organizations. Values like empathy, discipline, and cooperation grow through everyday interactions.

3. **Value-Oriented Pedagogy**

Moral values are integrated into teaching methods, classroom management, and extracurricular activities. Teachers act as role models and intentionally guide students' behavior and thinking using Islamic values

CONCLUSION

This study highlights the central role that Pesantren play in reinforcing Islamic moral values among students. The research found that spiritual practices, such as daily prayers and Quranic recitation, alongside sociocultural engagement and curriculum integration, are essential strategies in developing students' moral character. These practices foster a sense of responsibility, compassion, and integrity among students, which are integral components of Islamic moral education.

The pesantren environment not only teaches values but immerses students in daily practices that reinforce those values through ritual, social life, and learning activities. This immersive approach helps students internalize key virtues such as sincerity (*ikhlas*), discipline, empathy, and responsibility, making moral education both practical and sustainable. The success of this model strongly depends on three enabling factors: institutional consistency, teacher integrity, and student engagement. When these elements are aligned, pesantren can serve as powerful agents of character transformation and offer valuable insights for Islamic education reform in broader contexts.

Ultimately, this study highlights that pesantren are not outdated religious institutions, but dynamic centers of moral development capable of bridging tradition and innovation in Islamic education.

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