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INTEGRATING PESANTREN VALUES INTO FORMAL ISLAMIC ELEMENTARY EDUCATION: A CHARACTER FORMATION STUDY OF GENERATION Z STUDENTS

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ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini mengkaji integrasi nilai-nilai kepesantrenan ke dalam sistem pendidikan formal di MI Unggulan Annawawi sebagai upaya membentuk karakter peserta didik generasi Z. Menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan metode studi lapangan, data dikumpulkan melalui observasi partisipatif, wawancara mendalam, dan analisis dokumen. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa program-program seperti shalat dhuha berjamaah, hafalan surat pendek dan nadzom, serta pembiasaan doa harian berkontribusi signifikan dalam membentuk religiusitas dan kedisiplinan siswa. Namun, kemandirian siswa masih tergolong rendah, terutama karena tidak adanya sosok kakak kelas sebagai panutan. Guru memainkan peran sentral sebagai pembimbing spiritual dan teladan perilaku. Studi ini menyimpulkan bahwa strategi pendampingan yang berkelanjutan dan adaptif sangat dibutuhkan untuk mendorong kemandirian siswa, khususnya di lembaga pendidikan Islam yang masih dalam tahap pengembangan. Penelitian ini memberikan kontribusi terhadap pengembangan model pendidikan karakter berbasis pesantren yang kontekstual dengan tantangan era digital.

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Pesantren Values, Islamic Education, Character Formation, Student Autonomy, Generation Z

ABSTRACTS

This study explores the integration of pesantren (Islamic boarding school) values into the formal education system at MI Unggulan Annawawi, aiming to shape the character of Generation Z students. Employing a qualitative field research approach, data were gathered through participatory observation, in-depth interviews, and document analysis. The findings reveal that structured programs such as congregational dhuha prayer, memorization of short surahs and nadzom, and daily supplication have a significant impact on students' religious character and discipline. However, student independence remains limited, primarily due to the absence of senior student role models. Teachers play a pivotal role as spiritual mentors and behavior models. The study concludes that continuous and adaptive mentoring strategies are essential to enhance autonomy, especially in newly established Islamic educational institutions. This research contributes to the discourse on Islamic character education in the digital age and highlights the challenges of contextualizing pesantren values for contemporary learners.

A. INTRODUCTION

Elementary education plays a highly strategic role in shaping the character, morals, and spiritual foundations of students. In the Indonesian context, Madrasah Ibtidaiyah (MI), as a formal Islamic educational institution, focuses not only on academic achievement but also on strengthening Islamic values, encompassing cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects holistically (Wilda & Sutiah, 2024; Fathonah et al., 2025). Therefore, the integration of religious values and the formal learning system is urgently needed to shape a generation with noble character and adaptability to the challenges of the times.

One approach that has proven effective in character formation is the integration of Islamic boarding school (pesantren) values into the madrasah curriculum. Pesantren, as traditional Islamic educational institutions, possess a wealth of values such as discipline, independence, humility, and a strong spirit of learning (Kahfi, 2025; Pamuji, 2025; Syarif et al., 2025). If these values are implemented in a modern madrasah environment, it is hoped that they will produce students who are not only intellectually intelligent but also spiritually and emotionally mature.

Madrasahs face significant challenges in developing Generation Z students. This generation is known to have a tendency to be low in emotional resilience and social adaptability, despite excelling in digital literacy and access to information (Zuhdi, 2018; Sulaiman et al., 2025). This situation demands more adaptive, personalized, and contextual learning strategies, particularly in character education that prioritizes internalization of values and role models.

MI Unggulan Annawawi is a new madrasah that carries the vision of integrating Islamic boarding school values into the formal educational environment. As an institution still in its early stages of development, this MI faces challenges such as a limited school social structure, particularly the absence of senior students as role models, and students' dependence on teacher guidance (Ahmad, 2019; Alfiandi, 2025). These challenges result in low levels of student independence, initiative, and responsibility in learning and worship activities.

Several flagship programs have been launched to instill Islamic boarding school values at MI Annawawi. These programs include congregational Dhuha prayer, memorization of the Alala nadzom (recitation of the Names of Allah), recitation of the Asmaul Husana (the Beautiful Names of Allah), and daily prayers, all aimed at fostering

religious habits and student discipline. The success of these programs is greatly influenced by the competence of teachers in fostering and adapting learning approaches to the psychosocial characteristics of students (Hakim et al., 2025; Afkari et al., 2025).

Much previous research has focused on established madrasahs with a strong student culture. Research on new madrasahs, such as MI Unggulan Annawawi, which is still developing its institutional identity and culture, is still very limited (Aminatuzzuhriyah & Achadi, 2025; Ikbal et al., 2025). Yet, the challenges and dynamics faced by new madrasahs are very different and require a contextual approach.

