

Strategic Integration of General and Religious Education in Indonesian Pesantren: Building Holistic Character for National Resilience.


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<p>Article history: Received 15-10-2025 Revised 29-10-2025 Accepted 20-11-2025 Published 11-12-2025</p> <p>How to cite: Manaf, S., Daroajat, M. H., Zh, M. H. R., Thaariq, Z. Z. A., Syam, A. R., & Jamil, H. A. (2025). Strategic Integration of General and Religious Education in Indonesian Pesantren: Building Holistic Character for National Resilience. <i>Edcomtech: Jurnal Kajian Teknologi Pendidikan</i>, 10(2), 133–146. https://doi.org/10.17977/um039v10i22025p133-146</p> <p>© The Author(s)  This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License</p>	<p>Penelitian ini meneliti strategi yang diterapkan oleh pesantren (sekolah berasrama Islam) untuk mengintegrasikan pendidikan umum dan pendidikan keagamaan, sehingga memperkuat perannya sebagai pilar pendidikan nasional. Tujuan penelitian ini adalah untuk mengidentifikasi model integrasi yang efektif yang tidak mengorbankan identitas keagamaan. Metodologi yang digunakan adalah studi multi-kasus dengan pendekatan kualitatif. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara mendalam, observasi partisipan, dan analisis dokumen di beberapa pesantren, dan data dianalisis secara tematik. Temuan penelitian mengungkapkan bahwa keberhasilan integrasi ini bergantung pada pendekatan holistik. Kurikulum terpadu yang menetapkan nilai-nilai Islam sebagai landasan bagi seluruh mata pelajaran merupakan kunci utama, yang didukung oleh kepemimpinan visioner dan pemanfaatan Teknologi Informasi dan Komunikasi (TIK). Kolaborasi strategis dengan perguruan tinggi terbukti saling memperkaya khazanah keilmuan. Tantangan utama meliputi kesenjangan digital, keterbatasan anggaran, dan lokasi yang terpencil, yang diatasi melalui negosiasi kurikulum secara aktif dan manajemen yang inovatif. Integrasi ini memperkuat pembentukan karakter santri (peserta didik) melalui internalisasi nilai-nilai seperti disiplin, empati, dan moderasi beragama di seluruh aspek kehidupan pesantren. Sebagai kesimpulan, pesantren menawarkan model pendidikan yang sangat baik yang mensintesis modernitas dengan kearifan religius lokal. Temuan ini menyoroti perlunya kebijakan pendukung yang inklusif dan penelitian lebih lanjut untuk mengkaji dampak jangka panjang dari integrasi ini terhadap lulusan pesantren di dunia kerja dan masyarakat.</p> <p>Kata Kunci: <i>Integrasi Pendidikan; Pesantren; Pendidikan Karakter; Kurikulum Holistik; Kepemimpinan Pendidikan; Moderasi Beragama.</i></p> <p>Abstract <i>This research investigates the strategies employed by pesantren (Islamic boarding schools) to integrate general and religious education,</i></p>

	<p><i>thereby strengthening their role as a pillar of national education. The objective of this study is to identify effective integration models that do not compromise religious identity. The methodology utilised is a multiple case study with a qualitative approach. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis across several pesantren, and the data were thematically analysed. The research findings reveal that the success of this integration hinges on a holistic approach. A unified curriculum that establishes Islamic values as the foundation for all subjects is key, supported by visionary Leadership and the utilisation of Information and Communication Technology (ICT). Strategic collaboration with higher education institutions proved mutually enriching for the intellectual repository. Primary challenges include the digital divide, budgetary constraints, and remote locations, which are addressed through active curriculum negotiation and innovative management. This integration strengthens the character formation of santri (students) by internalising values such as discipline, empathy, and religious moderation across all aspects of pesantren life. In conclusion, the pesantren offers an excellent educational model that synthesises modernity with local religious wisdom. These findings highlight the need for inclusive supporting policies and further research to examine the long-term impact of this integration on pesantren graduates in the workforce and society.</i></p>
	<p>Keywords: <i>Education Integration, Pesantren, Character Education, Holistic Curriculum, Educational Leadership, Religious Moderation.</i></p>

