

## Moral Education in Islamic Boarding Schools for Shaping the Social Character of Adolescents

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**ABSTRACT:** *This study stems from the growing phenomenon of declining politeness among adolescents, a lack of empathy, weak social responsibility, and a deterioration of moral attitudes. It seeks to explore how moral education provided in Islamic boarding schools influences students' ability to socialise and interact within the community. This study focuses on moral education in Islamic boarding schools in shaping the social character of adolescents at Nahrul Ulum Al Banihawiy Islamic boarding school, Subang Regency, West Java, Indonesia. The purpose of this study is to describe how moral education in Islamic boarding schools contributes to the development of adolescents' social character within society. Moral education in Islamic boarding schools not only shapes adolescents' character but also involves the process of habituating students' behaviour. This study employs a qualitative research method using a phenomenological approach, aiming to explore the phenomenon deeply and naturally. Data collection techniques include open interviews, observation, and documentation. The interviews were conducted with the administrators (kyai), teachers (ustadz/ustadzah), and students (santri). Observations were carried out on all 40 students, ranging in age from 13 to 20 years old. Documentation was conducted throughout the research process. The results of the study indicate that the formation of social character is carried out through three main indicators: 1) the personal dimension emphasises the habituation of honest, disciplined, and responsible behavior through routine activities; 2) the social dimension is reflected in attitudes of empathy, cooperation, and concern for others; and 3) the spiritual dimension is developed through the practice of worship, the study of classical Islamic texts (kitab kuning), dzikir, and other religious activities that foster students' closeness to Allah Swt. These three indicators are implemented through exemplary behaviour, habituation, and discipline. The originality of this study lies in its unique context, focusing on a newly established Islamic boarding school with only 40 students and one graduating cohort. This setting provides an authentic view of the early stages of character and social skills formation in a developing Islamic Boarding Schools environment.*

Penelitian ini berawal dari fenomena yang semakin marak, yaitu menurunnya kesantunan di kalangan remaja, kurangnya empati, lemahnya tanggung jawab sosial, dan merosotnya sikap moral. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk

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mengeksplorasi bagaimana pendidikan moral yang diberikan di pesantren memengaruhi kemampuan santri untuk bersosialisasi dan berinteraksi dalam masyarakat. Penelitian ini berfokus pada pendidikan moral di pesantren dalam membentuk karakter sosial remaja di Pesantren Nahrul Ulum Al Banihawiy, Kabupaten Subang, Jawa Barat, Indonesia. Tujuan penelitian ini adalah untuk mendeskripsikan bagaimana pendidikan moral di pesantren berkontribusi terhadap perkembangan karakter sosial remaja di masyarakat. Pendidikan moral di pesantren tidak hanya membentuk karakter remaja, tetapi juga melibatkan proses pembiasaan perilaku santri. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode penelitian kualitatif dengan pendekatan fenomenologi, yang bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi fenomena tersebut secara mendalam dan alami. Teknik pengumpulan data meliputi wawancara terbuka, observasi, dan dokumentasi. Wawancara dilakukan dengan pengurus (kyai), guru (ustadz/ustadzah), dan santri. Observasi dilakukan terhadap seluruh 40 santri, dengan rentang usia 13 sampai 20 tahun. Dokumentasi dilakukan selama proses penelitian. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa pembentukan karakter sosial dilakukan melalui tiga indikator utama: 1) dimensi personal menekankan pembiasaan perilaku jujur, disiplin, dan bertanggung jawab melalui kegiatan rutin; 2) dimensi sosial tercermin dalam sikap empati, kerjasama, dan kepedulian terhadap sesama; dan 3) dimensi spiritual dikembangkan melalui praktik ibadah, kajian kitab kuning, dzikir, dan kegiatan keagamaan lainnya yang menumbuhkan kedekatan santri dengan Allah Swt. Ketiga indikator ini diimplementasikan melalui perilaku keteladanan, pembiasaan, dan disiplin. Orisinalitas penelitian ini terletak pada konteksnya yang unik, dengan fokus pada sebuah pondok pesantren yang baru berdiri dengan hanya 40 santri dan satu angkatan wisudawan. Latar ini memberikan gambaran yang autentik tentang tahap awal pembentukan karakter dan keterampilan sosial dalam lingkungan pesantren yang sedang berkembang.

