

CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT OF SANTRI AT DARUL AMANAH ISLAMIC BOARDING SCHOOL, KENDAL: A QUALITATIVE STUDY ON THE ROLES OF THE KYAI, CURRICULUM, AND DORMITORY ENVIRONMENT

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Abstract

This study examines the character development of santri at Darul Amanah Islamic Boarding School, Kendal, by focusing on the roles of the kyai, curriculum, and dormitory environment as the core elements in value internalization. Employing a qualitative case study approach, data were collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis. The findings reveal that the kyai serves as a central figure who provides moral exemplification, spiritual guidance, and continuous supervision. The pesantren curriculum integrates religious and general subjects with habituation practices, language strengthening, and extracurricular programs that foster morality, discipline, and independence. The dormitory environment functions as a social space in which students apply values daily through peer interaction, structured routines, collective activities, and social control mechanisms. The integration of these three dimensions creates a comprehensive and sustainable character-building system. The study highlights that effective character development depends not only on formal curriculum design but also on the exemplary leadership of the kyai and the cultural environment of the dormitory that consistently supports the practical and continuous internalization of values.

Keywords: *character development, kyai, pesantren curriculum, dormitory environment, santri*

Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis pembinaan karakter santri di Pondok Pesantren Darul Amanah Kendal melalui peran kyai, kurikulum, dan lingkungan asrama sebagai tiga elemen utama dalam proses internalisasi nilai. Menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan desain studi kasus, data diperoleh melalui wawancara mendalam, observasi partisipatif, dan analisis dokumen. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa kyai berperan sebagai figur sentral yang memberikan keteladanan, arahan spiritual, serta penguatan nilai melalui nasihat dan pengawasan rutin. Kurikulum pesantren mengintegrasikan ilmu agama dan umum dengan pendekatan pembiasaan, penguatan bahasa, serta kegiatan ekstrakurikuler yang mendukung pembentukan akhlak, kemandirian, dan kedisiplinan. Lingkungan asrama berfungsi sebagai ruang sosial yang memungkinkan santri menerapkan nilai-nilai dalam kehidupan sehari-hari melalui interaksi, kegiatan bersama, pengaturan jadwal, dan mekanisme kontrol sosial. Integrasi ketiga komponen tersebut menciptakan sistem pembinaan karakter yang komprehensif dan berkesinambungan. Temuan ini menegaskan bahwa keberhasilan pembinaan karakter tidak hanya bergantung pada kurikulum formal, tetapi juga pada keteladanan kyai dan kultur asrama yang mendukung internalisasi nilai secara praktis dan berkelanjutan.

Kata Kunci: *pembinaan karakter, kyai, kurikulum pesantren, lingkungan asrama, santri*

Introduction

Islamic-character values in Islamic education must be regarded as a crucial issue in the effort to instill Islam's worldview as a way of life. From a theoretical standpoint, character education emphasizes the internalisation of values so that moral education does not merely remain at a normative or formal level but becomes embedded in practical life. However, many educational institutions still focus predominantly on the cognitive domain, despite character-education theory arguing that value internalisation requires the integration of role modelling, experiential learning, and social environment (Hidayat, Rozak, Hakam, & Kembara, 2022).

Concurrently, social reality in Indonesia reveals an increasing prevalence of aggressive behaviour and moral deviance among youths, including among students. Observable declines in ethics, politeness, and social etiquette that conflict with religious and local cultural values signal a gap between the ideals of character education and actual social practice (Mukhtar, 2018). This mismatch underlines the need for Islamic educational institutions, especially pesantren, to formulate more comprehensive and socially responsive models of character formation.

Several previous studies indicate that attitude formation and moral personality primarily emerge from early childhood experiences: the family as the first educator and the teacher as subsequent guide. Experience in childhood is a major component in forming a person's character, including religious attitude, social ethics, and life view. Yet, many of these studies focus on family or formal school contexts, while fewer address how pesantren integrate moral-development processes within the boarding environment. For instance, Manshuruddin, Tumiran, Yunan & Hamdan (2021) documented a systemic-integrative model of character education in a modern pesantren, but without deeply unpacking the specific roles of kyai, curriculum and dormitory environment.

Studies on character education in pesantren often highlight habituation of worship, kyai's role, and extracurricular religious activities as key factors in shaping santri character (Muthoharoh & Miftahuddin, 2021). While informative, these works seldom investigate the interaction of three core elements, kyai leadership, a dual curriculum (religious + general), and dormitory culture, as a unified system of character formation in a pesantren setting. Another strand of research has addressed kyai leadership models (Kurniawan, Muslihah, Syarifudin & Supardi, 2022) indicating that spiritual and charismatic leadership styles are prevalent, yet the linkage to character internalisation outcomes remains under-explored.