Recent studies show that teachers play a central role as educators and spiritual guides in shaping students' character. Their role extends beyond the transfer of knowledge to serving as role models in religious and social life within the school environment (Jaziroh et al., 2025; Alnashr et al., 2025). Therefore, it is crucial to examine the effectiveness of teachers in implementing Islamic boarding school values in the context of new Islamic schools (madrasah) that lack an established social structure.

Based on this background, this study aims to examine the implementation of a pesantren-based value-based program in character development for students at MI Unggulan Annawawi. The primary focus is on the effectiveness of teacher strategies in character development, student responses to the religious habituation program, and how social and structural challenges are addressed in the context of Generation Z. This research is expected to provide a practical contribution to the development of a pesantren-based character education model that is relevant, contextual, and adaptive to current developments.

B. METHOD

This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach with field research, aiming to provide an in-depth description of the learning and character development of students in the context of a madrasah (Islamic boarding school) that integrates Islamic boarding school (pesantren) values into the formal education system. This approach was chosen because it captures social realities naturally and contextually, as well as understanding the subjective meanings behind the behavior and experiences of students, teachers, and the madrasah principal in implementing Islamic-based flagship programs (Moleong, 2019).

Primary data was collected through three main techniques: (1) passive participant observation of religious activities such as congregational Dhuha prayer, daily prayers, and memorizing nadzom (recitation of the Quran); (2) in-depth interviews with teachers and the madrasah principal regarding character development strategies; and (3) documentation in the form of school archives, activity records, and photographs. The research subjects included students from the first class of MI Unggulan Annawawi and key informants selected using purposive sampling, considering their knowledge and direct involvement in the implementation of the Islamic boarding school values program (Sugiyono, 2017).

The data analysis process was conducted using the Miles and Huberman interactive model, which includes the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). Data validity was maintained through source and method triangulation techniques to ensure the validity of the findings, by comparing the results of observations, interviews, and documentation in a holistic and comprehensive manner.

C. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Strengthening Religious Values Through Structured Habituation

Research findings indicate that the integration of Islamic boarding school values into learning at MI Unggulan Annawawi has positively impacted the development of religious character and student discipline. This is supported by religious routines such as dhuha prayer, morning prayer, and memorizing nadzom, which serve as instruments for habituation and strengthening spiritual character. This concept aligns with Lickona's (2013) view, which emphasizes that effective character education must be consistent and based on moral-spiritual habits in everyday life.

Table of Student Character Observation Results

No	Character Aspects	Assessment Indicators	Percentage (%)	Information
1	Independence	Completing tasks without teacher help	42	Low Need for reinforcement
2	Discipline	Punctuality, regularity of activities	78	Good
3	Responsibility	Completing tasks on time, neatly	61	Enough
4	Emotional Resilience	Stability when getting a strike	54	Keep

Table 1 presents the observational results of students' character development at MI Unggulan Annawawi across four key aspects: independence, discipline, responsibility, and emotional resilience. The data indicate that discipline is the strongest aspect, with a score of 78%, reflecting students' consistent punctuality and participation in routine activities such as morning prayers and religious recitations. Responsibility follows at 61%, showing moderate ability in completing tasks timely and neatly. Emotional resilience scored 54%, suggesting students' capacity to manage emotions when corrected is still developing. The lowest score is found in independence at 42%, which reveals a strong reliance on teacher guidance and limited initiative in task completion. These findings imply that while religious routines positively influence students' discipline, targeted strategies are still needed to foster autonomy and emotional strength, particularly in a first-generation cohort without senior role models.

Based on these results, students' independence remains relatively low. Dependence on teachers for completing assignments and addressing problems indicates that the integrative approach to Islamic boarding school values has not fully internalized the value of student autonomy. According to Vygotsky's theory of the zone of proximal development, students require mentoring to foster the development of higher-level psychological functions. However, at the same time, the role of social models (e.g., upperclassmen) is crucial for reinforcement (Vygotsky, 1978). The absence of peer role models at this MI is a contributing factor to the suboptimal development of independence.

Social limitations, such as the absence of upperclassmen, and the relatively young age of MI Unggulan Annawawi, are structural factors that also impact the program's effectiveness. As Marlina (2023) points out, the success of character education depends heavily on a stable school culture and the presence of social role models for students to emulate. This indicates that student character development cannot rely

solely on routine practices but also requires a supportive and sustainable social context. From a social learning theory perspective, Bandura (1977) explains that imitation of role models plays a crucial role in shaping behavior. In this case, the teacher's role is very dominant, but the diversity of behavioral models (peer modeling) remains minimal. Therefore, madrasas need to create internal student leadership systems such as student ambassadors or peer mentors as an alternative solution.