**Keywords:** *Moral Education, Islamic Boarding School, Adolescent Social Character.*

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Education plays a vital role in shaping an intellectually intelligent generation with strong and noble character. In essence, character education cannot rely solely on the normative delivery of instructional material. Character refers to a set of attitudes, behaviours, motivations, and skills (Zuhriy, 2011). The formation of students' character is stipulated in Presidential Regulation No. 87 of 2017 concerning the Strengthening of Character Education, which serves as an educational initiative and a responsibility of the national education system to reinforce character development among students (Setiawan et al., 2021).

Education in Indonesia consists of formal, non-formal, and informal education. The education system officially recognised by the government includes all levels from early childhood education, elementary school, junior high school, senior high school, to higher education (UU RI No.20, 2003). Educational institutions in Indonesia are diverse,

including formal schools and non-formal institutions such as Community Learning Centres and Learning Activity Studios, which provide government-recognised equivalency education programs (Permen RI No.17, 2010). There are also Islamic boarding schools, which are traditional religious-based educational institutions.

The exact time, location, and founder of the first Islamic boarding school in Indonesia remain uncertain. According to data from the Ministry of Religious Affairs, the oldest Islamic Boarding Schools in Indonesia is Jan Tanpes II Islamic Boarding School in Pamekasan, Madura, which was established in 1976. However, according to Martin van Bruinessen, the oldest Islamic Boarding Schools is Tegalsari Islamic Boarding School in Ponorogo, East Java, which was founded in 1742 (Usman, 2013). The difference between these two opinions arises from the limited historical records regarding the existence and early development of the Islamic boarding school. Islamic boarding schools are traditional Islamic educational institutions where students are not only taught religious knowledge but are also provided with moral education, discipline, and exemplary behaviour. They learn to interact with others based on noble values through a comprehensive moral education implemented in learning activities, daily habituation, and the exemplary conduct of *kyai* and *ustadz* (Lesmana et al., 2021).

Following the enactment of Law No. 18 of 2019 concerning Islamic Boarding Schools, Islamic boarding school education in Indonesia has gained a strong legal foundation and become a significant milestone, as Islamic Boarding Schools are now officially recognised as part of the national education system. The law affirms that Islamic Boarding Schools serve educational, *dakwah*, and community empowerment functions, granting recognition to their diplomas and educational levels as equivalent to those of formal education institutions. In addition, Islamic Boarding Schools are regulated under the Ministry of Religious Affairs through the Directorate General of Islamic Education, which coordinates programs for *Diniyah* Education and Islamic Boarding Schools.

The character crisis occurring in Indonesia reflects a gap between moral knowledge and moral practice. Islamic Boarding Schools, as the oldest educational institutions in Indonesia, are expected to play a vital role in nurturing a generation with strong character and moral integrity (Sabiq, 2022).

Indonesia desires to create a golden generation in 2045 with a target of entering the top 7 countries with the most significant economic power in the world. Inevitably, Indonesia will compete with other major countries. Therefore, moral education needs to be implemented to create a golden generation that embodies components of knowledge, awareness, intention, and action in practising moral values toward God, oneself, respect, and decency toward others, and the surrounding community. Ultimately, the educational process aims to shape Indonesians into fully developed individuals with integrity and moral excellence (Yusutria et al., 2024).

Many young people understand moral values but fail to internalise them in their daily actions. This condition is considered a serious concern by the government; therefore, through Government Regulation No. 87 of 2017 on the Strengthening of Character Education, the state emphasises that character formation must be at the core of the entire educational process. Education should no longer focus solely on academic achievement but also on the cultivation of moral values. However, formal educational institutions have not yet fully succeeded in realising this goal due to competitive systems and environments that do not adequately support the habituation of moral and religious values. Consequently, there is a need for educational institutions that possess a strong,

consistent, and sustainable system of value internalisation—this is where Islamic Boarding Schools become both relevant and strategic.

The educational system of Islamic Boarding Schools, with its boarding model, creates a social environment that continuously supports the internalisation of values. Islamic Boarding Schools are among the institutions expected to have the capacity to transform societal morals (Atqia & Zuhriyah, 2021). Students not only learn theoretical knowledge but also live in an environment of discipline, respect for teachers, togetherness, independence, and social responsibility. Character is developed through teaching, training, habituation, and guidance (Mujahid, 2021). These values form the core of character education. Therefore, when the nation faces a character crisis, Islamic Boarding Schools represent a concrete and integral solution for character education.

