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A LITERATURE REVIEW ON THE INTERNALIZATION OF NOBLE CHARACTER VALUES (AKHLAK MAHMUDAH) IN THE DIGITAL AGE

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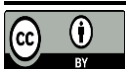
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ABSTRACT

This study stems from the phenomenon of the gap between the idealism of Islamic boarding school (pesantren) education, which is rich in moral values, and the reality of students' behavior influenced by digital culture. The research aims to describe how the process of internalizing akhlak mahmudah (noble character values) takes place in pesantren in facing the challenges of the digital era. This study uses a literature review approach by examining relevant scholarly sources on the internalization of akhlak mahmudah values in pesantren during the digital age. The findings show that internalization occurs through three stages: value transformation, transaction, and transinternalization, which are strengthened through the strategies of exemplary behavior, habituation, supervision, and integration of values into pesantren culture. Digital challenges such as uncontrolled access to information, lifestyles driven by social media trends, and weak character-based digital literacy are major concerns in education, particularly within the pesantren context. This study offers a fresh perspective by highlighting the importance of adaptive and contextual strategies in nurturing students' character so that it remains relevant amid the intense flow of digital influence.

Keywords: *Akhlak Mahmudah, Internalization, Pesantren, Digital Age*



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Introduction

Islamic boarding school is an educational institution engaged in the field of Islamic religion which is a shelter for anyone who wants to explore Islamic religion knowledge, especially in the formation of a religious, knowledgeable and noble personality. Islamic boarding school are the foundation of educational support in Indonesia and are the oldest educational institution the move from traditional systems to modern systems that provide social function to the surrounding community (Muid dkk., 2024). Although life in the pesantren is subject to strict supervision and routines that support the internalization of moral values, in reality, every individual has a tendency to deviate from the norm, as not everyone fully complies with the established rules. As a result, many violations occur, such as failing to attend congregational prayers, leaving the boarding school without permission, and uncontrolled use of social media.

This demonstrates that the strict supervision and rigorous routines within the boarding school environment do not guarantee the maximum internalization of virtuous moral values, as numerous factors influence the success of how the internalization process of these values among students in the boarding school unfolds. Like the students, even though the boarding school environment consistently upholds and practices religious norms to the fullest extent possible while living alongside religious leaders, it cannot be denied that many students violate the rules or regulations of the boarding school (Hoerunisa dkk., 2017).

In reality, the digital era highlights a gap between ideal expectations and on-the-ground practices, as the development of information technology has influenced various aspects of life, including the lives of students. Students now live in a digital environment, so they cannot escape the use of social media, internet access, and exposure to global information that is so fast and vast. According to data from APJII (the Indonesian Internet Service Providers Association), as of 2024, the number of internet users in Indonesia reached 221,563,479 out of a total population of 278,696,200 in 2023. According to the survey results, internet penetration in Indonesia reached 79.5%, an increase of 1.4% compared to the previous period. In terms of age, the majority of internet users are Gen Z (born between 1997 and 2012) at 34.40%, Millennials (born between 1981 and 1996) at 30.62%, Gen X (born between 1965 and 1980) at 18.98%, post-Gen Z (born after 2023) at 9.17%, baby boomers (born between 1946 and 1964) at 6.58%, and pre-boomers (born in 1945) at 0.24% (*Asosiasi Penyelenggara Jasa Internet Indonesia*, 2024). Based on the data above, internet users are predominantly young people, including santri.

On one hand, the digital era offers many conveniences in the learning process, such as tools for da'wah and sharing knowledge. However, on the other hand, the openness of the digital world poses serious challenges, as the information obtained cannot be fully controlled by ustadz/ustadzah or even the parents of santri. Information can spread without considering the appropriate target audience, as the digital system is general and

open, allowing anyone to access information without strict filtering. This can trigger moral degradation among religious students. In fact, many students are found to upload content, interact, and follow trends that do not reflect Islamic moral values, both outside and within the boarding school environment, creating a gap in the moral development process that should be the core of boarding school education. Therefore, moral values require direct intervention to foster empathy and sympathy among the community.

Research conducted by (Yusuf dkk., 2023) explains that boarding schools play a significant role in character education through the maintenance of habits that contain moral values. This research emphasizes how the integration of traditional boarding school values with the use of digital technology can support the process of character formation among students. However, the study still focuses on the general concept of character education and does not specifically discuss the process of internalizing moral values in the context of the increasingly complex challenges of the digital era.

Meanwhile, research conducted by (Arifin dkk., 2023) explains the importance of an integrative learning model in instilling moral values in madrasahs. This research shows that integrative methods that combine cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects can help students understand and practice moral values comprehensively. However, the study focuses more on the madrasah context and has not elaborated on the approaches taken in the pesantren environment, particularly in addressing the impact of digitalization on santri behavior.