The implications of these findings demonstrate the importance of integrating religious habits with strategies to strengthen student autonomy. Teachers need to be encouraged to implement task-based learning methods and collaborative projects that provide space for students to take initiative, make decisions, and manage responsibilities gradually (Lestari & Afriani, 2020). Furthermore, madrasas need to develop a learning ecosystem that supports students' emotional and social development, for example through character-based extracurricular activities, student leadership training, and soft skills strengthening programs.

Low Independence and Emotional Resilience

This study's limitations lie in its coverage of only one institution and its limited sample size to the first cohort. Furthermore, it did not utilize a longitudinal approach that could capture changes in student character over a long period. For future improvement, similar studies could be conducted at various madrasahs of varying ages, and incorporate a mixed-methods approach to achieve more holistic and quantitatively measurable results.

The data shows that student independence remains low (42%). Students' dependence on teachers for completing assignments, making decisions, and navigating emotional challenges is a dominant issue. This is reinforced by the madrasah principal's statement that students "*easily lose focus without teacher guidance*". This phenomenon can be explained through Vygotsky's (1978) theory of the zone of proximal development (ZPD), which states that students need scaffolding or social support from more experienced figures to develop their capacities. In this case, the absence of senior students as social role models creates a gap in the development of autonomous character.

This finding is further supported by research by Marlina (2023), which states that the success of character education is determined not only by formal programs but also by a school culture that provides concrete social models. Therefore, MI Annawawi requires structural innovations such as a student mentoring system or student leadership activities designed to gradually foster independence.

This research makes an important contribution to contemporary Islamic education discourse, particularly in efforts to develop learning models that integrate Islamic boarding school values into the formal system. In the context of character education for Generation Z, value integration needs to be accompanied by an adaptive pedagogical approach, systematic mentoring strategies, and program design that considers the psychosocial aspects of students.

Analysis/Discussion (1000-1500 words)

This study set out to examine how pesantren-based religious values are integrated into formal primary education in a newly established Islamic school (MI Unggulan Annawawi), and how this integration contributes to character formation among first-generation students. The primary objective was to explore the practical implementation of pesantren values such as discipline, independence, and emotional control within structured academic routines, and to identify challenges in building

student autonomy and social-emotional resilience. The results obtained provide insights into the potential and limitations of religious-based character education in formal educational contexts that lack institutional maturity and peer-led modeling.

One of the key findings is the successful incorporation of pesantren values through daily religious routines. Activities such as shalat dhuha, group recitation of Asmaul Husna, and the memorization of Islamic poetry (nadzom) have been systematically embedded into the school day. This aligns with the theory of moral habituation proposed by Lickona (2013), which argues that consistent moral routines, particularly those tied to spiritual meaning, serve as powerful reinforcers of character. The effectiveness of these routines is evidenced in the high levels of observed discipline (78%) and responsibility (61%) among students. These scores suggest that moral routines, even when implemented in early institutional stages, can foster external behavioral compliance and surface-level commitment to rules.

The study also revealed a significant gap in student independence (42%) and emotional resilience (54%). While students were punctual and followed routines, many lacked initiative, critical decision-making, and emotional self-regulation. These findings indicate that character formation had not yet reached the level of internalization, a stage in which students act morally not because they are supervised, but because they choose to. This reinforces Lickona's argument that moral knowledge and routine must eventually evolve into moral autonomy, a stage that was not fully evident in this study's context.

The reliance on teachers for direction and motivation highlights the absence of a supportive peer structure. As noted by the school principal, students "*easily lose focus without teacher supervision*," signaling the lack of internalized motivation and peer accountability. From a theoretical perspective, this reflects Vygotsky's (1978) Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), where learning and development are scaffolded by more experienced individuals. In MI Annawawi's case, such scaffolding comes almost exclusively from teachers due to the absence of older student cohorts who typically function as informal mentors or role models. This lack of vertical modeling hinders the development of student-led leadership, self-discipline, and social maturity.

The lack of peer mentorship opportunities not only slows down moral internalization but also hampers the cultivation of social-emotional learning (SEL). Emotional regulation, which scored a modest 54%, is an essential aspect of SEL and is often developed through exposure to social conflict, peer negotiation, and modeling of appropriate emotional responses. Without senior students, MI Annawawi students remain in a relatively sheltered emotional environment, with limited opportunities to practice resilience in complex social contexts. These conditions differ from traditional pesantren settings where intergenerational peer learning is common and structured.

