



Pesantren and Politics: Moral and Social Values in Santri Character Formation

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Abstract

The internalization of moral and social values in pesantren does not always occur uniformly because it is influenced by the family backgrounds of santri, parenting styles, and technological developments. This study aims to analyze the internalization of theological, moral, and social values, their implementation in the daily lives of santri, the factors influencing this process, and the role of Mawaridussalam Islamic Boarding School in shaping santri character. This study employed a qualitative method with a phenomenological approach. Data were collected through participant observation, interviews, and documentation involving 20 informants consisting of pesantren leaders, teachers, student care administrators, and santri representatives. Data were analyzed through data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing, while validity was ensured through source and technique triangulation. The findings reveal that theological, moral, and social values are internalized through teacher role modelling, leadership training, educational guidance, worship habituation, deliberation, layered supervision, and the implementation of rewards and sanctions. The core values include sincerity, muraqabah, trust in God, trustworthiness, justice, equality, honesty, responsibility, and social care. This internalization is supported by a 24-hour residential education system, structured evaluation, and collaboration with parents, while differences in family backgrounds and technology use remain significant challenges. These findings affirm that pesantren functions not only as an institution of moral education but also as a training ground for social leadership among santri.

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INTRODUCTION

Education serves not only to develop knowledge but also to shape students' ability to internalize and apply values in their daily lives (Miftahuddin et al., 2024). In Islamic education, character development integrates faith, piety, knowledge, worship, and moral conduct so that religious teachings can serve as the foundation for behaving and acting responsibly (Wardany & Sukmawati, 2024). This process requires an educational environment that enables values to be learned, emulated, internalized, and applied on an ongoing basis (Salim et al., 2024).

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Islamic boarding schools are characterized by an educational approach that integrates formal learning, boarding life, the exemplary role of educators, the cultivation of religious practices, student organizations, the enforcement of discipline, and social interaction (Atqia & Zuhriyah, 2021). The boarding system allows for 24-hour guidance so that students can apply the values they have learned in their relationships with kiai, ustaz, administrators, and fellow students (Salim et al., 2024). This character development occurs through the internalization of values the process by which values transform from knowledge into awareness and habits reflected in behavior (Wasim et al., 2026). Role modeling, dialogue, habit formation, hands-on practice, guidance, and supervision serve as complementary methods in shaping students' character (Muali et al., 2021).

The values instilled in pesantren include theological, moral, and social values. Theological values relate to the relationship between humans and Allah SWT, which is manifested through faith, piety, sincerity, muraqabah, tawakal, and devotion to worship (Miftahuddin et al., 2024). Theological awareness fosters self-control because students understand that their behavior is not only bound by institutional rules but also carries religious accountability (Wasim et al., 2026). Meanwhile, moral and social values include trustworthiness, justice, honesty, equality, consultation, discipline, responsibility, respect, cooperation, and concern for others (Hakim & Sumadi, 2026). These values are put into practice through the division of tasks, organization, dormitory life, mutual cooperation, conflict resolution, and the enforcement of rules (Junaedi et al., 2025; Salabi, 2025).

The application of moral and social values is linked to political education within the pesantren environment. Political education in this context is not limited to political parties, general elections, or the struggle for power, but encompasses the development of awareness regarding leadership, trust, justice, deliberation, participation, rights, and obligations in communal life (Zainuddin et al., 2026). Student organizations provide experiences in carrying out duties, expressing opinions, abiding by collective decisions, and being accountable for one's responsibilities (Halomoan et al., 2023). Organizational life also teaches that leadership is not only about position but also about service, setting a good example, and responsibility toward the common good (Wasim et al., 2026). Instilling the values of balance, tolerance, justice, and acceptance of differences helps strengthen a moderate attitude in the lives of santri (Rozaq et al., 2022).

The Mawaridussalam Islamic Boarding School fosters character development through education, the practice of worship, dormitory life, leadership training, and the Mawaridussalam Student Organization (Oesterle et al., 2026). Theological values are introduced through congregational prayer, Duha prayer, recitation of the Quran, zikir, supplication, sincerity, muraqabah, and tawakal, while moral and social values are instilled through exemplary behavior, deliberation, shared responsibility, discipline, recognition, and educational sanctions. The training and organization of students provide a space to learn to lead, obey rules, implement programs, make decisions, and safeguard the common good. These characteristics make the Mawaridussalam Islamic Boarding School a relevant subject for study as both a space for moral education and a venue for social leadership training.