Minister of Religious Affairs Regulations No. 31 of 2020 and No. 73 of 2022 strengthen the position of Islamic Boarding Schools through the regulation of the National Standards for Islamic Boarding School Education, which cover aspects such as graduate competencies, curriculum, teaching staff, and institutional management. These regulations affirm that Islamic Boarding Schools have the autonomy to design curricula based on Islamic values and local wisdom while remaining within the framework of national development. In other words, Islamic Boarding School education policies serve as a formal instrument to reinforce national character education through religious and cultural approaches.

Social interaction refers to the relationship between individuals in which they mutually influence one another, meaning that within a society, individuals provide reciprocal responses. Adolescents who easily make friends are those with strong social interaction skills, whether in communication, socialising, problem-solving calmly, or participating in discussions. All of these are carried out without anxiety, tension, or discomfort that could affect their emotions (Fatnar & Anam, 2014).

Adjusting socially is not an easy task. Many children struggle to adapt both socially and personally. According to various sources, in 2016, the level of adolescent violence in Indonesia reached 50%, while drug use and promiscuity also increased. The goal of character education, however, is to cultivate adolescents who are resilient, morally upright, and responsible toward both society and themselves. These behaviours contradict the objectives of character education as stated in Presidential Regulation No. 87 of 2017.

In previous studies Nawawi et al. (2024), one approach to character education is the concept developed by Syaikh Musthafa al-Ghalayaini in his book *Izhatun Nasyi'in*. This book, which is often used as teaching material in Islamic Boarding Schools, offers a deeper understanding of the importance of instilling noble character in the younger generation. Syaikh al-Ghalayaini provides detailed advice on how to educate adolescents to develop good character and virtuous morals, such as patience, sincerity, wholeheartedness, responsibility, and nationalism. This approach not only emphasises moral aspects but also integrates profound religious values, offering a new perspective on character education.

In previous research Zuhriy (2011), the success of character education is influenced by several factors: first, the exemplary behavior of the Kyai (Islamic boarding school leader); second, the intensity of interactions established among students, between students and administrators, as well as between students, administrators, and caregivers; and finally, the shared rules outlined in the Student Regulations, which the caregivers

sign. These three aspects are what make character education in this Islamic Boarding School effectively and firmly instilled within the students.

A case study in Malaysia has revealed effective moral teaching strategies in multicultural classrooms, including an emphasis on developing empathy and culturally sensitive contextual approaches (Budiyono et al., 2024). However, the majority of research in this field concentrates on formal Moral Education lessons, with little attention paid to the unique dynamics of daily practices in dorm environments (Irfani et al., 2025).

The implementation of character, moral, and ethical education plays a crucial role in enhancing the moral intelligence of students. The combination of the *targhib* (motivation), *qudwah* (exemplary model), and dialogical approaches has proven effective in preventing harmful behaviours—particularly among students from violent or problematic backgrounds—and in fostering the development of positive moral reasoning and emotional intelligence (R. E. Sari et al., 2025).

The main goal of teaching in Islamic Boarding Schools is the development of students' moral character so that they can compete and contribute effectively within society. The patterns of activities, routines, and learning processes implemented in the Islamic Boarding School are designed to influence behavioural patterns among students, between students and *kyai/ustadz* (teachers), and between students and the surrounding community (Nurjanah et al., 2024). Islamic boarding schools are one of the educational institutions in Indonesia that contribute to developing the character of students in the form of culture and can be applied at the elementary, middle, and high school levels by internalising the process of instilling attitudes within oneself through coaching and guidance (Shiddiq et al., 2024).

Adolescents—and even adults—require social interaction. For adolescents, this ability is crucial, as they face many developmental tasks that must be fulfilled physically, psychologically, and socially to achieve optimal and holistic growth. The need to interact with people outside the boarding environment provides far greater developmental benefits. In contrast, students in Islamic Boarding Schools are not given complete freedom in this regard. This condition differs significantly from adolescents who live with their families, where they are free to interact and build relationships with others outside the household (Fatnar & Anam, 2014).

The purpose of this study is to analyse the process of moral education implemented at Nahrul Ulum Al Banihaway Islamic Boarding School, which is still in a developmental stage in terms of its training methods, curriculum, and the roles of administrators, *kyai*, and *ustadz*. The study aims to examine whether the school has sufficiently influenced the formation of students' character, and whether the moral education provided also supports their ability to socialise effectively within the community. It also explores whether there are extracurricular activities that train students to interact with society, helping them adapt to cultural realities outside the boarding environment.