INTRODUCTION

Pesantren (Islamic boarding schools) are educational institutions that have long been an integral part of the educational system in Indonesia (Zh, 2021). Historically, pesantren have not only served as centers for religious education but have also made significant contributions to shaping the character and morality of their students (santri). In the face of modernisation, pesantren are challenged to integrate general and religious education without compromising the spiritual values that underpin them. This transition necessitates more potent synergy between general and religious curricula to ensure pesantren remain relevant in addressing the demands of the modern world while preserving their authenticity as institutions grounded in Islamic teachings (Purwanto et al., 2021).

The significance of this paper lies in the need to identify how pesantren can assume a more active role within the national education system without losing their distinct identity. Indonesia's national education system requires diversity and effective integration of religious and general education. Consequently, pesantren hold a strategic position as institutions capable of fostering synergy between these two educational domains. This integration extends beyond mere curricular adjustment; it pertains to optimising the contribution of pesantren in supporting national character development, grounded in religious, ethical, and moral values (Darwanto et al., 2024).

The general education offered within pesantren seeks to accommodate the evolving social and economic needs of Indonesian society. The synergy between religious and general education in pesantren can present a solution for creating a holistic educational system that encompasses both academic aspects and character and moral formation. This is crucial because education in Indonesia is expected to produce individuals who are not only academically proficient but also possess noble virtues, reflecting the values of Pancasila in daily life (Yusuf et al., 2024).

However, despite many pesantren having begun to integrate general education into their systems, significant challenges persist. Numerous pesantren still encounter difficulties in adopting general education curricula that are relevant to contemporary needs while simultaneously safeguarding religious doctrines and principles. This research aims to investigate how pesantren can overcome these challenges by establishing an effective synergy between these two educational types. This is essential for enabling pesantren to function optimally within an inclusive national education framework based on religious values (Sirojuddin et al., 2025).

Previous research has extensively highlighted the importance of religious education in shaping national character. However, few studies have explored how pesantren, as unique educational institutions, can systematically and structurally integrate general and religious education. Many studies focus predominantly on religious education in isolation or on general education that does not directly incorporate religious dimensions. This study aims to bridge this gap by examining how pesantren can serve as pillars within the national education system, harmoniously combining these two dimensions (Purwanto et al., 2020).

A gap unaddressed by prior research is the limited understanding of how pesantren can effectively manage a curriculum that integrates both general and religious education. Existing studies often focus on the theoretical aspects of religious education and pay less attention to the practical implementation of curricula that integrate both without compromising educational quality. Therefore, this research is vital for addressing this gap by proposing data-driven solutions and by identifying best practices from the field (Anshori & Pohl, 2022).

Methodologically, this study employs a qualitative approach with case studies conducted in several pesantren that have successfully integrated general and religious education. Through in-depth interviews, observations, and document analysis, this research will identify the factors that support and hinder such integration and provide recommendations for other pesantren seeking to adopt a similar approach. The findings are expected to yield an improved model for managing pesantren education that can be applied more broadly across Indonesia (Shaleh et al., 2024).

Thus, the scholarly contribution of this research lies in developing a more systematic and practical model for integrating general and religious education that can serve as a reference for other pesantrens. This study is also expected to offer a new perspective in efforts to enhance the quality of education in Indonesia, particularly within pesantren, which have often received limited attention in national educational discourse. The synergy between religious and general education in pesantren is anticipated to cultivate a generation that is not only academically competent but also possesses a strong character aligned with national values (Astuti, 2023).

