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The Relationship Between Social Interaction in Islamic Boarding Schools and Students' Independent Character

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Abstract

Purpose: This study examined the relationship between social interaction in an Islamic boarding school environment and students' independent character at Modern Darussalam Koto Anau Islamic Boarding School, Solok Regency, West Sumatra, Indonesia. Method: The study used a quantitative cross-sectional correlational design. The population comprised all 46 students enrolled in grades 1 to 6 of Kulliyatul Mu'allimin al-Islamiyah, and all eligible students were included through total-enumeration sampling. Data were collected using Likert-type self-report questionnaires measuring social interaction and independent character, supported by institutional documentation used to confirm enrolment and eligibility. Descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, and simple linear regression were performed using IBM SPSS Statistics version 25. Main Findings: Social-interaction scores ranged from 21 to 60, with a mean of 42.35 and a standard deviation of 9.53. Independent-character scores ranged from 12 to 40, with a mean of 26.41 and a standard deviation of 6.30. The regression model was statistically significant, $F(1, 44) = 140.485$, $p < .001$. Social interaction was positively associated with independent character ($B = 0.577$), and the model reported $R^2 = .761$. Novelty/Originality: This study provides institution-specific evidence from a modern Indonesian pesantren by examining social interaction as a residential-school contextual factor associated with independent character within Indonesian residential education settings. Contribution: The findings extend discussion of pesantren beyond religious and academic instruction by highlighting the potential developmental relevance of daily interactions among students, teachers, and peers. They also support sociocultural interpretations of learning and personal development through social participation. However, the cross-sectional design does not establish causality. Future multicentre longitudinal studies using validated multidimensional measures and multiple data sources are needed to clarify directionality, mechanisms, and generalizability.

Keywords: social interaction; Islamic boarding school; independent character; pesantren students; cross-sectional study

Introduction

Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) are among Indonesia's longest-standing Islamic educational institutions and continue to play an important role in students' moral, social, and personal development. Rather than functioning solely as formal schools, pesantren provide residential educational settings in which learning, worship, peer relations, institutional rules, and daily routines are closely intertwined. This distinctive environment enables sustained interaction among students, teachers (*ustadz*), religious leaders (*kyai*), and peers. Such interaction may provide opportunities for students to learn social norms, responsibility, self-management, and decision-making through everyday participation in communal life (Munawir et al., 2024; Nilan, 2009). Previous scholarship also shows that Indonesian Islamic education has historically combined religious traditions with modern educational aspirations, making pesantren an important context for examining student development in contemporary Indonesia (Lukens-Bull, 2001).

Modern Darussalam Koto Anau Islamic Boarding School, located in Solok Regency, West Sumatra, implements a residential education system in which students from grades 1 to 6 of Kulliyatul Mu'allimin al-Islamiyah (KMI) live within the school complex during their period of study. This arrangement creates a comprehensive learning environment in which academic activities, religious practices, organizational participation, and daily residential routines take place within the same social setting. International research has emphasized that educational institutions are important developmental contexts because their organizational structures, social relationships, norms, and practices can shape adolescents' social-emotional development and behavioral adjustment (Eccles & Roeser, 2011). In pesantren, the continuous nature of residential life may make social interaction particularly salient, as students routinely communicate, cooperate, negotiate responsibilities, and receive guidance from adults and peers.

Independent character in the present study refers to students' capacity to manage personal needs, make responsible decisions, regulate daily activities, initiate tasks, and reduce excessive dependence on others. This construct is closely related to autonomy and self-regulation, both of which are central developmental capacities during adolescence. Self-determination theory proposes that autonomy, competence, and relatedness are basic psychological needs that support optimal functioning and personal development (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Likewise, research on self-regulated learning emphasizes that students become more capable of directing their own behavior when they actively set goals, monitor progress, and manage their actions in relation to environmental demands (Zimmerman, 2002). Therefore, independence should not be understood as social isolation; rather, it may develop through constructive relationships that provide guidance, feedback, modelling, and gradually increasing responsibility.