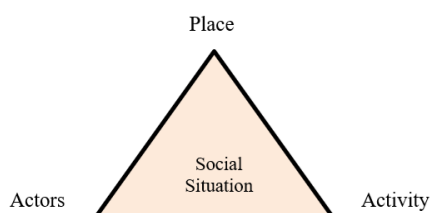
Based on preliminary data, Nahrul Ulum Al Banihaway Islamic Boarding School is a newly established institution that has only graduated one cohort. Therefore, the long-term effects of moral education on students' social lives remain limited and not yet fully observable. With only 40 students, the scope of observation is also limited; however, this allows for a more focused and in-depth investigation, emphasising the quality of the moral education process.

Theoretically and practically, this research contributes to expanding knowledge and providing insights in the field of moral education, supporting character formation from the early stages of students' entry into the Islamic Boarding School. It assesses, evaluates, and refines moral development methods to be more effective, focused, and efficient—aligned with the conditions of both the Islamic Boarding School and the local community. The implementation of moral education at Nahrul Ulum Al Banihawiy Islamic Boarding School, which has only produced one graduating cohort and has a limited number of students, offers a new perspective on the strategies and challenges of character and social skills formation within a boarding school environment that is not yet fully established structurally or culturally.

Islamic boarding schools have consistently produced a generation that can respond to the challenges and dynamics of the times, especially in the context of Islamic-based education. Character education in Islamic boarding schools is mainly delivered through the typical methods and approaches inherent in this institution (Dora & Arif, 2024). From a social perspective, this study also highlights the strategic role of Islamic Boarding Schools in shaping adolescents who are not only morally upright but also possess strong social skills to live and interact within society. Furthermore, this research may serve as a valuable reference for local governments, educational institutions, and community leaders in supporting the existence of Islamic Boarding Schools as educational institutions that contribute to the character development of young generations, particularly in Subang Regency and similar regions.

## II. METHOD

This study employs a qualitative method with a descriptive phenomenological approach (Creswell & Poth, 2017), in which the researcher seeks to explore deeply and naturally to provide a comprehensive depiction of how the process of moral education takes place within the Islamic Boarding School environment. In qualitative research, Spradley refers to this as a 'social situation' which consists of three interrelated elements: place, actors, and activities that interact synergistically (Sugiyono, 2019).



**Figure 1.** Three elements of a social situation

The subjects (actors) of this research, who provided the necessary data, were the kyai and the *ustadz/ustadzah*. The sample in this study included the head of the learning group and the place itself, namely the Islamic Boarding School where the participants reside. The activities (activity) observed took place both within the boarding school and outside of it, particularly involving non-boarding Muslim adolescents.

The study was conducted at Nahrul Ulum Al Banihawiy, located at Jl. Sukamaju RT 05/02, Bunihayu, Jalan Cagak District, Subang Regency, West Java, Indonesia (41281). Pelaksanaan penelitian selama enam minggu dari tanggal 21 April hingga 30 Mei 2025. The research was carried out over six weeks, from April 21 to May 30, 2025. This site was chosen because the Islamic Boarding School has only graduated one cohort and has

a total of 40 students. Data collection techniques included in-depth interviews, participant observation, and documentation, aiming to uncover the meaning of students' lived experiences in character formation and social skills development (Andika, 2022). To ensure data validity, the researcher applied source and technique triangulation by comparing data obtained from interviews, observations, and documentation involving various informants (kyai, teachers, and students). Additionally, member checking was conducted by confirming the interview results and data interpretations with the informants to ensure the accuracy and consistency of meaning.

Data analysis was conducted using a descriptive phenomenological approach through the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing to uncover the essence of students' lived experiences regarding moral education in the Islamic Boarding School. The researcher directly interacted with the subjects to gain a deeper understanding of the strategies, techniques, and moral values taught as part of the students' character-building process, as well as with members of the surrounding community—particularly non-boarding Muslim adolescents aged 14–20 years—to examine whether the students demonstrated stronger social qualities compared to their non-boarding peers.

### III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

#### Dimensions of Character Formation in Islamic Boarding Schools

Islamic Boarding Schools represent both non-formal and traditional forms of education, while their formal education structure is equivalent to general schools. The formal education model within Islamic Boarding Schools is known as *Diniyah* Formal Education and *Muadalah* Islamic Boarding School. These institutions play a crucial role in shaping students' character through religious instruction, the implementation of disciplined daily routines, and various social activities that cultivate a sense of responsibility (Baroroh & Khobir, 2024).