The relevance of this topic is paramount, considering the ongoing evolution of social and educational dynamics in Indonesia. As an integral part of the Indonesian educational landscape, pesantren must adapt to changing times without losing their traditional religious roots. Therefore, this research will provide a clearer picture of how pesantren can contribute to building a higher-quality, character-driven national education system firmly grounded in strong religious principles.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Concept of Holistic Education and National Character

The paradigm of holistic education has emerged as a comprehensive framework that addresses the limitations of traditional, cognitively focused models. This approach posits that

meaningful learning must transcend academic instruction to nurture the multifaceted dimensions of the individual, encompassing intellectual, physical, emotional, social, creative, and spiritual development (Mahmoudi et al., 2012; Miller, 2023). Within this framework, character education is not an adjunct but a fundamental component, providing the ethical content to the holistic structure. Research indicates that holistic models significantly influence moral behaviour by integrating ethical reflection directly into the learning process, aiming to develop students' affective potency and ingrain habits aligned with national and universal values (Bulkani et al., 2025; Umami et al., 2019). The implementation of this symbiosis requires pedagogies that foster active participation in meaningful tasks and systematic guidance for students to know, love, and act upon ethical principles (Syarif & Ghani, 2017).

Specific national and cultural contexts profoundly shape the operationalisation of this integrated model and serve as a mechanism for cultural sustainability. Nations strategically adapt the holistic framework to reinforce national identity and address localised challenges. For instance, Malaysia's holistic education is explicitly intertwined with its National Philosophy of Education, emphasising the development of individuals grounded in a belief in God (Ismail & Hassan, 2009). Similarly, in Indonesia, character education is framed as a strategic response to globalisation, advocating for the integration of local cultural values to fortify national character (Herlina et al., 2024). This trend of contextualization is also evident in India, where the National Education Policy 2020 promotes value-based education rooted in *Dharma* and Indian Knowledge Systems, positioning moral growth as integral to intellectual advancement (Isser et al., 2024).

Despite a strong conceptual consensus on its benefits, a critical analysis reveals significant gaps in the extant literature. A predominant focus on policy and conceptual analysis has led to a scarcity of robust empirical studies that measure the long-term causal impact of holistic education on specific character outcomes. Furthermore, the crucial dimension of implementation, particularly regarding teacher preparedness and the necessary professional development for this pedagogical shift, remains under-researched. An additional, seldom addressed tension lies in reconciling the universalist aspirations of holistic education with the particularistic goals of national character-building, which warrants deeper philosophical inquiry.

In conclusion, the integration of holistic education and character development represents a significant evolution in educational theory, aimed at cultivating well-rounded individuals capable of contributing meaningfully to their societies. The synthesis of current research demonstrates that by addressing the whole person and creating value-laden learning experiences, this approach can foster individuals who are both academically competent and ethically grounded. However, the field requires more rigorous empirical validation and a deeper investigation into implementation challenges to move from persuasive theoretical frameworks to evidence-based practice. Future research must therefore focus on bridging these gaps to provide a nuanced understanding of how holistic education can effectively build a strong and adaptable national character for the 21st century.

Integrating General and Religious Education in Pesantren

The integration of general and religious education within Indonesian *pesantren* represents a critical pedagogical evolution, driven by the need to equip students for a globalized world while preserving Islamic values. Current literature reveals diverse implementation models, ranging from formal collaborations with universities that embed religious principles within multicultural and skills-based curricula (Sirojuddin et al., 2025), to dual-curriculum systems

where the national curriculum coexists, though it is not always fully integrated, with traditional religious instruction (Nurjanah et al., 2018). The philosophical underpinnings of these models vary significantly, from holistic approaches that treat science and religion as a unified epistemological field, as observed in Malaysia, to more constructive models in Indonesia that seek to harmonize modern knowledge with traditional thought (Hadi et al., 2024). Further enriching this landscape are innovative, student-centric frameworks, such as curricula structured around multiple intelligences, which aim to cater to diverse learning aptitudes and foster a more comprehensive educational experience (Sirojuddin & Aprilianto, 2022).