With these research results, this study is novel in that it focuses on how the process of internalizing moral values takes place in Islamic boarding schools in the face of the challenges of the digital age. This research not only examines the theoretical methods of internalization but also explores concrete practices, such as habit-forming activities, role modeling, and adaptive strategies that can be developed to respond to the positive and negative impacts of the digital era on the behavior of boarding school students.

This provides an overview of one preventive approach, namely the internalization of virtuous moral values for boarding school students in the digital age to prevent the erosion of moral values in the digital era and to position students as “Agents of Change” in developing the quality of the younger generation across various aspects while minimizing the causes of character-related issues in the world (Badrudin Muhammad, 2022). The internalization of moral values among students serves to cultivate a society characterized by faith and piety rooted in truth, upholding values of justice, goodness, reflection, and the noble ideals of humanism. (Juhaeriyah, 2022)

The gap between the ideal of a student and their reality in the boarding school environment highlights the importance of appropriate and more adaptive strategies in internalizing moral values in the digital age. Pesantren must provide strong education and make a positive contribution to character formation so that the changes that occur can

meet the needs of santri in preparing to face future challenges. Internalization is not sufficient through verbal methods or by example alone but must also be designed using methods appropriate to the characteristics of the era faced by santri. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to determine how Islamic boarding schools can formulate appropriate strategies or approaches in instilling good morals in students without losing their relevance amid the rapid pace of digitalization.

Research Method

The type of research in this study is qualitative. Qualitative research is research aimed at describing a process of activities that occur in the field as material for further study in order to find shortcomings and weaknesses as a form of improvement (Ibrahim dkk., 2018). The method used in this study is descriptive, employing a literature review approach, with data sources obtained from written materials such as books, journals, and documents relevant to the discussion on the internalization of virtuous moral values in Islamic boarding schools in the digital era.

Results and Discussion

A. The Concept of Akhlak Mahmudah in Pesantren Education

Akhlak comes from Arabic, meaning manners, nature, or behavior, and can be equated with politeness. Terminologically, akhlak is a trait inherent in the human soul, emerging spontaneously when needed without prior consideration or thought (Badrudin Muhammad, 2022). Akhlak mahmudah can also be interpreted as noble behavior, character, and traits according to Islamic teachings. Akhlak also reflects one's faith and purity of soul, resulting in good deeds that emerge spontaneously without coercion or heavy consideration (Soleh dkk., 2024).

Good akhlak also reflects how Islamic values are instilled in a santri, which is then reflected in their daily life, both within and outside the pesantren. There are five fundamental elements that form the basis of the character education system and moral values in Islamic boarding schools: the boarding school as a dormitory for students, the mosque as the center of civilization and education, the students as learners, kyai or ustadz ustadzah as leaders and teachers in the pesantren, and finally the study of religious texts (Fahmi dkk., 2024). The praiseworthy moral values instilled in pesantren education include contentment with Allah, honesty, trust in Allah, gratitude, responsibility, patience, politeness, empathy, and humility. These values form the core of santri character development and are the primary objective of pesantren education.

The purpose of internalizing virtuous moral values in Islamic boarding schools is to shape individuals who are pious, possess a perfect soul, and are accustomed to what is good, noble, and praiseworthy, while being able to avoid what is bad, shameful, and

blameworthy (Damanhuri, 2015). The factors that can influence a person's moral character include their behavior, which is manifested in their actions; instincts, which are innate abilities driven by psychological impulses that satisfy personal desires; innate patterns, such as curiosity; desires, which are strong inner urges; habits; and the environment, which is the outer sphere of human existence and the place where people interact with one another. and will or destiny (Fahmi dkk., 2024).

B. Challenges of Moral Internalization in the Digital Era

In line with the development of the times, technology has entered every part of human life. Islamic education is no exception to the influence of technology in this era. The integration of technology in education has become an absolute necessity that must be mastered and utilized across all educational institutions. However, alongside this, Islamic boarding schools must be able to analyze the opportunities and challenges they will face in the digital age, identify social education issues, and determine the strategies that need to be implemented (Kholifah, 2022).