The internalization of values does not always result in the same behavior, as it is influenced by motivation, family background, habits, educational experiences, and the students' ability to adapt (Salabi, 2025). Cultural diversity, economic conditions, and parenting styles can pose challenges to adaptation, but they also provide opportunities to learn tolerance, equality, empathy, and

cooperation. Peer support can help students develop independence, self-confidence, and the readiness to tackle problems together (Azizah et al., 2025). Successful student development also requires coordination among school leaders, teachers, dormitory staff, student organizations, and parents in carrying out consistent monitoring and evaluation (Siregar et al., 2023).

Advances in digital technology present additional challenges in the character development of pesantren students. The use of smartphones, social media, online games, and digital entertainment can influence communication patterns, discipline, and social relationships, particularly when students are outside the pesantren environment (Hamli, 2023; Muhith et al., 2023). Technology can support learning, but its use without guidance can expose students to content that is inconsistent with educational values and increase the risk of negative behavior in the digital space. Islamic boarding schools need to respond to these changes through digital ethics education, the strengthening of moral awareness, and collaboration with students' guardians not merely through prohibitions and supervision (Shobariyah et al., 2026).

Previous research has examined character development through communal living and religious practices (Atqia & Zuhriyah, 2021), the hidden curriculum (Salim et al., 2024), the leadership and exemplary role of *kyai* (Muali et al., 2021), democratic values and moderation (Halomoan et al., 2023), solidarity and peer support (Azizah et al., 2025), and the cultural challenges faced by Islamic boarding schools in the digital age (Muhith et al., 2023; Shobariyah et al., 2026). These studies indicate that the character development of santri occurs through the interplay of religious values, institutional culture, leadership, and social experiences. However, theological, moral, and social aspects, as well as leadership, santri organizations, family, and technology, are still largely discussed in isolation; consequently, their interconnectedness within Islamic value-based political education has not yet been fully elucidated.

This study offers a novel approach by analyzing the Mawaridussalam Islamic Boarding School as a space for the internalization of theological values, moral and social development, and leadership training for students within a single study. Political education is understood as a learning process focused on trust, justice, equality, deliberation, participation, leadership, responsibility, and concern for the common good not as involvement in practical politics. This study aims to analyze the process of internalizing theological, moral, and social values; their application in students' lives; the factors influencing them; and the role of the boarding school's environment and guidance system. The research findings are expected to strengthen studies on boarding school education and serve as a basis for evaluating the development of a structured, fair, and technology-adaptive student guidance program supported by collaboration with students' guardians.

METHODS

This study employs a qualitative method, specifically field research with a phenomenological approach, to understand the informants' experiences in interpreting the internalization of theological and social moral values at the Mawaridussalam Islamic Boarding School (Akem et al., 2025; Anidar et al., 2026; Aryasutha et al., 2025; Efendi et al., 2026; Eltoukhi et al., 2025; Engkizar et al., 2025; 2026; Oktavia et al., 2023; Sugiyono, 2019). Primary data were obtained from 20 informants, consisting of the boarding school's leadership, ustaz, student welfare administrators, and students, who were selected through purposive sampling based on their involvement in and understanding of the mentoring system. Secondary data were derived from boarding school

regulations, organizational documents, activity logs, evaluation reports, photographs, and related written sources. Data were collected through participatory observation, semi-structured interviews, and documentation focused on religious practices, dormitory life, discipline, leadership development, organizational activities, deliberations, rewards, sanctions, and students' social interactions.

The data were analyzed through reduction, presentation, and drawing of conclusions (Baroud et al., 2025; Engkizar et al., 2024; 2026; Moleong, 2021). Interview transcripts were coded and grouped into themes: the internalization of values, the implementation of theological and social moral values, influencing factors, and the role of the pesantren environment. Data validity was examined through source and method triangulation, repeated observations, and confirmation with informants (Engkizar et al., 2023; Seminikhyna & Lutsenko, 2024). The researcher served as the primary instrument, supported by interview guidelines, field notes, recording devices, and documentation. The researcher's position as an alumnus was managed through reflective notes and by separating personal experiences from the current data. The study was conducted after obtaining permission from the pesantren; all informants participated voluntarily after receiving an explanation of the research, and their identities and data were kept confidential.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The Process of Internalizing Theological and Social Moral Values in the Character Development of Santri