Despite these innovative efforts, the path to seamless integration is fraught with significant challenges. A primary obstacle is pedagogical disjunction, often stemming from inadequate teacher preparedness; instructors for general subjects frequently lack the theological background to contextualize their material within an Islamic framework, while religious teachers may be less familiar with modern pedagogies (Riwanda et al., 2025). Concurrently, systemic issues of accessibility and management persist, with high costs, geographical barriers, and stringent academic requirements limiting student enrollment. These necessitate transformative management strategies that expand access without diluting the institution's core values (Darwanto et al., 2024). In response to these hurdles, some institutions are pioneering creative teaching methodologies, such as applying gamification to enhance engagement in language acquisition (Muzayyana Agustin et al., 2024) or integrating ecological awareness through Islamic ethical principles, thereby demonstrating how value-based learning can be operationalized within the curriculum (Rohmatulloh et al., 2023).

A consistently cited outcome of successful integration is its profound impact on student character and moral development. The unique *pesantren* environment is identified as a potent space for fostering social integrity, tolerance, and a sense of responsibility (Darwanto et al., 2024). This character building is often cultivated through direct relational practices, where teachers act as role models and prioritize empathetic, two-way communication to build a foundation of mutual trust with students (Hastasari et al., 2022). This focus on developing the whole person aligns with broader educational goals that extend beyond academic achievement, aiming to cultivate individuals who are both morally grounded and capable of engaging with diverse, intercultural contexts, a principle also explored in Muslim educational settings abroad (Abdul-Jabbar & Ramadan, 2025).

A critical synthesis of the literature, however, reveals several salient gaps that warrant further scholarly inquiry. First, there is a notable epistemological gap. At the same time, studies describe various integration models; they often lack a critical examination of the underlying philosophical assumptions about the relationship between religious and scientific knowledge that inform these models. Second, an assessment gap is evident, as the field relies heavily on qualitative case studies and would benefit from longitudinal, empirical research measuring the efficacy of integration on specific cognitive and behavioral outcomes. Finally, a contextual gap persists, with a need for more comparative, large-scale studies across diverse *pesantren* types to move beyond isolated success stories and develop a more nuanced understanding of the contextual factors that enable or hinder successful integration. Addressing these gaps is essential to move beyond descriptive accounts and to build a robust evidence base for the future of integrated education in *pesantren*.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative multiple-case study design to investigate the strategies and dynamics of integrating general and religious education within the pesantren (Islamic boarding school) environment. This approach was selected for its capacity to elucidate the complexity of social phenomena within their natural context, in this case, the pesantren educational ecosystem. The multiple case study design enabled the researcher not only to understand the integration process within a single setting but also to derive common themes and unique characteristics by comparing practices across several pesantren with distinct profiles, thereby yielding a more comprehensive and robust depiction.

Research Design and Data Sources

A qualitative, multiple-case study design was adopted to facilitate a deep, contextual exploration of the integration process across diverse institutional contexts. The primary criterion for selecting the pesantren was their recognised reputation for systematically implementing a model of general and religious education integration. Key stakeholders, including pesantren leaders (kyai), madrasah principals, teachers/ustadz, and students (santri), were identified as participants to provide multi-level perspectives.

Data Collection

Data were collected through methodological triangulation to ensure depth and validity. The primary techniques included in-depth, semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders, namely pesantren leaders (kyai), madrasah principals, teachers, and students, to gather multi-level insights into integration policies, their implementation, and lived experiences. To complement the interview data, participant observation was conducted in settings such as classrooms, co-curricular programs, and dormitory life to capture integration practices that occur implicitly and informally. Furthermore, document analysis was conducted on curricula, syllabi, textbooks, and other relevant materials from pesantren archives to understand the formal and intended aspects of the integration model.

