

Constructing Students Disciplinary Character through Hidden Curriculum in the Pesantren Tradition: An Educational Technology Perspective

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	<p>sampling, consisting of seven senior students and three teachers. Data were collected through participatory observation, in-depth interviews, and document analysis, then analysed following the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldana, including data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Data validity was ensured through source triangulation, method triangulation, and member checking. The findings reveal that disciplinary character is constructed through collective prayer habituation, structured rules with social supervision, teacher role modelling, and peer reinforcement culture. Discipline evolves from external compliance toward internalised awareness embedded in students identities. Selective adoption of educational technology reinforces the hidden curriculum through activity monitoring, documentation of moral practices, and enrichment of learning content, although it also introduces risks of distraction from open digital media exposure. The study confirms that the pesantren tradition functions as a moral ecosystem that systematically reproduces values through structured daily practices. The findings imply the need for educational technology integration designs that are sensitive to the pesantren hidden pedagogy, so that digital transformation reinforces rather than replaces existing character formation mechanisms.</p>
	<p>Keywords: <i>Disciplinary Character; Hidden Curriculum; Islamic Boarding School; Educational Technology; Character Education.</i></p>

INTRODUCTION

Pesantren is one of the oldest indigenous educational institutions in Indonesia and remains a central pillar of Islamic education in the archipelago. Unlike formal schools, pesantren operates as an integrated educational ecosystem in which residential life, religious ritual, classical text study, and teacher-student interaction converge to shape both intellectual and moral formation. Five constitutive elements, namely the dormitory, the mosque, the classical texts, the kiai, and the students, work together to reproduce a holistic model of Islamic education whose ultimate aim is the formation of insan kamil, that is, a complete person with balanced cognitive, affective, social, and spiritual capacities (Dhofier, 2015). Within this ecosystem, disciplinary character occupies a foundational role: it organises ritual life, structures the rhythm of learning, and enables the social order on which communal living depends.

Although classical curriculum theory long assumed that schools educate primarily through their explicit syllabi, several decades of educational scholarship have shown that schooling also transmits values, dispositions, and rules of conduct through implicit mechanisms collectively known as the hidden curriculum (Jackson, 1968; Snyder, 1971; Apple, 2004). The hidden curriculum refers to the unwritten norms, routines, regularities, and institutional cultures that shape how students learn to behave, what they learn to value, and how they learn to relate to authority and to peers. In the pesantren context, the hidden curriculum is particularly powerful because residential life means that virtually every waking hour, from pre-dawn prayer to evening study, is patterned by institutional routine and saturated with implicit normative messages.

At the same time, contemporary pesantren no longer operate in cultural isolation. The diffusion of educational technology, smartphones, and social media has fundamentally altered the information environment in which students live and learn. Students are simultaneously embedded in two worlds: the structured moral ecology of the pesantren and the porous,

attention-fragmenting ecology of digital media. Recent scholarship in educational technology has documented how digital tools both support and disrupt traditional pedagogies, with effects on attention, peer culture, and authority relations (Selwyn, 2016; Holmes et al., 2019). For pesantren, this raises a pressing question: how does the hidden curriculum continue to construct disciplinary character when the boundaries of the institution are increasingly porous to digital influence, and how can educational technology be integrated in ways that reinforce rather than erode that mechanism?

Prior research on character education in pesantren has predominantly examined the explicit curriculum, that is, the formal teaching of moral content through kitab kuning recitation or classroom-based religious instruction. A smaller body of work has begun to address the hidden curriculum dimension, but most of these studies treat it as a static cultural feature rather than as a dynamic process that interacts with the surrounding technological environment. Studies on educational technology integration in Islamic education, in turn, have focused largely on the formal classroom, examining digital media for Quran-Hadith learning (Zh et al., 2022; Zh et al., 2021), Arabic vocabulary acquisition (Zh, 2021), or religious education applications, while paying less attention to how educational technology interacts with the pesantren hidden curriculum that operates outside the classroom. The intersection between hidden curriculum, disciplinary character formation, and educational technology integration thus remains under-theorised in the literature.

This study addresses that gap by investigating how disciplinary character is constructed through hidden curriculum practices in the pesantren tradition, using Pondok Pesantren Al Fatah as a case site, and by examining how the increasing presence of educational technology mediates this construction. The research is guided by three questions: (1) which hidden curriculum practices most strongly contribute to the construction of disciplinary character among students; (2) through what mechanisms do students internalise discipline from external compliance to embedded identity; and (3) how does educational technology, both as a threat and as a resource, mediate these processes. The argument advanced in this article is that hidden curriculum in pesantren functions as a moral ecosystem reproducing values through structured daily practice, and that educational technology integration must be designed with sensitivity to this hidden pedagogy if it is to support rather than substitute existing character formation mechanisms.