Furthermore, research has been largely descriptive, lacking deep analyses of mechanisms by which boarding-school culture (as social system) fosters value internalisation, daily habits, peer control, and institutional practices. This manifests a research gap: there is a need for an operationalised, integrative model of character-education in pesantren that

comprehensively covers leadership, curriculum, and dormitory environment in one empirical study.

This study fills the identified gap by investigating character development of santri at Darul Amanah Islamic Boarding School, Kendal, through the interconnected roles of kyai leadership, curriculum implementation, and dormitory environment. The novel contribution lies in its holistic approach: rather than treating each element separately, this research examines how these three dimensions operate together as a system of character internalisation in a pesantren context. Moreover, the pesantren under study emphasises a distinctive balance: religious moral character, non-academic talent development, language mastery (Arabic and English), and discipline integrated into dormitory life, features seldom discussed together in the literature. The findings of this study thus provide a new contextualised model of pesantren character building that is operational, context-sensitive, and usable for other Islamic boarding schools in the modern era.

The objectives of this study are: (1) to analyse the character development of santri at Darul Amanah Islamic Boarding School, Kendal through the role of the kyai; (2) to examine how the curriculum (religious and general) supports character development; and (3) to explore how the dormitory environment (habituation, peer interaction, supervision) contributes to the internalisation of character values, and how the three elements interact to form a comprehensive character-building system.

This study argues that the success of character education in pesantren cannot be understood solely through curriculum design; rather, it must be viewed as the outcome of interactions among kyai leadership, structured daily routines in the boarding environment, and a curriculum that bridges religious and secular learning arenas. These three elements form an educational ecosystem in which values are taught, practised, and lived by santri in a sustained manner.

This research is significant because it offers an empirical and comprehensive understanding of a character-education model in a pesantren that is responsive to contemporary moral challenges among youth. By investigating a contextually grounded and integrative model, findings from this study can guide pesantren and Islamic educational institutions in developing more effective, adaptive, and socially relevant strategies for character formation.

Method

This study aims to describe and analyze the character development of santri at Darul Amanah Islamic Boarding School, Kendal, focusing on the roles of the kyai, the curriculum, and the dormitory environment. The research is a field study employing a qualitative design with a phenomenological approach, which seeks to understand social phenomena through the subjective experiences of individuals involved in the character-building process (Nawawi & Hadari, 2018). A phenomenological case study

design was chosen because it allows the researcher to explore the lived experiences of kyai, teachers, and santri and to uncover how they construct meaning within the social and educational structure of pesantren life (Langdrige, 2007). The study population consists of kyai, boarding supervisors, teachers, santri, and alumni directly involved in character development programs. Purposive sampling was applied with criteria including kyai or supervisors responsible for character guidance, santri with at least one year of boarding experience, alumni who graduated within the last one to three years, and teachers involved in designing or implementing the pesantren curriculum. Sampling continued until data saturation was reached, typically involving around 15 to 25 participants.

Data were collected using semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and documentation. Interviews lasting approximately 45–60 minutes were conducted using a guided interview protocol that explored experiences related to character development, curriculum implementation, and dormitory life. Participant observation was carried out over four to six weeks in the boarding environment to record daily routines, patterns of habituation, social interactions, and forms of role modelling by the kyai. Documentation such as program guidelines, schedules, activity reports, and institutional records was also collected to complement interview and observational data. All interviews were audio-recorded with informed consent, transcribed verbatim, and supported by detailed field notes.

To ensure trustworthiness, the study employed methodological triangulation across interviews, observations, and documentation, along with member checking with selected informants and a comprehensive audit trail documenting each stage of the research process. These procedures are consistent with phenomenological research standards that emphasize reflexivity and rigorous documentation (Moustakas, 1994; Gill, 2014). Data analysis followed an interactive and iterative process, beginning with data collection, followed by data reduction through coding, categorization, and phenomenological bracketing (*epoché*) to minimize researcher bias. The next stage involved displaying data by organizing codes into themes and sub-themes related to the character-building process. Finally, conclusions were drawn through reflective interpretation of participants' lived experiences, following phenomenological analysis techniques described by Groenewald (2004). Qualitative analysis software such as NVivo or Atlas.ti was used to assist in coding and thematic organization while maintaining manual interpretive control by the researcher.

Throughout the research, ethical considerations were prioritised. Participants were informed about the research objectives, the confidentiality of their identity, and their right to withdraw at any time. Written informed consent was obtained, and all data were securely stored and used exclusively for academic purposes.