Data Analysis

The collected data were analysed interactively using Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis framework. The process commenced with interview transcription and data organisation, followed by initial coding, theme identification, theme review, and, finally, the definition and naming of the key themes. This process facilitated the identification of emergent patterns, such as holistic curriculum models, the role of transformational leadership, and strategies for overcoming resistance. Findings from each case were first subjected to a within-case analysis. Subsequently, a cross-case analysis was performed to distil overarching success factors and universal challenges. Within this methodological framework, the study aims to develop a grounded conceptual model and contextually relevant policy recommendations to strengthen the role of pesantren as a pillar of national education.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Pesantren Education as a Pillar for Strengthening General and Religious Education in Indonesia

A dichotomy between general and religious sciences has long characterized the Indonesian educational landscape. As the nation's oldest indigenous educational institution, the Islamic boarding school, or *pesantren*, now stands at a critical juncture. It faces the dual imperative

of preserving its tradition as a bastion of religious knowledge while simultaneously responding to growing demands to integrate the national curriculum, thereby ensuring its graduates can compete in the modern workforce. The central challenge lies in synthesising these two domains without eroding the spiritual and moral ethos that defines the pesantren. This essay posits that the key to success lies in fostering a profound integration, moving beyond a superficial amalgamation of two distinct curricula.

A primary strategy is the development of a holistic, integrated curriculum. Shaleh et al. (2024) Propose a model that unifies religious and general subjects to foster cognitive, character, and spiritual development simultaneously. In contrast to older approaches that merely juxtaposed two curricula, this model positions Islamic values as the foundational spirit that permeates all academic disciplines. Consequently, the pursuit of scientific knowledge is no longer regarded as a secular activity but as an integral part of contemplating God's creation (*tafakkur*).

However, a well-designed curriculum is ineffective without supportive governance and visionary leadership. Research by Rohmad et al. (2024) underscores the pivotal role of school principals in enhancing the academic performance of pesantren. A leader must act as an agent of change, capable of balancing tradition with modern exigencies. This involves making strategic decisions regarding resource allocation, teacher training, and pedagogical innovation. As evidenced in the Junior High School Program Based on Pesantren (Zainal et al., 2022), effective change management is crucial for mitigating conflict and preserving the pesantren's unique identity.

A significant anticipated outcome of this integration is the reinforcement of character and religious moderation. While pesantren are inherently environments for moral formation (*tarbiyah al-akhlaq*), integration with formal education renders this process more structured. Hastasari et al. (2022) demonstrate that communication patterns within pesantren can cultivate empathy and trust, which underpin a robust moral foundation. Furthermore, Zulfatmi (2023) Adds that integrating the values of religious moderation into learning can significantly bolster national unity. Thus, the pesantren transcends its role as a mere educational institution, becoming a laboratory for cultivating tolerant and inclusive citizens.

In the 21st Century, any discussion on educational quality is inextricably linked to technology. Darwanto et al. (2024) identify the adoption of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) as a critical factor for improving learning outcomes and administrative efficiency in pesantren. Nevertheless, this introduces a new challenge: the digital divide. Many pesantren, particularly in remote regions, continue to struggle with access to technology and relevant training. Therefore, integration efforts must be coupled with initiatives to enhance digital literacy, ensuring pesantren are not left behind.

Another innovative strategy involves forging collaborations with external institutions. Sirojuddin et al. (2025) explore partnerships between universities and pesantren. Such collaborations facilitate a mutually beneficial exchange of expertise, resources, and perspectives. Universities gain access to the rich ethical and spiritual heritage of pesantren, while the latter benefit from modern scientific teaching methods and critical thinking pedagogies.

Despite these promising strategies, the path to full integration is fraught with obstacles. Darwanto et al. (2024) document significant barriers, including high operational costs, geographical isolation, and rigorous academic demands. These issues are not merely technical but are deeply intertwined with broader socio-economic disparities. Consequently, support

from both the government and the private sector is indispensable to prevent the emergence of an inequitable system where only well-resourced *pesantren* can succeed.