The article proceeds as follows. The next section describes the qualitative case study methodology employed. The findings are then presented around five empirical themes, organised in line with the conceptual framework illustrated in Figure 1. The discussion situates these findings within hidden curriculum theory, character education scholarship, and the educational technology literature, with explicit attention to how integration design can preserve the integrity of pesantren hidden pedagogy. The article closes with conclusions, limitations, and directions for further research.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach with a single-case study design (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 2018). The case study design was selected because the construction of disciplinary character through hidden curriculum is a contemporary phenomenon embedded in a bounded institutional context, where understanding requires sustained engagement with the routines, meanings, and practices of the actors involved. Pondok Pesantren Al Fatah was selected as the case site because it is a representative pesantren combining traditional kitab kuning study with structured residential life, and because its leadership had begun a measured

process of educational technology adoption, making it an information-rich case for examining the intersection of hidden curriculum and technology.

The researchers acted as the key instruments in the field, conducting participatory observation across six months of fieldwork. The presence of the researchers in daily activities, while maintaining analytical distance, allowed direct observation of habituation processes, supervisory interactions, and informal moments where character is enacted. Informants were selected through purposive sampling and consisted of seven senior students who had resided in the pesantren for at least three years and three teachers (ustadz) involved directly in supervisory and instructional roles. The senior students were selected because their long residence allowed them to articulate the gradual transition from external compliance to internalised discipline, while the teachers were selected because their dual role as instructors and exemplars made them privileged observers of the hidden curriculum.

Data were collected through three complementary techniques. First, participatory observation was conducted across daily routines, including pre-dawn prayer, kitab study, communal meals, evening study, and dormitory life, with field notes recorded in a structured observation log. Second, semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with each informant, guided by a protocol developed around three themes: hidden curriculum practices, internalisation of discipline, and the role of digital media and educational technology in daily life. Each interview lasted between forty-five and seventy-five minutes and was audio-recorded with informed consent. Third, document analysis examined pesantren regulations, daily schedules, supervision logs, and digital learning artefacts where relevant, to triangulate observational and interview data.

Data were analysed through the interactive model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014), which involves three concurrent activities: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing or verification. Data reduction proceeded through open coding to surface concepts emerging inductively from the field, followed by axial coding to connect those concepts into broader thematic categories. Two researchers coded a subset of the data independently and compared results; inter-coder agreement exceeded eighty percent, with disagreements resolved through reflective discussion. Data display employed thematic matrices and direct quotations to preserve participant voice. Conclusions were drawn progressively and verified across iterative cycles of fieldwork.

Trustworthiness was established through four strategies. Source triangulation compared accounts from students, teachers, and documents. Method triangulation cross-checked observation, interview, and documentary data. Member checking with key informants verified the accuracy of preliminary interpretations. An audit trail recording analytical decisions was maintained to support dependability. Ethical considerations included informed consent, anonymisation of student identities, and the right to withdraw at any stage of the research.

RESULTS

Field data analysis yielded five interlinked themes describing how disciplinary character is constructed through hidden curriculum practices at Pondok Pesantren Al Fatah, with educational technology serving as a mediating contextual factor. These themes, organised conceptually in Figure 1, comprise hidden curriculum sources, internalisation mechanisms, observable disciplinary character outcomes, the mediating role of educational technology, and the visible synthesis between formal and hidden curriculum captured in Table 1.

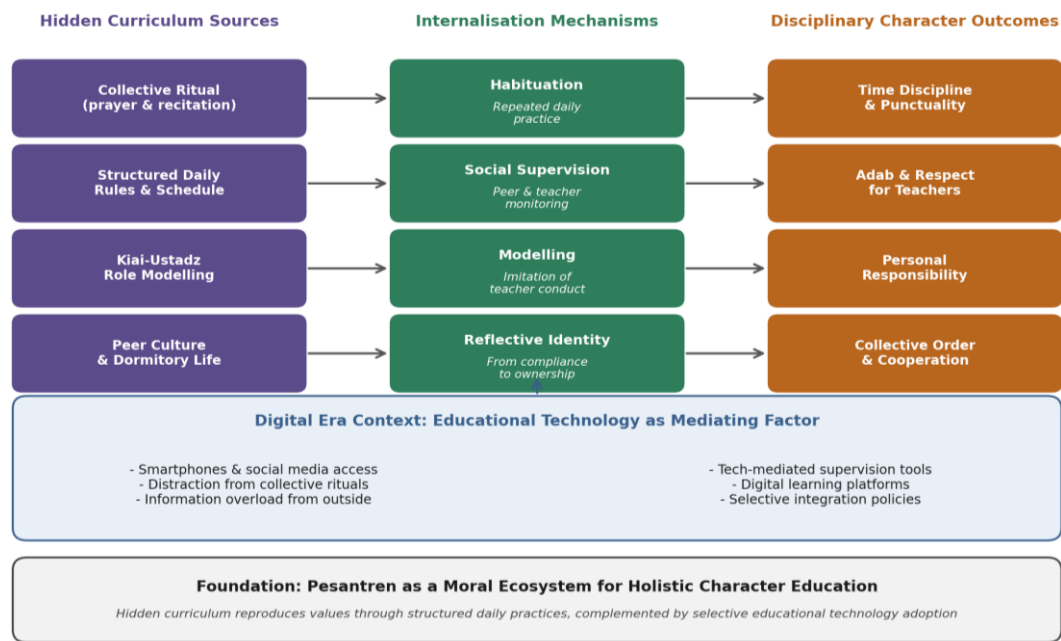


Figure 1. Conceptual framework: hidden curriculum and disciplinary character construction in the digital era