At the Mawaridussalam Islamic Boarding School, the internalization of values is carried out through setting a good example, habit formation, guidance, leadership development, supervision, and the involvement of santri in boarding school activities. The 24-hour educational environment ensures that values are not only understood but also practiced in daily life. Role modeling is evident in the teachers' discipline in participating in congregational prayers, performing the Duha prayer, reading the Quran, and accompanying students' activities, ensuring consistency between the values taught and the educators' behavior (Director of Mawaridussalam Islamic Boarding School, personal communication, 2026). Setting a good example is crucial in character education because the educators' behavior can be observed and emulated by the students (Ulwan, 2024). Daily interactions with the *kiai* and ustaz also help these values develop into habits and a sense of awareness (Muali et al., 2021; Wasim et al., 2026).

Exemplary behavior is reinforced through a digital attendance app that tracks teachers' participation in religious activities. This system demonstrates that rules apply equally to students, teachers, and administrators, thereby enhancing trust in the boarding school's educational guidance. Religious activities, dormitory life, rules, and daily interactions form a hidden curriculum that supports character development (Salim et al., 2024). The pesantren culture, which integrates rules, the practice of worship, exemplary behavior, and communal activities, also fosters discipline and sustained cooperation (Salabi, 2025).

The internalization of values is also achieved through educational sanctions. Pesantren avoid physical punishment and replace it with activities such as writing short surahs, reading the Quran, cleaning the surroundings, participating in personal guidance sessions, or having the student's guardian present for certain violations (Informant in the Field of Student Care, personal communication, 2026). Sanctions are designed to help students understand their mistakes, accept the consequences, and correct their behavior based on self-

awareness.

Leadership training is carried out under the motto “willing to be led and ready to lead” within the dormitory administration, regional councils, activity coordinators, and the Mawaridussalam Student Organization. Students are entrusted with organizing activities, maintaining order, enforcing discipline, mentoring younger students, and submitting reports to the *ustadz* (Source: Student Affairs Department, personal communication, 2026). These experiences foster leadership, responsibility, obedience, self-confidence, and problem-solving skills. The leadership development program also links moral education with political education, as students learn about trust, the division of roles, decision-making, adherence to rules, and the common good.

The Implementation of Social Morality and Political Education in the Lives of Boarding School Students

The implementation of social ethics at the Mawaridussalam Islamic Boarding School is evident through the values of trustworthiness, justice, deliberation, equality, noble character, honesty, responsibility, independence, and social awareness. These values are applied in dormitory life, student organizations, activity management, discipline enforcement, and relationships among students. Students who serve as dormitory managers and leaders of the Mawaridussalam Student Organization are entrusted with maintaining order, managing activities, and recording the revenue of the boarding school’s business entity. These experiences foster honesty, attention to detail, and accountability for decisions (Informant in the Field of Student Care, personal communication, 2026). Leadership in Islamic politics is directed toward safeguarding the common good and upholding justice (Al-Mawardi, 2020). The interplay between religion, power, education, and the authority of the *kiai* can also shape students’ political understanding when grounded in responsibility, the public good, and the ethical exercise of authority (Zainuddin et al., 2026).

Justice is upheld through guidance that takes into account the needs and circumstances of each student without using a family’s social status as a basis for granting special privileges (Director of the Mawaridussalam Islamic Boarding School, personal communication, 2026). Equality is realized through uniforms, shared facilities, meals from the communal kitchen, and rules that apply to all students. These practices minimize symbols of social status and encourage students to judge others based on their character, responsibility, and achievements. The values of *ta’dib*, *tawasuth*, *tasamuh*, and *ukhawah* instilled through exemplary behavior and social-religious practices can serve as a social cohesive force and shape the character of students to be inclusive, moderate, and empathetic (Hakim & Sumadi, 2026).

Deliberation takes place through organizational meetings, dormitory forums, evaluations, and *bahtsul masail*. Students are given the opportunity to express their views based on reasons and evidence, listen to others’ opinions, and accept collective decisions (Informant: Mawaridussalam Student Organization Executive, personal communication, 2026). Mutual understanding requires equal opportunities to present reasons without undue domination (Boyne & Habermas, 1986). Deliberation serves as a form of political education because students learn that decisions require argumentation, consideration of the common good, and a willingness to accept the outcome. Democratic values can be instilled through learning, dormitory life, social cooperation, and student organizations (Halomoan et al., 2023), while the leadership of the *kiai* and the pesantren culture reinforce moderation, tolerance, justice, and acceptance of differences (Rozaq et al., 2022).