Underpinning all these strategies is the often-overlooked role of the teacher. Successful integration demands educators who are not merely religious instructors (*ustadz*), but also skilled modern pedagogues. Continuous professional development is paramount, encompassing areas such as English language proficiency (Fahriany & Wahyunengsih, 2025). This linguistic competence is vital for providing students with access to global knowledge, while also addressing a fundamental question: can *pesantren* produce global citizens who remain firmly grounded in their Islamic identity?

Collectively, findings from recent studies indicate that successful integration requires a multifaceted approach that encompasses a holistic curriculum, strategic leadership, character cultivation, technological adoption, and strategic collaboration. The significance of this endeavour lies in its potential to forge a distinctly Indonesian educational model, one that does not merely emulate Western systems but represents a mature synthesis of modernity with local and religious wisdom. Nonetheless, further research is warranted, particularly longitudinal studies to assess the long-term impact of this integration on the trajectory of *pesantren* graduates in the broader world.

Challenges Facing Islamic Boarding Schools in Implementing General Education Without Eroding Religious Values

The incorporation of general subjects, such as mathematics, science, and foreign languages, into the *pesantren* (Islamic boarding school) curriculum is far from straightforward. Hanif et al. (2024) characterize this process as one of 'curricular resistance,' wherein *pesantren* do not passively adopt government-mandated curricula. Instead, they actively adapt and modify them to align with their core religious identity. This creates a complex dual mandate: preserving a rich religious heritage while simultaneously meeting the demands of modern society. The challenge, therefore, extends beyond mere scheduling conflicts, reflecting a broader socio-cultural dynamic within Muslim communities.

At its heart, this integration often constitutes a subtle form of resistance against the dominance of state educational systems. As Hanif et al. (2024) demonstrate, *pesantren* adopt national curricula in a manner that deliberately preserves their institutional autonomy and distinctive epistemological standpoint. This negotiation underscores that integration is a bidirectional process of adaptation, not a passive acceptance of external standards.

The imperative to maintain religious values is further complicated by pressing practical constraints. Darwanto et al. (2024) identify that many *pesantren* struggle with high operational costs and remote locations, which severely limit their access to adequate educational resources. These conditions highlight the significant economic and social barriers to meaningful educational reform. Consequently, developing new management models is crucial to ensure that integrated education does not become a privilege reserved for a small number of well-funded institutions, thereby exacerbating existing disparities within Islamic education.

The pressure to adapt to modernity also presents a profound dilemma, particularly in navigating technological advancement without diluting traditional values. The COVID-19 pandemic served as a potent case study. According to Arim et al. (2024), the pandemic forced *pesantren* to transition to digital tools, often without sufficient preparation rapidly. The obstacles encountered were not merely technical but also pedagogical and ethical, raising questions about teaching methods and digital morality. These findings emphasise the urgent

need for policies that guide the integration of technology to ensure effectiveness and compatibility with Islamic principles.

In the face of such complexity, several *pesantren* have demonstrated remarkable innovation. Basori et al. (2023) document how certain Salafi *pesantren* have successfully preserved their core values while embracing strategic renewal. This proves that conservation and progress are not mutually exclusive. However, the extent to which these successful models can be replicated in other institutions remains an open question. Their success often hinges on strong leadership and unique institutional cultures, raising concerns about sustainability and broader applicability.

Furthermore, successful integration demands deep cultural sensitivity, extending into the non-academic aspects of student life. Research by Pakpahan et al. (2025) on adolescent health in Islamic schools stresses that intervention programs in such sensitive areas must be context-specific and respectful of religious norms to achieve acceptance and efficacy. This reinforces the notion that successful integration is contingent upon a holistic approach that comprehends the entirety of the students' lived experience.

Environmental education offers a compelling example of this potential. The 'Green Pesantren' initiative, analyzed by Anshori & Pohl (2022), illustrates how environmental awareness can be seamlessly woven into religious curricula. This showcases the potential for *pesantren* to contribute to global sustainability discourses from a distinctly Islamic perspective. Notably, the lack of substantial government support for such initiatives underscores a significant policy failure, standing in stark contrast to parallel developments in other countries that are actively fostered through public-private partnerships.