The digital era brings a rapid and widespread flow of information. This has both positive and negative aspects in its application. On the positive side, technology opens doors to new connections, perspectives, and information in accessing knowledge, expanding religious horizons, and strengthening communication. However, the negative aspects include moral instability among the younger generation, vulnerability of children to exposure to knowledge, external socialization, and public media. The most dangerous aspect is that young adults who have received incorrect information about Islam through digital media begin to apply extremist values in their daily behavior. Thus, the openness of the technological world poses serious challenges in the moral education of students, particularly in the context of Islamic boarding schools (Zainuddin dkk., 2025). The real challenges faced by Islamic boarding schools in moral education in the digital age include:

1. Limited control over information access: the spread of unverified information, superficial religious understanding due to exposure to instant content, and the negative influence of digital culture that can weaken moral values (Zainuddin dkk., 2025).
2. The emergence of a digital lifestyle: students are increasingly exposed to trends on social media, such as fashion, speech patterns, and entertainment styles that sometimes conflict with Islamic values of simplicity and modesty.
3. Lack of digital literacy grounded in moral values. Not all students understand how to use technology wisely, making it difficult for them to distinguish between content that is morally beneficial and harmful.
4. 4 Resistance to change. Some pesantren communities may be concerned that digital technology will erode the traditional values that have been upheld for so long (Darunnajah, 2024).

5. Limited infrastructure and digital access. Many pesantren lack adequate internet and digital access, which must be addressed to ensure that santri can utilize the internet without being exposed to negative content. (Darunnajah, 2024)

If these conditions are not addressed strategically, they can lead to moral degradation, weak character, and a decline in commitment to pesantren values. This indicates that the challenges of the digital era are not merely technical but also touch on fundamental aspects of character formation.

C. Strategies for Internalizing Moral Values in Islamic Boarding Schools

In the Indonesian dictionary, internalization is defined as deep understanding and mastery that occurs through coaching, guidance, counseling, training, and so on. The internalization of virtuous moral values refers to the process of instilling such values. The moral character of students today is highly dynamic, and the internalization process is influenced by the ever-evolving digital world. Therefore, the approach used in moral education must align with the current changes in students' character.

Various strategies must be developed by Islamic boarding schools to maximize the cultivation of moral values among students. (Iplih, 2016) identified six main strategies used in instilling Islamic character values at the Al-Mumtaz Islamic boarding school, namely through role modeling, weekly moral value programs, fostering good behavior, moral knowing approaches, full control, and character development through entrepreneurial activities. These strategies demonstrate a systematic and integrative approach in shaping the personalities of students both spiritually and socially.

In line with this (Wirayanti, 2024) emphasizes the importance of a unique boarding school approach based on emotional closeness between teachers and students, strong spiritual discipline, and the intensive application of Islamic values in daily life. According to her, these three elements are the key to making pesantren education effective in fostering noble character among students.

Both perspectives show that the cultivation of noble character is not sufficient through teaching alone but requires emotional involvement, comprehensive supervision, and consistent instillation of values in the students' lives. According to Muhaimin, as quoted by (Aziz, 2016) there are three stages in the internalization process that can represent its stages, namely: 1) the value transformation stage, 2) the value transaction stage, 3) the transinternalization stage.

- a. Value transformation stage: a process carried out by educators to inform students about good and bad values. In this case, moral values are explicitly conveyed in learning materials such as akidah akhlak, fiqh, and hadith. Or through regular sermons given by ustadz/ustadzah.
- b. Value transaction stage: an educational process using two-way communication, or positive interaction between teachers and students. In this case, students are

encouraged to engage in dialogue and interaction in daily activities that can help shape their character, such as muhadhoroh, dormitory duty and management activities, and routine worship activities such as congregational prayer and tahajud together.

- c. Internalization stage: a deep process that is not only carried out through verbal communication but also through mental attitude and personality. Moral values are strengthened through the example set by ustadz/ustadzah/mudabbir, as well as through the boarding school culture that facilitates the consistent repetition of good habits such as greetings, smiles, and politeness, thereby becoming part of a student's character.

Conclusion

The process of internalizing moral values in Islamic boarding schools in the face of digital era challenges is implemented through a systematic and layered approach. It begins with strengthening values, practicing habits, and character formation through real-life examples. The strategies employed include modeling, habit formation, full supervision, strengthening emotional connections between teachers and students, and consistent pesantren activities infused with moral values. Pesantren also apply the internalization process through three stages:

- 1) value transformation, which is the explicit communication of values through lessons.
- 2) value transaction, an interactive process through routine activities and student organizations.
- 3) transinternalization, which is character building through the cultivation of values and deeper role modeling.

In the digital age, boarding schools face challenges such as unrestricted access to information, a lifestyle that tends to be consumerist and permissive, and a lack of digital literacy based on values. However, through adaptive strategies such as value-based supervision, an emotional approach, and the implementation of internal digital regulations, boarding schools are able to maintain the relevance of the internalization of moral values and remain a moral bulwark for the Muslim youth.

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