Results and Discussion

The Pillars of Character Development at Darul Amanah Islamic Boarding School, Kendal

The findings indicate that character development at Darul Amanah Islamic Boarding School, Kendal, is grounded in four fundamental pillars that guide all educational activities and daily routines of the students. The first pillar is Islamic values, instilled through the teaching of the Qur'an, Hadith, classical Islamic texts, and the moral example of the Prophet Muhammad. These values are reinforced through daily worship, religious activities, and moral advice given by the kyai in both formal and informal situations. The second pillar is discipline and independence, shaped through an organized daily schedule beginning at 03.30 a.m. for the tahajjud prayer, followed by congregational prayers, morning sermons, formal schooling, Qur'an recitation, evening lessons, and a daily reflective journal. Students are trained to adhere to rules, respect time, and take responsibility for their personal needs and cleanliness as part of developing independence.

The third pillar is mastery of Arabic and English, implemented through mandatory Arabic communication in TMI classes, daily *mufrodat* enrichment, Arabic discussions during religious lessons, and English public-speaking sessions. This approach not only strengthens linguistic competence but also builds confidence, communication skills, and politeness in speech. The fourth pillar is spiritual enhancement, cultivated through routine worship such as tahajjud, morning dhikr, post-prayer recitations, Qur'anic studies, and daily *muhadharah*. These four pillars work together to form students' moral, social, intellectual, and spiritual character in a comprehensive manner.

Internalization of the Panca Jiwa (Five Souls) in Students' Daily Life

The findings show that the Panca Jiwa—sincerity, simplicity, self-reliance, religious brotherhood, and responsible freedom—are deeply internalized and practiced in daily life at Darul Amanah Islamic Boarding School. Sincerity is evident in students' willingness to carry out pesantren activities without complaint, including night prayers, cleaning duties, and communal service. They perform these tasks with the intention of worship. Simplicity is reflected in their modest lifestyle, self-control, and their ability to adapt to limited facilities. Students are accustomed to maintaining cleanliness and order despite living modestly.

Self-reliance is demonstrated through students managing their own needs, such as washing their clothes, cleaning their rooms, repairing their belongings, and organizing their study schedules. The pesantren encourages minimal dependence on external help. Religious brotherhood appears in the close-knit relationships formed among students, administrators, and teachers. Daily interactions are marked by mutual respect, cooperation, and strong emotional bonds. Meanwhile, responsible freedom gives students the opportunity to choose extracurricular activities or leadership roles while still adhering to pesantren norms. The internalization of these five values forms

the cultural core of Darul Amanah and shapes the attitudes and behaviors of students in their everyday lives.

Planning of Short-Term and Long-Term Character Development Programs

The study finds that character development at Darul Amanah is planned systematically through short-term and long-term programs designed by the kyai and teaching board. The short-term programs focus on daily activities such as discipline routines, strengthening obligatory and voluntary worship, Arabic and English language practice, and moral development through communal work, daily journals, and weekly evaluations. Leadership skills are introduced through small responsibilities such as room duties and task coordination. These programs aim to shape consistent behavioral habits.

The long-term programs emphasize deeper spiritual development, including intensive classical-text studies, tahfidz Qur'an, and formal leadership training through the student organization OSDA. They also include academic and non-academic enrichment such as language debates, scientific mini-research projects, skill-based workshops, community service, and major school events like *panggung gembira*. All planning is adjusted to students' developmental needs and aligned with the pesantren's values. The structured nature of these plans ensures that character development is not incidental but intentional and continuous.

Implementation of Character Development through Learning and Daily Habituation

The findings show that character development is implemented through a combination of formal learning, pesantren activities, role modeling, and daily supervision. In formal education, students attend school in the morning and continue with pesantren-based lessons such as classical-text studies, tahfidz sessions, and language training. This integration allows students to gain religious knowledge alongside general academic skills.

Daily habituation plays a central role in shaping character, including congregational prayers, tahajjud, daily sermons, cleaning duties, and communal service. The kyai and teachers serve as moral role models whose behavior is consistently observed and imitated by students. Supervision is carried out by administrators and room mentors to ensure that rules are followed and that students uphold good manners and discipline. Through this integrated system, students develop character through lived experience, disciplined routines, and intense social interaction.

Comprehensive Evaluation of Students' Character Development

The findings reveal that character-development evaluation at Darul Amanah is conducted comprehensively and continuously, covering academic, spiritual, social, and personal aspects. Evaluation is carried out through direct observation by the kyai, teachers, and dormitory supervisors, focusing on discipline, cleanliness, worship routines, and daily behavior. The pesantren implements a character report card distributed to parents each semester,

documenting students' progress in morality, discipline, language skills, and leadership.

In addition to observation, students conduct self-assessments through daily journals, in which they record their activities, reflect on their behavior, and evaluate their daily performance. Parents also provide feedback regarding their children's development at home. Internal program evaluations are conducted by the kyai and teaching board to adjust or improve character-building strategies. This comprehensive evaluation system ensures that character development at Darul Amanah is effective, targeted, and results in measurable behavioral change among students.