A promising solution to these multifaceted challenges lies in strategic collaboration with higher education institutions. Sirojuddin et al. (2025) explore how university-*pesantren* partnerships can effectively synthesize Islamic values, general skills, and multicultural insights. The significance of this model is its potential to dismantle the traditional barriers separating religious and secular knowledge. By fostering tolerance and an appreciation for diversity, such collaborations can directly counter the narratives of radicalism often associated with insular religious education.

Ultimately, the overarching goal of these integrative efforts is to cultivate an educational model that is both holistic and relevant to contemporary global challenges. As Subakir (2020) argues, integrating Islamic values is not merely a curricular balancing act, but a transformative response to social, environmental, and moral decline. Thus, *pesantren* are increasingly positioned not as relics of the past, but as vital incubators for local solutions to modern problems, capable of contributing a unique and valuable perspective to global conversations on education and ethics.

The Contribution of Islamic Boarding Schools to Character and Moral Formation within the National Education System

As deeply rooted Islamic educational institutions in Indonesia, *pesantren* have demonstrated a transformative role in shaping the character of the younger generation. Within the evolving context of national education, their position is increasingly strategic, given the complex moral challenges facing modern society. The uniqueness of *pesantren* lies in their capacity to synthesize traditional values with contemporary demands, thereby fostering a holistic and sustainable educational ecosystem. Supporting this, research by Purwanto et al. (2021) reveals that the effectiveness of character education in *pesantren* is intrinsically linked

to a comprehensive approach that simultaneously engages cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains.

The philosophy of respect, inherited from scholars such as al-Zarnūjī, serves as an ethical foundation for social dynamics within the *pesantren* community. This concept of *ta'zīm* (respect) is not merely a formal ritual but a philosophical framework that fundamentally shapes the mindset and conduct of students (*santri*). As Huda (2021) elaborates, respect for knowledge cultivates a genuine culture of learning, respect for teachers builds dignified educational relationships, and respect for fellow students fosters a collaborative social environment. In practice, this trilogy of respect fosters a distinctive educational culture in which knowledge transfer occurs within an atmosphere of mutual appreciation.

Extracurricular activities within *pesantren* function as a practical laboratory for character values in real-life settings. Unlike conventional approaches that often separate value education from physical activity, *pesantren* strategically utilize every activity as a medium for value internalization. Notably, Huda et al. (2024) observe that through activities such as scouting and martial arts, students not only develop physical skills but also learn leadership, discipline, and responsibility. More importantly, these activities are systematically designed with a clear and measurable integration of character values.

The innovative integration of entrepreneurial education with multicultural values in some *pesantren* underscores their adaptive capacity in responding to contemporary challenges. A study by Mariyono (2025) at Pondok Pesantren Bahrul Maghfiroh Malang illustrates how entrepreneurial practices, such as orchid and mushroom cultivation, serve as effective mediums for instilling creativity, resilience, and an appreciation for diversity. This approach not only produces vocationally skilled graduates but also shapes an entrepreneurial mindset that is both ethical and multicultural in outlook.

The cultivation of pluralism in modern *pesantren*, such as Gontor, represents a significant transformation towards a more inclusive paradigm without compromising Islamic identity. Muhajir (2022) argues that through an integrative approach, these institutions successfully develop a religious character that is inclusive, independent, and nationalist. This process involves a careful deconstruction of exclusive religious understandings alongside a reconstruction of universal Islamic values that are accommodating of difference. Consequently, graduates emerge capable of thriving in a pluralistic society without losing their religious identity.

The synergy between *pesantren* and higher education institutions creates an integrative model of mutual enrichment. According to Sirojuddin et al. (2025), such collaboration enables an exchange of symbolic capital between the traditional values of the *pesantren* and the modern knowledge of the university. This process not only broadens the intellectual horizons of the *santri* but also fosters a more open and critical mindset. Significantly, this interaction generates a productive dialectic between tradition and modernity, yielding novel syntheses in character education.