Good character is prioritized over the acquisition of knowledge, in

accordance with the principle of *al-adabu fauqa al-'ilmi*. This value is embodied through speaking politely, respecting teachers, maintaining proper conduct, and treating peers with kindness. Good conduct helps students absorb knowledge and use it responsibly (Hermawan et al., 2020). Honesty is cultivated when students serve as dormitory managers, discipline enforcers, financial administrators, or activity coordinators. They are required to be objective in documenting violations, reporting finances, and safeguarding others' property. These practices form the foundation for building integrity (Arif, 2012), while the cashless transaction system helps ensure orderly and accountable record-keeping.

Responsibility and independence are linked to the Five Core Values of the Mawaridussalam Islamic Boarding School, which emphasize sincerity, simplicity, and self-reliance. These values are put into practice through assignments such as serving as event coordinators, student council members, dormitory managers, and student organization leaders (Khaliq, 2019). Students learn to manage conflicts, make decisions, organize activities, and solve problems through the delegation of responsibilities, which is always accompanied by guidance and supervision.

Social awareness develops through the habit of helping sick friends, fetching food, lending clothes, studying together, and supporting friends who are facing difficulties (Student Informant, personal communication, 2026). Emotional and informational support, as well as direct assistance from peers, can strengthen students' independence, self-confidence, and ability to cope with problems (Azizah et al., 2025). Living together, helping one another, and working together serve as important means of fostering students' social responsibility (Muhaimin, 2009).

Factors Influencing the Process of Value Internalization

The process of value internalization is influenced by internal and external factors. Internal factors include social interaction, role modeling, multi-layered supervision, the use of technology, and routine evaluations, while external factors include cultural background, family upbringing, the attitudes of students' guardians, and the use of technology outside the pesantren. Interactions between teachers and students that take place in classrooms, mosques, dormitories, dining halls, and various activities allow students to observe the application of values firsthand and make it easier for teachers to monitor their behavioral development.

Technology is utilized through surveillance cameras for security and disciplinary oversight, as well as a cashless transaction system to enhance traceability and accountability in the use of funds (Informant from the Student Care Division, personal communication, 2026). Supervision is also carried out by homeroom teachers, dormitory supervisors, dormitory administrators, the Student Care Division, and the Mawaridussalam Student Organization. Records of violations and students' progress are discussed during weekly evaluations. If behavioral changes are observed, the boarding school takes a personalized approach before determining the form of guidance. Regular evaluations are necessary so that decisions are based on records of progress, not momentary impressions (Rismawati, 2022).

Cultural diversity, ethnicity, economic circumstances, and family customs influence how students communicate, follow rules, and respond to guidance. However, communal living also serves as a means of learning tolerance and adaptability. The attitudes of students' guardians also determine the consistency of guidance, as support for the rules can strengthen a child's sense of responsibility, whereas defense that fails to consider the full scope of the issue

can hinder it (Informant in the Field of Student Care, personal communication, 2026). Since parental involvement influences a child's academic and moral development, family guidance and pesantren guidance need to be aligned (Nisa, 2024). Differences in motivation, background, and external environmental influences also need to be addressed through setting a good example, structured habits, and a personalized approach that helps students understand the moral reasoning behind the rules (Salabi, 2025).

Technology poses a challenge when students are at home during school breaks. Unsupervised use of smartphones can lead to increased gaming or access to non-educational content. Some students exhibit changes after returning to the boarding school, such as becoming passive, withdrawn, having difficulty interacting, or lacking discipline (Informant from the Student Care Department, personal communication, 2026). Unguided use of technology can affect students' habits, communication, and character (Arifin, 2025), especially when digital skills are not accompanied by spiritual and social maturity (Muali et al., 2021). Digital changes also affect the organizational culture of Islamic boarding schools, so guidance must be adapted to the character of the generation and developments in the social environment (Muhith et al., 2023).

The success of value internalization depends on the cultural cohesion of the pesantren, teachers' exemplary behavior, supervision, evaluation, parenting styles, and students' habits outside the institution. Pesantren need to strengthen communication with students' guardians and develop digital ethics education so that technology use is controlled not only through supervision but also through students' moral awareness (Shobariyah et al., 2026).