*Diniyah* Formal Education provides levels of education equivalent to public schools, namely *Ula* (elementary level), *Wustha* (junior high level), and *Ulya* (senior high level) (N. Huda, 2022). Its graduates are required to take the national examination (*Imtihan Wathani*) to obtain state recognition and to continue to higher levels of education. Historically, the presence of Islamic boarding schools began as exclusive Islamic educational institutions with a focus on Islamic education, such as learning the "yellow book", the Qur'an and Hadith with traditional learning models "*bandongan, syawir, sorogan* and others" (Arif et al., 2024). Meanwhile, *Muadalah* Education offers a formal education system with a curriculum developed independently according to the distinctive characteristics of each Islamic Boarding School, while remaining rooted in classical Islamic texts (*kitab kuning*).

Nahrul Ulum Al Banihawiy is a formal Islamic Boarding School selected as the research site because it was established only in 2022 and has just graduated its first cohort. Currently, the total number of students is 40, consisting of 27 junior high school students and 13 senior high school students, both male and female, aged between 14 and 20 years old. In addition, 10 non-boarding Muslim adolescents were observed as comparative subjects.

One of the core curriculum implemented at the Islamic Boarding School is the teaching of Creed (*Aqidah*) and Morality (*Akhlaq*). In the *Akhlaq* subject, students are expected

to promote honesty and truthfulness, refrain from envy, and demonstrate noble behaviour. The Islamic History subject is focused on delving into the life of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) with the intention of presenting him as a role model to emulate (Miftahuddin et al., 2024). The subjects taught include the pillars of faith (*rukun iman*), Islamic theology (*tauhid/ushuludin*), the prevention of deviant beliefs such as *shirk* (polytheism) and *kufir* (disbelief) and moral values toward Allah Swt, fellow human beings, oneself, and the surrounding environment.

At the Islamic Boarding School, students are required to study the classical Islamic texts (*kitab kuning*), which form an integral part of the curriculum (Amiruddin et al., 2022). Within the boarding school environment, character formation occurs comprehensively through the processes of learning, habituation, and socially embedded religious life. Character is explained as being developed through three main dimensions: personal, social, and spiritual (Koesoema, 2019). These dimensions are cultivated through practical experiences at the boarding school, such as the exemplary behaviour of the *kyai* and *ustadz*, habituation to virtuous behaviours, and discipline in adhering to boarding school rules, which together shape students into morally upright individuals.

### ***Personal Dimension***

Personal dimension relates to an individual's ability to recognise, control, and direct themselves toward positive and responsible behaviour. It reflects the capacity to maintain and develop one's life constructively, both within a limited environment and in the broader society (Julaikha et al., 2022). This personal dimension demonstrates self-integrity, manifested through values such as honesty, responsibility, independence, and self-discipline. It serves as a foundation for students to build a strong personality, resist negative environmental influences, and behave in accordance with Islamic moral teachings.

In the context of Islamic Boarding School life, the character formation of students is developed through various patterns of habituation and discipline that are applied consistently. Therefore, the Islamic boarding school's habituation is very significant in cultivating awareness, both potential and cultural (Afista & Bakar, 2020). Within the Islamic Boarding School environment, the figures of the *kyai* and *ustadz* serve as models of *uswah hasanah*, providing tangible examples of virtuous behaviour for students (Latif et al., 2025). Every morning, students follow a routine schedule of cleaning duties before lessons begin, and this rule is applied consistently. Such habituation not only fosters discipline but also instils a sense of ownership. In their daily religious practice, students demonstrate consistency in worship and polite behaviour during interactions. They are also engaged in character development and social activities (Rohmadi et al., 2024). One of the supervising *ustadz* often gives direct examples such as arriving on time, speaking politely, not interrupting work, and maintaining cleanliness (N. Sari et al., 2025). One supervising *ustadz* often provides direct examples, such as arriving on time, speaking politely, not procrastinating, and maintaining cleanliness. Students observe and imitate these behaviours, eventually performing them habitually without being instructed. Routines develop into consistent habits. Through these activities, instructors provide concrete examples of how moral values are applied in daily life (Fauzi et al., 2022).

Nahrul Ulum Al Banihaway Islamic Boarding School maintains weekly routines such as *muhasabah* (self-reflection) on Friday nights, *akhlaq* study sessions, and discipline evaluations. During *muhasabah*, students are encouraged to reflect on their daily

behaviours and assess their level of responsibility and self-discipline. The consistent habituation process, the exemplary behaviour of teachers, and the enforcement of discipline have proven to be effective means of shaping students into individuals with integrity and virtuous character. The practice of habituation and modelling remains strong, consistently applied, and unwavering amidst technological advances and the evolving times (Handayani et al., 2020).