The adaptive resilience of *pesantren* in responding to social change deserves recognition. Jubba et al. (2021) document that these institutions have undertaken significant reorientation in their moral education approaches, particularly in addressing the characteristics of the millennial generation. This transformation encompasses teaching methodologies, curricular content, and a shift towards more participatory communication styles. Crucially, however, these changes have not eroded fundamental values but have instead reinforced the relevance of *pesantren* within a rapidly changing society.

The enduring relevance of al-Zarnūjī's concept of respect in a contemporary context highlights the profound vision of character education within the Islamic tradition. Huda et al. (2024) contend that this concept is not merely a historical relic but a philosophical framework that remains acutely relevant for addressing the problems of character education in the modern era. In practice, it is implemented through a culture of quality that emphasizes academic civility, respect for the learning process, and the prioritization of ethics in every educational interaction.

The principal strength of the *pesantren*'s holistic approach is its ability to create a fully integrated educational environment. In contrast to general education systems, which often compartmentalize value education and knowledge acquisition, *pesantren* positions values as the very spirit of the entire educational process. This integration is reflected in the absence of a dichotomy between religious and secular sciences, curricular and extracurricular activities, and academic and non-academic life. Collectively, these elements synergize to form a well-rounded and virtuous personality in the students.

Within the national educational landscape, the contribution of *pesantren* is increasingly vital to addressing the nation's character crisis. As institutions whose resilience has been tested through various historical epochs, *pesantren* offer a model of character education rooted in local values yet pertinent to global challenges. This strategic role is essential not only for preserving cultural heritage but also for fostering social cohesion and strengthening the nation's moral resilience amid intensifying currents of globalization.

CONCLUSION

Based on the preceding discussion, it can be concluded that *pesantren* occupy a strategic and multidimensional role within the Indonesian education system. As the nation's oldest educational institutions, they function not merely as guardians of religious tradition but have demonstrably evolved into dynamic agents of transformation, adeptly responding to contemporary challenges.

First, the endeavor to integrate general and religious education within *pesantren* reveals that the key to its success lies not in a superficial amalgamation of two curricula, but in a profound and holistic approach. This integration necessitates a synergistic framework involving a unified curriculum, visionary leadership, thoughtful technological adoption, strategic collaboration with higher education, and comprehensive teacher capacity building. Although significant challenges such as the digital divide, financial constraints, and remote locations persist, the integration process itself emerges as a form of active negotiation, allowing *pesantren* to preserve their distinctive identity while adapting to modern demands.

Second, and more importantly, throughout this integrative process, *pesantren* have successfully maintained religious values as the core spirit infusing all educational activities. Through strategies such as 'curricular resistance,' innovative institutional management, and the seamless incorporation of values into every facet from academic subjects like science to non-academic pursuits like entrepreneurship and environmental stewardship, *pesantren* powerfully demonstrate that modernization need not erode tradition. On the contrary, it can be harnessed to reinforce and revitalize it.

Third, the most significant contribution of *pesantren* arguably lies in their unparalleled efficacy in shaping student character and morality. Grounded in the philosophy of *ta'zim* (profound respect), they cultivate a holistic educational ecosystem. Through a deliberate blend of intra-curricular instruction, extracurricular activities, and immersive dormitory life, values such as discipline, empathy, tolerance, and responsibility are

systematically internalized. Furthermore, their capacity to instil religious moderation and multicultural awareness positions *pesantren* as effective "living laboratories" for nurturing citizens who are simultaneously devout, inclusive, and of strong moral character—qualities indispensable for safeguarding national social cohesion.

In conclusion, *pesantren* can no longer be viewed as peripheral institutions. Instead, they stand as a distinctive Indonesian educational model, offering a mature synthesis of modernity with local and religious wisdom. Their demonstrated success in educating the whole person intellectual, spiritual, and moral solidifies their status as a crucial pillar in strengthening national resilience amidst the currents of globalization and ongoing character crises.

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