The relationship between social interaction and independent character can also be interpreted through Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural perspective. From this perspective, higher psychological functions develop through social

participation and are subsequently internalized by individuals. In the pesantren context, vertical interactions with *kyai* and *ustadz*, as well as horizontal interactions among students, may offer opportunities for students to observe responsible behavior, receive feedback, participate in collaborative activities, and gradually undertake tasks independently. The Zone of Proximal Development is relevant because students may initially perform unfamiliar tasks with support from more capable peers or adults before becoming able to manage such tasks independently. The notion of scaffolded support should, however, be interpreted carefully as a later pedagogical elaboration of sociocultural theory rather than as a direct causal mechanism demonstrated by the present cross-sectional study (Wood et al., 1976).

Empirical studies in Indonesian pesantren settings provide preliminary support for the relevance of social relations to student independence. Wulandhari (2025) reported a positive and significant relationship between social support and students' independence. Wahono (2023) further found that peer social interaction mediated relationships among parenting, character education, life skills, and the independence of students in a modern pesantren. Paryanti et al. (2024) also highlighted the contribution of pesantren experiences to students' independence and creativity. Nevertheless, these studies differ in their constructs, designs, populations, and analytical models. In particular, social support, peer interaction, institutional practices, and broad social interaction should not be treated as interchangeable concepts. A more focused examination is therefore needed to clarify how students' reported social interaction within a specific pesantren setting is associated with their independent character.

Preliminary observations at Modern Darussalam Koto Anau Islamic Boarding School suggest that some students may still experience difficulties in independently managing personal needs, taking initiative, regulating time, complying consistently with dormitory rules, and avoiding excessive reliance on peers. These observations should be interpreted cautiously because they do not constitute causal evidence or a formal prevalence estimate. However, they indicate the importance of examining whether variation in students' social interaction is associated with variation in their independent-character scores within this residential educational environment.

Accordingly, this study investigates the relationship between social interaction in the Islamic boarding school environment and students' independent character at Modern Darussalam Koto Anau Islamic Boarding School. Specifically, the study addresses the following questions:

1. What is the level of students' social interaction in the Islamic boarding school environment?
2. What is the level of students' independent character?
3. Is social interaction in the Islamic boarding school environment significantly associated with students' independent character?

Based on sociocultural theory and prior empirical findings, the study hypothesizes that higher levels of reported social interaction will be positively

associated with higher independent-character scores. Given the correlational and cross-sectional design, the findings should be interpreted as evidence of association rather than proof that social interaction causes or forms students' independent character.

Method

This study employed a quantitative cross-sectional correlational design to examine the association between social interaction in the Islamic boarding school environment and students' independent character. The study was conducted at Modern Darussalam Koto Anau Islamic Boarding School, Solok Regency, West Sumatra, Indonesia. The school implements a residential educational system in which students participate in academic learning, religious activities, dormitory routines, and social activities within the same institutional environment.

The study was reported in accordance with key principles for observational research, including clear reporting of the study design, participant selection, variables, measurements, and statistical analysis (von Elm et al., 2007). Because the study used a cross-sectional correlational design, the findings were interpreted as associations and not as evidence of causality.

The study population comprised all 46 students enrolled in grades 1 to 6 of Kulliyatul Mu'allimin al-Islamiyah at Modern Darussalam Koto Anau Islamic Boarding School. A total-enumeration sampling approach was used, meaning that all eligible students in the population were invited to participate. This approach was selected because the accessible population was relatively small and the study aimed to obtain data from the entire student cohort.

Students were eligible to participate if they were officially enrolled in grades 1 to 6 during the data-collection period and were available at the school when the questionnaire was administered. Students who did not provide complete questionnaire responses were excluded from the final analysis. The final number of participants included in each analysis should be reported clearly, together with any missing-data procedures.