### ***Social Dimension***

The social dimension reflects an individual's ability to interact harmoniously with others based on prevailing moral values and norms. Social character encompasses attitudes such as empathy, cooperation, tolerance, politeness, and care for others, which serve as indicators of a person's moral maturity in social life. In the context of Islamic Boarding Schools, social character is developed through collaboration among various parties, including teachers, parents, and the community, which is key to the successful internalisation of Islamic character values (Ma'arif et al., 2024).

Based on field observations, students at Nahrul Ulum Al Banihawiy Islamic Boarding School demonstrate positive social behaviour in their daily lives. They are accustomed to helping one another during dormitory cleaning duties, engaging in communal activities to maintain the environment, and cooperating in religious events such as the celebration of the Prophet's birthday (Maulid Nabi) and routine Friday night study sessions. In each of these activities, students are required to participate actively and collaborate, allowing social responsibility and solidarity values to be developed through practical experience.

KH. Nahrul Amin, one of the *ustadz*, stated, "We always emphasise the importance of togetherness among students. If a friend is ill, they should show concern by visiting and helping. We want them to develop social sensitivity, because morality is not only toward Allah, but also toward others". This statement illustrates that social moral education at the Islamic Boarding School is aimed at shaping students who are not only personally religious but also socially aware of their environment. Values such as empathy and togetherness become part of the social character internalised through modelling and habituation. In the boarding school context, habituation serves as a key step in cultivating virtuous character (Arifin & Turmudi, 2019).

At Nahrul Ulum Al Banihawiy Islamic Boarding School, there are social service and community engagement programs held at the end of each semester, such as cleaning the mosque, teaching Quranic recitation to children in the surrounding area, and distributing basic food packages. Through these activities, students learn to apply social values in community life, fostering care, responsibility, and strong social character.

The process of social discipline is also evident in dormitory life, which requires students to respect rules and maintain communal harmony. For instance, students are prohibited from using harsh language, must take turns using shared facilities, and are obliged to respect seniors and teachers. These regulations function as concrete exercises in developing polite social character, respect for diversity, and the ability to live in harmony. Weekly activities such as voluntary fasting on Mondays and Thursdays, lectures during *muhadhoroh*, and *ta'lim al-qur'an* are all efforts by the boarding school to cultivate disciplined and virtuous students (Abdunnasir & Amirudin, 2022).

### ***Spiritual Dimension***

Life at Nahrul Ulum Al Banihawiy Islamic Boarding School is deeply infused with religious activities that foster spiritual discipline. Students are habituated to perform the five daily prayers in congregation, recite the Qur'an after Maghrib, attend classical Islamic texts (*kitab kuning*) study sessions every morning and evening, and engage in *dzikir* and *muhasabah* before sleeping. This structured routine demonstrates a systematic process of spiritual habituation, instilling awareness of worship and an emotional closeness to Allah Swt.

In the context of Islamic Boarding School education, the spiritual dimension serves as the central pillar of moral formation, as all educational activities are oriented toward reinforcing Islamic religious values and spirituality. Islamic Boarding School education represents a vital moral force within Indonesia's educational system, shaping unique social values (M. Huda, 2024). Beyond character development, Islamic Boarding Schools also serve as a foundation for implementing character education (Farihi, 2021). They can be considered a solution for cultivating a generation with strong character amid the challenges of globalisation and technological development (Jannah et al., 2024).

“Here, we are not only instructed to pray diligently, but also taught the importance of intention and sincerity. The *kyai* often demonstrates directly, such as consistently performing *dzikir* after prayers and never getting angry when we make mistakes. From this, we learn that worship is not merely an obligation, but a means to calm the heart,” stated AR, a Grade XI student. This statement illustrates that the modelling behaviour of the *kyai* and *ustadz* has a significant influence on character formation.

The Islamic Boarding School has regular programs designed to deepen students' religious understanding while fostering a more personal spiritual experience, such as *mabit* (night programs for faith and piety development), *tadarus al-Qur'an* during Ramadan, and weekly *akhlaq tasawwuf* study sessions. Through these routines, students are trained to maintain consistency in worship and cultivate obedient habits as part of character development.

### **Social Competence Development in Islamic Boarding Schools**

Moral education is undoubtedly one of the core values, assessed not only through learning outcomes but also through daily interactions. Currently, many adolescents exhibit low moral values and poor character. Character refers to an individual's nature, temperament, and personality, shaped by the internalisation of various behaviours that are reflected in their thinking, attitudes, and actions. Declining responsibility, frequent student brawls, diminished creativity, reduced honesty, loss of respect, and impolite behaviour contribute to conflicts at the grassroots level and constitute a social problem (Fahdini et al., 2021).