The findings of this study reveal that the four pillars of character development at Darul Amanah Islamic Boarding School (Islamic values, discipline and independence, linguistic competence, and spiritual cultivation) are strongly aligned with contemporary discussions in character education. Susilo (2022) explains that character education trends in Indonesian Islamic schools emphasize *akhlāqul karīmah* as a holistic moral framework that integrates religious, social, and behavioral dimensions. This is consistent with the school's approach, where Qur'anic studies, exemplary conduct, and moral instruction form the basis of character formation. Likewise, habitual discipline and moral habituation observed at Darul Amanah reflect what Muthoharoh and Miftahuddin (2021) found in pesantren-based character learning, namely that continuous routines, embedded rules, and teacher modeling are crucial in shaping students' moral behavior.

The internalization of the *Panca Jiwa* (Five Souls), sincerity, simplicity, self-reliance, religious brotherhood, and responsible freedom, also demonstrates how pesantren culture serves as an embedded system of values. Earlier studies note that Indonesian pesantren function as "miniature societies" in which religious and social values are practiced daily, enabling deep internalization through lived experience rather than theoretical instruction (Shiddiq et al., 2023). The emphasis on sincerity and simplicity, for example, corresponds to classical Islamic teachings but has been underrepresented in empirical research (Arif et al., 2024). The present study contributes evidence that these values remain central and are embodied naturally through daily routines such as communal service, modest living, and respectful interaction with teachers.

Additionally, the mechanisms of discipline, linguistic practices, and spiritual routines identified in this study reinforce the broader theory that character formation requires a structured environment that integrates cognitive, behavioral, and affective elements. Lickona (2016) asserted that character is built through the triad of knowing the good, feeling the good, and doing the good, which is visible in how students at Darul Amanah understand, appreciate, and practice moral behavior. Similar findings in Islamic schools show that school routines and the learning climate significantly influence the moral and social development of learners (Susilo, 2022). The unique contribution of the present study lies in highlighting how Arabic and English

language practice becomes a concrete tool of character formation by fostering discipline, politeness, and intellectual confidence, an aspect rarely discussed in pesantren literature.

Furthermore, the structured planning, implementation, and evaluation system discovered in this study affirms that effective character education requires deliberate institutional design. Previous studies show that kyai leadership, institutional culture, and supervisory mechanisms are significant determinants of pesantren educational success (Kurniawan et al., 2022; Hafidh et al., 2021). Darul Amanah's dual-structure planning, short-term and long-term programs, reflects a mature model of character education management. The comprehensive evaluation system, which includes report cards, behavioral monitoring, parental feedback, and self-assessment, expands upon earlier pesantren studies that tended to limit character evaluation to worship activities or disciplinary compliance.

Overall, the dialogue between the study's findings and existing literature indicates that Darul Amanah has developed a character education ecosystem that integrates moral instruction, spiritual routines, linguistic discipline, leadership training, and social engagement. This integrated model fills an important research gap by demonstrating how pesantren can operationalize character development comprehensively (beyond ritual and discipline) through strategic planning, structured implementation, and continuous formative evaluation. These findings offer practical implications for Islamic boarding schools seeking to design character education that is culturally rooted yet responsive to contemporary educational demands.

Conclusion

The study concludes that the concept and implementation of character development at Darul Amanah Islamic Boarding School, Sukorejo Kendal, are directed toward shaping students who are morally upright, disciplined, independent, intellectually broad-minded, and capable of balancing religious and worldly knowledge. The foundation of this character-building system rests on four main pillars: the internalization of Islamic values, the cultivation of discipline and independence, mastery of Arabic and English, and continuous spiritual education. These pillars are further reinforced by the *Panca Jiwa* of the pesantren (sincerity, simplicity, brotherhood, responsible freedom, and self-reliance) which form the cultural and moral core of daily life in the institution.

The implementation process is carried out through three major stages. The planning stage includes short-term programs focused on worship habituation and discipline, as well as long-term programs emphasizing leadership development, independence, academic enrichment, and spiritual deepening. The execution stage involves integrated practices of habituation, role modelling, supervision, and the development of social skills, leadership competencies, and student talents. The evaluation stage is conducted

continuously through behavioral observation, academic and attitude assessments, self-reflection activities, and parental involvement.

Overall, the comprehensive and systematic approach adopted by Darul Amanah successfully fosters a generation of students who are knowledgeable, virtuous, independent, spiritually grounded, and prepared to contribute positively to society. The findings demonstrate that the pesantren environment (through its structured routines, cultural values, and holistic educational design) creates an effective ecosystem for character development rooted in Islamic principles and aligned with contemporary educational needs.

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