Data were collected using structured self-report questionnaires with Likert-type response scales. The first questionnaire measured social interaction in the Islamic boarding school environment. This variable referred to students' reciprocal relationships and communication with teachers, religious leaders, and peers during academic, religious, organizational, and residential activities. The second questionnaire measured independent character, defined as students' ability to manage personal needs, regulate daily activities, take initiative, make responsible decisions, and perform tasks without excessive reliance on others.

Each instrument should be described in detail in the final manuscript, including its theoretical source or development process, number of items, response options, scoring procedure, possible score range, reverse-scored items, and interpretation criteria. Before hypothesis testing, the internal

consistency of both scales should be evaluated using Cronbach's alpha and, where possible, McDonald's omega. Evidence of content validity and construct validity should also be reported. Category labels such as low, moderate, or high should only be used when supported by a pre-specified and theoretically justified scoring procedure.

Documentation was used to confirm the number of enrolled students and participant eligibility. Documentary data were not used as an additional outcome measure.

Prior to data collection, written permission should be obtained from the school administration. Participants should receive a clear explanation of the study purpose, voluntary nature of participation, confidentiality procedures, and their right to decline or withdraw without academic consequences. As the participants may include minors, informed consent from parents or legal guardians and assent from students should be obtained in accordance with the applicable institutional and national ethical requirements.

Questionnaires should be completed anonymously during an arranged data-collection session under conditions that minimize pressure from teachers, school administrators, or peers. To reduce social-desirability and common-method bias, participants should be informed that there are no correct or incorrect answers and that individual responses will not be disclosed to the school. Because both variables were measured using self-report questionnaires at a single point in time, the potential for common-method bias should be acknowledged when interpreting the results (Podsakoff et al., 2003).

Data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics version 25. Descriptive statistics, including frequency, percentage, mean, standard deviation, minimum, and maximum values, were used to describe participants' scores on social interaction and independent character.

Before regression analysis, the assumptions of linearity, normality of residuals, homoscedasticity, independence of errors, and the absence of influential outliers should be assessed and reported. Pearson's correlation coefficient should be calculated to describe the direction and strength of the bivariate association between social interaction and independent character.

Simple linear regression analysis was then used to estimate whether social-interaction scores were statistically associated with independent-character scores. The regression results should report the unstandardized coefficient, standard error, standardized coefficient, 95% confidence interval, t statistic, p value, F statistic with degrees of freedom, R squared, and adjusted R squared. Statistical significance should be evaluated at a two-tailed alpha level of .05. Values displayed by SPSS as .000 should be reported as $p < .001$.

The regression model was used to quantify the proportion of variance in independent-character scores associated with social-interaction scores in this sample. The resulting R squared value should not be interpreted as proof that social interaction causes independent character, because temporal order,

confounding variables, and alternative explanations cannot be ruled out in a cross-sectional correlational design.

Results and Discussion

Results

Descriptive Statistics of Social Interaction

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Variable X

Descriptive Statistic	Value
Minimum	21
Maximum	60
Mean	42.35
Standard Deviation	9.53
Number of Respondents	46

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics for students' social-interaction scores. The analysis included 46 students from Modern Darussalam Koto Anau Islamic Boarding School. Social-interaction scores ranged from 21 to 60, with a mean of 42.35 and a standard deviation of 9.53.

The category label for this mean score should only be reported after the manuscript provides the theoretical score range and a pre-specified, justified classification procedure. Therefore, the result is reported descriptively rather than being classified as low, moderate, or high.

Descriptive Statistics of Independent Character

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of Variable Y

Descriptive Statistic	Value
Minimum	12
Maximum	40
Mean	26.41
Standard Deviation	6.30
Number of Respondents	46

Table 2 shows the descriptive statistics for students' independent-character scores. The analysis included 46 students. Scores ranged from 12 to 40, with a mean of 26.41 and a standard deviation of 6.30. As with the social-interaction variable, the interpretation of this score as low, moderate, or high requires an explicit and validated categorization rule. The current data support the descriptive conclusion that the average independent-character score was 26.41 within the observed range of 12 to 40.