Observations and interviews were conducted with 40 male and female students and 10 randomly selected Muslim adolescents outside the Islamic Boarding School to examine differences in interaction patterns. Social competence should not be solely defined as being "extroverted" or socially outgoing. An "introverted" individual should not be assumed to lack social skills. Social competence is categorised into two main factors: internal and external. The following indicators were derived from various sources and subsequently analysed by the researcher.

**Table 1. Indicators of ability: internal and external social**

Social Skills Indicator	Example Behaviour
<b>Internal</b>	
Cooperation	Actively involved in the task group
Empathy	Help friends in trouble without being requested
Communicate politely	Use polite language
Tolerance	No cutting other people's conversations
Conflict	Finish the problem with dialogue
<b>External</b>	
Self-confident	Dare to speak with new people.
Adaptive	Fast adapt to the new environment.
Mingle in Social	Active in public
Outgoing communication	Able to express an opinion to the public
Initiative	Help an inhabitant without requesting

Based on the results of interviews and observations, students' social competence can be viewed from two main aspects: internal social competence, which reflects relationships and interactions within the Islamic Boarding School environment, and external social competence, which represents students' interactions with the community outside the boarding school. These two aspects complement each other and serve as indicators of the Islamic Boarding School's success in fostering students' character and social skills comprehensively.

#### ***Internal Social Competence***

Students' internal social competence is observed to develop through habitual interactions among peers. Ustadz N, one of the dormitory supervisors, stated, "During activities such as communal work or cleanliness competitions, the students immediately divide tasks among themselves without being instructed. They already know who will sweep and who will prepare the equipment". Observations further reinforced this finding. No student remained passive during environmental cleaning activities; everyone actively participated.

In terms of empathy, students show concern for peers who are ill. "If a friend is sick, we usually take over their cleaning duties or bring food to their room", said one student. This demonstrates practical behaviour, as several students were observed delivering medicine, water, and food to their sick peers without being asked.

Moreover, a culture of polite communication has become a hallmark of the Islamic Boarding School. Students are habituated to speak respectfully to both *ustadz* and peers. This politeness in communication also enhances their problem-solving skills, which is an essential aspect of social character, because conflicts cannot be resolved if individuals are unable to control their emotions and modulate their tone and words.

#### ***External Social Skills***

Confidence is one of the key traits that individuals should possess. Students' ability to interact outside the Islamic Boarding School environment, whether with the community or during religious social activities, demonstrates their high level of self-confidence, particularly when participating in public events. Ustadz F stated, "Students are not shy to speak in public; if there are guests, they welcome them and introduce the boarding school". Observations corroborate this, as students confidently recite the Qur'an during

community gatherings in a loud and clear voice, indicating well-developed self-confidence.

The dormitory supervisor remarked, “Regarding social integration, when there are events involving the community, students can blend in well, although it is evident that some struggle. Some integrate easily, while others face challenges, but they continue to make an effort”. Students' ability to engage with the community is also evident in activities such as communal work, social service, or celebrating the Prophet's birthday. Students are often involved as committee members or event hosts. Through these experiences, they learn to communicate effectively with peers and the community, ensuring that the audience understands the messages or materials they convey

Based on the data, the students at Nahrul Ulum Al Banihawiy Islamic Boarding School demonstrated well-developed social character. They were able to collaborate effectively in groups, respect differences of opinion, assist peers in need without being asked, resolve interpersonal conflicts, and maintain politeness in social interactions. These social competencies were shaped through the systematic implementation of moral education within the Islamic Boarding School environment. The moral values instilled include: (a) Empathy, developed through *ukhuwah islamiyah* and communal living; (b) Cooperation, cultivated through collective activities such as gotong royong (mutual assistance), shared duties, helping one another, and deliberation; (c) Discipline and social manners, formed through habitual respect toward peers and teachers; and (d) Conflict resolution, fostered through direct experiences of managing differences or tensions among students in their daily dormitory life. The internalisation of these moral values is closely linked to the active role of the caretakers and the teachers (*ustadz/ustadzah*), who serve as living role models for the students. Although formally positioned as educators, they act as parental figures who guide, nurture, and provide a sense of security for the students. This personal and compassionate relationship contributes significantly to the effectiveness of social character formation within the Islamic Boarding Schools. Every moral value is not merely taught theoretically but exemplified through daily conduct, allowing students to internalise moral behaviour as part of their lived experience (Fahdini et al., 2021).