The Role of the Environment and the Pesantren's Development System

The environment at the Mawaridussalam Pesantren serves as the primary space for character development through dormitory rotations, the strengthening of ukhuwah Islamiyah, the implementation of rewards and sanctions, and opportunities for self-improvement. Dormitory rotations are conducted periodically to prevent the formation of closed cliques and to broaden students' social connections. This policy trains students to adapt, communicate, understand differences, and build solidarity with peers from diverse backgrounds (Informant in the Field of Student Care, personal communication, 2026). A boarding system that brings together students from different backgrounds can serve as a space for the internalization of character, adaptability, and leadership through comprehensive and sustained guidance (Ubaidillah, 2020).

Dormitory life fosters a sense of care through direct experiences, such as helping a sick friend, fetching food, and providing assistance to students in need (Student Informant, personal communication, 2026). These interactions make the dormitory a space for social learning that cultivates empathy, independence, and responsibility. Peer support can also strengthen students' confidence in their own abilities and their readiness to face challenges together (Azizah et al., 2025). The development of independence in boarding school education occurs through role modeling, guidance, motivation, and the gradual assignment of responsibilities in accordance with the students' developmental stages (Rohmah et al., 2026).

Islamic brotherhood is strengthened through the enforcement of rules, the use of facilities, the distribution of food, the culture of waiting in line, and the fulfillment of the same obligations regardless of family status. Even the children of teachers or administrators do not receive special privileges. These practices instill the understanding that a person's dignity is determined by character and responsibility, not by social status. The internalization of the Panca

Jiwa Pondok through introduction, exemplary behavior, habit formation, and deep reflection can strengthen the students' social piety, personal maturity, and spirituality (Aw et al., 2023). The values of brotherhood, tolerance, etiquette, and moderation supported by exemplary behavior and socio-religious habits serve as a social glue that transforms the diversity of the students into a strength for building harmony (Hakim & Sumadi, 2026). This process also takes place through the hidden curriculum, which is reflected in the rules, daily activities, the kiai's exemplary conduct, and the culture of pesantren life (Sadiyah, 2022).

Islamic boarding schools use awards such as the "cleanest room" and "most disciplined student" titles to encourage cooperation, cleanliness, and discipline. Meanwhile, disciplinary actions are administered in an educational manner after students are given the opportunity to explain their misconduct. The implementation of character education through role modeling, habit formation, guidance, rewards, and disciplinary measures can foster a boarding school environment that is safe, inclusive, and respectful of students' dignity (Nursehah et al., 2024). After completing their sanctions, students' mistakes are not continually brought up, and students who demonstrate positive change may continue to participate in activities and be entrusted with leadership roles. This approach teaches that every action has consequences, but every individual still has the opportunity to improve themselves.

The rehabilitation system helps students resume their social roles without being stigmatized, which could hinder their transformation. A second chance, accompanied by supervision, can foster a new sense of responsibility, while supportive leadership and an educational environment ensure the consistency of guidance (Siregar et al., 2023). Overall, the environment and guidance system at the Mawaridussalam Islamic Boarding School integrate religious practices, dormitory life, student organizations, deliberation, rewards, sanctions, and rehabilitation into a single, continuous educational process. The practice of worship builds spiritual awareness; dormitory life fosters a sense of care; student organizations train leadership skills; deliberations encourage participation; and rewards, sanctions, and rehabilitation instill discipline and a sense of responsibility in the students.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the internalization of theological, moral, and social values at the Mawaridussalam Islamic Boarding School is shaped through the synergy between educators' exemplary conduct, the practice of worship, dormitory life, guidance, supervision, and the delegation of responsibilities to students. This process establishes religious values as the foundation for self-discipline while simultaneously developing students' ability to fulfill their duties, engage in deliberation, make decisions, and consider the common good. The contribution of this study lies in the understanding that political education in Islamic boarding schools need not take the form of practical politics but can be fostered through leadership experiences grounded in ethics, responsibility, and social concern. Its success depends on consistent guidance within the pesantren, family support, and the students' ability to navigate the influence of technology. Therefore, pesantren administrators need to strengthen educators' role as role models, support student organizations, conduct regular behavioral evaluations, implement educational and restorative sanctions, maintain communication with parents, and provide digital ethics education. This guidance model can be applied to other Islamic boarding schools by adapting it to the students' personalities, the institution's culture, and the needs of their social environment.

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