Simple Linear Regression Analysis

Table 3. Results of the Simple Linear Regression Test of X on Y

Variable	b	t	Sig.	R Square	Interpretation
X to Y	0.577	11.78	< .001	.761	Significant

Table 3 indicates a positive regression coefficient for social interaction and independent character, with an unstandardized coefficient of 0.577. The reported significance value was below .001. The reported coefficient of determination was .761, indicating that 76.1% of the variance in independent-character scores was accounted for by social-interaction scores in this one-predictor model.

This result should be interpreted as a statistical association within the present sample. Because the study used a cross-sectional correlational design, the regression result does not establish that social interaction causes independent character.

Table 4. Results of the Linear Regression Test (Summary)

Variable	Coefficient (B)	t Value	Sig.
Constant	1.987	0.941	Not reported
Social Interaction	0.577	11.853	< .001

Table 4 presents the coefficient output for the simple linear regression model. The unstandardized regression coefficient for social interaction was 0.577, with a t value of 11.853 and a significance value below .001. The positive coefficient indicates that higher social-interaction scores were associated with higher independent-character scores.

Statistical verification note: The t value in Table 3 is 11.78, whereas the t value in Table 4 is 11.853. These values are not equivalent after ordinary rounding. The authors should recheck the original SPSS output and use one verified t value consistently throughout the manuscript.

Overall Regression Model

Table 5. F Test/ANOVA Results

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	1360.913	1	1360.913	140.485	< .001
Residual	426.239	44	Not reported	Not reported	Not reported
Total	1787.152	45	Not reported	Not reported	Not reported

Table 5 shows that the overall simple linear regression model was statistically significant, $F(1, 44) = 140.485$, $p < .001$. This result indicates that the model including social interaction was significantly associated with variation in independent-character scores.

The original manuscript labeled both the regression-summary table and the ANOVA table as Table 4. In the revised manuscript, the ANOVA table should be numbered as Table 5 to maintain sequential numbering.

One-Sample t-Test

Table 6. One-Sample t-Test Results

Variable	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% CI Lower	95% CI Upper
Independent Character	4.143	8	.003	4.11111	1.8230	6.3993

Table 6 reports the one-sample t-test for the subgroup of nine students whose social-interaction scores were above 48. The observed mean difference was 4.11111 relative to the theoretical test value of 30. Accordingly, the subgroup mean independent-character score was 34.11111. The result was statistically significant, $t(8) = 4.143$, $p = .003$, with a 95% confidence interval for the mean difference from 1.8230 to 6.3993.

This analysis indicates that, in this selected subgroup, the mean independent-character score was significantly higher than the theoretical value of 30. The value 34.1 should be reported as a score, not as a percentage, unless the scale was formally transformed into a percentage. Because the subgroup was defined using a social-interaction cutoff above 48 and included only nine students, this analysis should be described as exploratory. The rationale for the cutoff must be stated clearly.

Discussion

Social Interaction in the Islamic Boarding School Environment

The descriptive findings indicate that the 46 students had a mean social-interaction score of 42.35, with scores ranging from 21 to 60. This result suggests variation in the extent to which students engaged in social relationships within the Islamic boarding school environment. However, the score should not be described as moderate, high, or optimal until the manuscript provides the theoretical scale range and a justified categorization procedure.

Social interaction in a pesantren setting may involve relationships between students and religious teachers, as well as relationships among peers. According to Soekanto (2000), social interaction is based on social contact and communication. Within a residential school environment, students routinely encounter opportunities for face-to-face communication during classroom activities, religious learning, dormitory routines, organizational activities, and informal interactions. These institutional conditions may create a context in which students can participate in cooperation, communication, peer support, and shared responsibilities.