The life within the Islamic Boarding School represents a micro-social environment in which students (*santri*) live collectively with individuals from diverse backgrounds for twenty-four hours a day over several years. This communal setting trains students to understand social dynamics, even though the scope remains relatively limited. However, certain constraints can be observed in their external social abilities, including: (a) limited experience in interacting with heterogeneous communities outside the Islamic Boarding School. Many students display reduced flexibility when reintegrating into broader society, appearing hesitant when initiating conversations beyond their familiar peer group and often experiencing a form of cultural shock when entering the workplace, university, or urban settings; and (b) limited linguistic and expressive competence, as their communication style is primarily shaped by the Islamic Boarding School culture. They are accustomed to using formal and religious expressions, which are sometimes less easily understood by Muslim youth who have not attended Islamic Boarding Schools.

Muslim adolescents who do not attend Islamic Boarding Schools generally demonstrate stronger external social skills. This advantage is primarily shaped by the roles of parents, schools, and the surrounding community. Parents serve as the first and primary source

of education for their children. Warm parental acceptance—through providing a sense of security, meeting both physical and psychological needs, appreciating their activities, and establishing clear boundaries—helps children develop confidence in their own abilities (Fatnar & Anam, 2014). In the context of Islamic Boarding Schools, caregivers, kyai, and staff act as secondary parents who educate, guide, and protect students like the parental role at home, primarily through the teaching of civics, social sciences, and religious education.

Meanwhile, the school environment serves as an essential setting for instruction and character formation, as students spend a significant amount of time there. The school thus plays a vital role in empowering and strengthening students' moral and social competencies (Setiawan et al., 2021). The community, on the other hand, provides direct and experiential learning opportunities. It offers exposure to real-life behaviours, social conflicts, tolerance, cooperation, and various social dynamics. Education within the community context teaches adolescents to develop their personal potential and improve their quality of life through active participation in social life.

Muslim adolescents who do not attend Islamic Boarding Schools tend to be more confident in initiating conversations with new people, adapt easily to different environments, express their opinions openly, actively participate in community activities, and demonstrate higher social awareness and flexibility when facing conflicts. They are generally accustomed to interacting with diverse groups in society, which strengthens their external social competence. However, as with any strength, these advantages are accompanied by certain limitations.

The same confidence that enables them to communicate easily can sometimes be perceived as impolite, especially when speaking with elders. They tend to interrupt conversations, use informal or less respectful language, and display a lower tendency to offer help voluntarily, particularly toward unfamiliar individuals. Moreover, a lack of punctuality in fulfilling commitments often leads to interpersonal conflicts. These shortcomings may arise from the absence of continuous moral and character guidance typically provided in Islamic Boarding Schools. Previous studies have also highlighted that the character of *santri* and that of Muslim adolescents outside the boarding school context differ significantly in their modes of communication, ways of thinking, and particularly in their levels of religiosity (Melia & Umar, 2022).

The management consistently emphasises that the exemplary behaviour of the caretakers and teachers plays a crucial role in maintaining discipline, as adolescents still need adult figures to serve as role models. It is expected that when students graduate from the Islamic Boarding School, they will be able to adapt well to society and remain steadfast against negative influences that contradict Islamic moral and religious principles. Several teachers employ lecture-based and personal counselling methods to instil values of honesty, discipline, and courteous behaviour. These approaches are particularly emphasised during the early stages of a student's stay in the Islamic Boarding School, as many students initially bring with them habits and behavioural patterns formed in their previous environments.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

Overall, students tend to excel in internal social abilities such as empathy, cooperation, and proper manners. However, they still require reinforcement in external social abilities, including societal adaptation, cross-cultural communication, and social flexibility. Character formation among students at Nahrul Ulum Al Banihawiy Islamic Boarding School takes place integratively through the strengthening of three core dimensions—personal, social, and spiritual. These dimensions are implemented through role modelling (Uswah Hasanah), habituation, and discipline, which effectively cultivate honesty, responsibility, empathy, and religiosity within the students. The student is not only taught about moral values cognitively but is also trained to internalise and actualise these values in real-life behaviour. As a result, good character grows organically from within and becomes an integral part of their personality. Thus, the educational system in the Islamic Boarding School not only produces students who are knowledgeable in religion but also individuals of integrity, social awareness, and intense spirituality as a foundation for engaging with society.

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