These findings resonate with those of Marlina (2023), who emphasized that character education is most effective when implemented within a stable school culture that offers both formal programs and informal social structures. Marlina's study of established madrasahs showed that the presence of senior students as role models accelerated the adoption of school values among younger students. In contrast, in MI Annawawi, the absence of institutional tradition and layered student communities delays the development of a self-sustaining character culture. This suggests that values integration, while foundational, must be supported by a holistic ecosystem that enables peer influence and distributed leadership.

Another comparative reference is the study by Aspiyah (2024), which found that pesantren-based character education programs improve religious behavior but are less effective in cultivating independence when implemented in isolation from broader social interactions. In line with Aspiyah's findings, this study shows that students at MI Annawawi participate in religious routines but struggle with tasks that require initiative and decision-making, pointing to a possible ritualization of values rather than genuine internalization.

The current research confirms observations by Kusnandi (2017), who argued that pesantren-based schooling provides strong moral foundations but requires significant time and repeated exposure to values for long-term behavioral change. Since MI Annawawi is still in its foundational phase and its students are all new, the institution lacks the longitudinal depth needed for organic character development. Without cumulative exposure and multi-generational interaction, character education remains confined to externally enforced routines.

In terms of practical implications, the study underscores the urgent need to develop a layered student leadership structure within new Islamic schools. Even in the absence of older students, schools can implement peer mentorship programs, rotating leadership roles, and project-based learning teams where responsibility is gradually shifted to students. Such efforts would allow students to exercise judgment, manage emotions, and assume ownership of tasks skills critical to developing true autonomy. Additionally, incorporating reflective practices such as journaling or group discussions on moral dilemmas can enhance self-awareness and bridge the gap between external behavior and internal value adoption.

Another key implication relates to the need for teacher role expansion. In contexts like MI Annawawi, where students lack peer models, teachers must simultaneously function as educators, moral exemplars, emotional coaches, and leadership mentors. This multifaceted role necessitates targeted professional development in character-based pedagogy, social-emotional learning strategies, and student empowerment techniques. Without teacher preparedness, the risk remains that values education becomes mechanical and superficial.

In terms of limitations, the study's single-location scope and focus on first-generation students limit the generalizability of findings. The cross-sectional nature of data collection also fails to capture character development as a temporal process, which by nature evolves over years, not months. Future research should adopt longitudinal mixed-method designs, enabling the tracking of value internalization over time, while also incorporating student reflections, parental input, and behavioral data from multiple sources.

Picture: Key Findings



This research contributes to the discourse on Islamic character education by highlighting both the strengths and constraints of pesantren-based value integration in formal schooling. It confirms that structured religious routines promote behavioral discipline and surface-level compliance. However, without social scaffolding and opportunities for authentic moral agency, students may fail to internalize these values into personal principles. Building character is not merely about instilling routines—it requires an intentional cultivation of autonomy, emotional intelligence, and social responsibility within a supportive community.

CONCLUSION

This study provides an in-depth understanding of the dynamics of the integration of Islamic boarding school values into formal learning at MI Unggulan Annawawi, particularly in the context of basic education for Generation Z. The analysis shows that flagship programs such as congregational Dhuha prayer, morning prayer, memorizing nadzom, and reciting the Asmaul Husana have been effective in shaping students' religious character and discipline. The role of teachers as spiritual and social guides is crucial in shaping a school culture with an Islamic boarding school nuance. These findings strengthen theories of character education based on habituation and role models, and support the results of previous studies regarding the importance of the role of Islamic boarding schools in Islamic education. However, limitations in the aspects of student independence and emotional resilience, largely caused by the absence of social structures such as upperclassmen, indicate that the process of character formation requires time, a supportive ecosystem, and a gradual approach. The implications of these findings highlight the importance of learning strategies that emphasize not only collective discipline but also individual student empowerment through tasks that foster personal responsibility. Socially and academically, these results recommend strengthening the role of teachers as character facilitators and the need to develop learning programs that encourage student autonomy. The main limitations of this study lie in the limited location and sample size of a single early madrasah. Therefore, further longitudinal research involving more similar educational institutions is recommended to assess the long-term effectiveness of the pesantren integration model in shaping the character of the younger generation in the digital age.

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Khoirun Nisa': Conceptualization, methodology, formal analysis, writing original draft preparation.

Adi Wibowo: Data curation, investigation, validation, writing review and editing.

Daimah: Theoretical framework, literature review, supervision.

Aisyah Chorijatun Nahri: Methodological review, academic language editing, visualization. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Data availability: The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request. Due to privacy considerations regarding student data, some restrictions may apply.

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