Nevertheless, the present quantitative data do not directly measure all forms of associative and dissociative interaction, such as cooperation, competition, accommodation, or conflict. Therefore, claims that these processes were balanced, mature, or optimal should be avoided unless they are supported by specific questionnaire dimensions, interview excerpts, or observational evidence. If observational or interview data are available, they should be reported separately with clear procedures, participants, and illustrative quotations.

The finding may be considered alongside previous studies of pesantren education. Paryanti et al. (2024) discussed the contribution of pesantren to students' independence and creativity, while Wahono (2023) identified the relevance of peer social interaction within a broader model of student independence. However, these studies differ in construct definitions, design, participants, and analytical approaches. Similarity in findings should therefore be interpreted as contextual relevance rather than as direct validation of the present measurement instrument or study design.

International scholarship also recognizes that schools are important developmental contexts because institutional norms, adult guidance, peer relationships, and organizational practices shape students' social and emotional experiences (Eccles & Roeser, 2011). In Indonesia, pesantren combine residential life, religious learning, and formal education. This combination may make interpersonal relationships especially relevant to how students experience responsibility, belonging, and participation in daily institutional life (Lukens-Bull, 2001; Nilan, 2009).

Independent Character Among Students

Students' independent-character scores ranged from 12 to 40, with a mean of 26.41 and a standard deviation of 6.30. This finding describes the distribution of independent-character scores in the present sample. As with social interaction, the score should not be interpreted as moderate, adequate, good, or high without a documented scoring threshold.

Independent character may include the ability to manage personal needs, regulate time, take initiative, make decisions, and accept responsibility. These capacities are conceptually related to autonomy and self-regulation. Self-determination theory identifies autonomy, competence, and relatedness as psychological needs that support personal development and effective functioning (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Similarly, Zimmerman (2002) explains self-regulation as an active process through which learners direct their thoughts, motivation, and behavior toward goals. In a residential educational context, students may have repeated opportunities to practice these capacities through daily routines and responsibilities.

Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural perspective offers a useful framework for interpreting this relationship. It proposes that higher psychological functions emerge through social participation and are subsequently internalized by individuals. Students may initially manage responsibilities with guidance from teachers or more experienced peers and gradually perform

these tasks more independently. However, the present study did not measure the proposed process of internalization directly. Thus, sociocultural theory should be used to interpret a plausible mechanism rather than to claim that the observed statistical association proves the mechanism.

The term scaffolding should also be used carefully. Although it is compatible with sociocultural approaches to learning, it was developed in later scholarship to describe temporary support provided during learning (Wood et al., 1976). If the manuscript discusses scaffolding, it should cite Wood et al. (1976) in addition to Vygotsky (1978).

Wulandhari (2025) reported a positive relationship between social support and students' independence, with $r = .272$ and $p < .001$. This finding is relevant because supportive relationships may be associated with students' confidence and capacity to act independently. However, social support is not identical to the broader social-interaction construct measured in the present study. The manuscript should acknowledge this distinction rather than treating both concepts as interchangeable.

Association Between Social Interaction and Independent Character

The simple linear regression analysis showed a positive association between social interaction and independent character. The reported regression coefficient was 0.577, and the overall model was statistically significant, $F(1, 44) = 140.485$, $p < .001$. The reported R squared value was .761, indicating that social-interaction scores accounted for 76.1% of the variance in independent-character scores in the present one-predictor model.

The manuscript should not report an R value of 7.61 because a correlation coefficient must fall between minus one and plus one. If the reported R squared value is .761, the corresponding positive multiple R would be approximately .872. However, the final manuscript should report the actual value from the verified SPSS output rather than an inferred value.

The positive association is consistent with the general proposition that students' relationships with peers and adults may be relevant to their social and personal development. Wentzel (1998) found that relationships with parents, teachers, and peers were associated with student motivation during middle school. In the pesantren context, frequent interaction may provide students with opportunities to receive feedback, observe role models, share strategies for managing tasks, and participate in collective responsibilities. These experiences may be related to independent-character scores, but the present data cannot determine which specific interactional processes are responsible for the observed association.

The original manuscript cites Hamim Al Rusdi (2024) as reporting a positive correlation between social interaction and student independence. This citation should be retained only after a complete and independently verifiable bibliographic record is added to the reference list. Until the full source, publication venue, and DOI or stable URL are verified, this comparison should be treated with caution.

Interpretation of the Regression and One-Sample t-Test

The regression result does not demonstrate that social interaction causes independent character. The data were collected at one point in time, and both variables were measured through student self-report questionnaires. Consequently, alternative explanations remain possible. For example, students with stronger independent character may participate more confidently in social interaction, while unmeasured factors such as parenting, age, length of residence, socioeconomic background, institutional rules, or baseline self-regulation may be associated with both variables.

The large R squared value should therefore be interpreted cautiously. It reflects the proportion of variance accounted for within this specific sample and model, not the causal contribution of social interaction. Same-source self-report measurement may also inflate associations because respondents assessed both variables using similar methods at the same time (Podsakoff et al., 2003).

Wahono (2023) found that peer social interaction served as a mediator in a broader model involving parenting, character education, life skills, and student independence. This supports the view that peer interaction may be relevant to students' development. However, Wahono's multivariable mediation model and the present one-predictor regression model are not directly comparable. The reported 43% contribution in Wahono's study should not be compared directly with the present R squared value of .761.

The one-sample t-test found that the subgroup of nine students with social-interaction scores above 48 had a mean independent-character score of 34.11111, significantly above the theoretical value of 30, $t(8) = 4.143$, $p = .003$. This result may be presented as an exploratory subgroup finding. It should not be used as evidence that high social interaction causes superior independent character because the subgroup was selected according to the predictor variable and the cutoff was not yet theoretically justified.

Overall, the findings indicate a positive association between social interaction and independent character among students at Modern Darussalam Koto Anau Islamic Boarding School. Future research should use larger and more diverse samples, validated multi-dimensional instruments, longitudinal designs, and multiple sources of data, such as teacher ratings, behavioral records, interviews, and structured observations. Such designs would provide stronger evidence regarding directionality, mechanisms, and the educational conditions that support students' independence.

Conclusion

This study found a strong positive association between social interaction in the Islamic boarding school environment and students' independent-character scores at Modern Darussalam Koto Anau Islamic Boarding School. Among 46 students, the mean social-interaction score was 42.35, while the mean independent-character score was 26.41. The simple linear regression model was statistically significant, $F(1, 44) = 140.485$, $p < .001$, and reported

an R squared value of .761. This relatively large association suggests that social interaction may be more closely related to students' independent character than is often assumed in discussions of residential Islamic education. However, because the study used a cross-sectional correlational design, the result should be interpreted as an association rather than evidence that social interaction causes independent character.

The study contributes to the literature by supporting previous findings that peer relationships, social support, and interactions within pesantren may be relevant to students' independence. It also extends the discussion by treating the pesantren not only as a site of religious and academic learning, but also as a residential social environment in which students may practice responsibility, communication, decision-making, and self-management. At the same time, the findings challenge overly simple assumptions that intensive social interaction automatically produces independence. Social interaction, social support, peer influence, institutional discipline, and self-regulation are related but distinct constructs. Future research should examine these dimensions separately and test whether peer support, adult guidance, self-regulation, or institutional practices mediate their relationships with independent character.

This study is limited by its small total-enumeration sample of 46 students from one Islamic boarding school, its cross-sectional design, and its reliance on self-report questionnaires. These limitations restrict the generalizability of the findings and prevent conclusions about temporal direction or causality. The large R squared value may also reflect unmeasured factors and same-source measurement bias. Future studies should involve larger and more diverse samples across multiple pesantren, use validated multi-dimensional instruments, incorporate teacher ratings, behavioral records, interviews, and structured observations, and apply longitudinal or quasi-experimental designs. Such research would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the conditions through which social interaction is associated with the development of students' independent character.

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