Hidden Curriculum Practices in Daily Pesantren Life

Observation across the six-month fieldwork period revealed that the hidden curriculum at Pondok Pesantren Al Fatah operates through tightly structured daily routines that begin before dawn and continue past evening study. The day is regulated by the sound of the bedug and the call to prayer, which serve as more than religious markers; they function as institutional time signals that synchronise the activity of more than two hundred students. This temporal patterning is the substrate on which disciplinary character is built, because students experience time itself as a moral structure governed by collective obligation rather than individual preference.

Within this temporal structure, four hidden curriculum sources emerged with particular salience. The first is collective ritual, especially the five daily congregational prayers and recitation activities, where punctuality is not merely encouraged but socially enforced through the visible presence of every student in the mosque. The second is the structured rules and schedule, which define the location and conduct expected at each hour. The third is teacher role modelling, where the kiai and ustadz are observed by students to keep the same schedule themselves, which transforms compliance from an asymmetric demand into a shared norm. The fourth is the peer culture of dormitory life, where senior students reinforce and demonstrate expected conduct, providing horizontal supervision that complements vertical authority.

One senior student articulated the experience succinctly: the structured schedule at first feels burdensome, but after months it becomes the rhythm by which the body itself orients to the day. Another noted that even on rest days the body wakes at the time of pre-dawn prayer, which suggests that the schedule has been internalised at a level deeper than conscious decision. These accounts converge with observation: the hidden curriculum at Al Fatah works precisely because it is total, embodied, and inescapable within the boundaries of pesantren life.

Mechanisms of Internalisation: From Compliance to Identity

The findings reveal that the path from external compliance to internalised discipline runs through four interconnected mechanisms. The first is habituation, in which repeated daily practice gradually transforms an effortful action into an automatic disposition. The second is social supervision, in which both peers and teachers continuously monitor conduct, creating an environment where deviation is quickly noticed and corrected. The third is modelling, in which observed teacher conduct provides a tangible exemplar that students imitate before they fully understand the underlying values. The fourth is reflective identity formation, in which students, especially in their later years, begin to articulate discipline as a personal commitment rather than an externally imposed rule.

Senior students described this transition in their own words. One observed that during the first year the rules felt like a cage, but by the third year the rules felt like the bones of his own body, supporting rather than constraining him. Another reflected that he no longer prayed because the bell rang; the bell rang because it was time to pray, and his body simply followed. These accounts illustrate the ownership stage that Damon and colleagues described as the hallmark of mature character formation, in which the source of discipline migrates inward and the student becomes the agent rather than the object of moral practice (Damon, 2008).

Importantly, this transition is neither automatic nor uniform. Some students remain at the compliance stage even after several years, particularly when their entry into the pesantren is not voluntary or when their peer networks are weak. Teachers reported that they pay particular attention to such students, providing additional mentoring conversations to support the migration of motivation from external to internal. This finding underscores that even the hidden curriculum requires deliberate pedagogical attention; it is not self-executing.

Observable Disciplinary Character Outcomes

Across observation, interview, and document data, four disciplinary character outcomes were identifiable as products of the hidden curriculum. Time discipline and punctuality were evident in the routine on-time attendance at prayer and study sessions, with attendance records corroborating observation. Adab and respect for teachers manifested in body posture during recitation, the sequence of greetings exchanged on encounter, and the careful listening during kitab study. Personal responsibility appeared in the way students managed their personal belongings, dormitory chores, and study commitments without continuous supervision. Collective order and cooperation were visible in the orderly conduct of communal meals, the rotation of cleaning duties, and the peer-led organisation of evening study.

These outcomes are not separable but mutually reinforcing. A student who has internalised time discipline is also more likely to display adab, because both depend on the capacity to subordinate immediate impulses to a larger normative order. Teachers reported that they read these outcomes together as signals of moral maturity, not as discrete competencies. This integrated reading is consistent with the holistic conception of character in Islamic ethical thought, where individual virtues are understood as facets of a unified disposition oriented toward the good (Al-Attas, 1979).

Educational Technology as Mediating Factor in the Hidden Curriculum

The fourth theme addresses the central scholarly contribution of this article: how educational technology mediates the hidden curriculum process. Three patterns emerged from the data. First, educational technology can disrupt the hidden curriculum when it

introduces unstructured digital exposure into the otherwise tightly bounded pesantren environment. Smartphones brought into the dormitory by students returning from family visits, social media notifications during study time, and video content consumed in dormitories at night were all reported as sources of attention fragmentation that weaken the embodied rhythm on which habituation depends.

Second, educational technology can reinforce the hidden curriculum when it is selectively integrated under institutional control. The pesantren has begun to use simple digital attendance recording for prayer times, a teacher-managed messaging group for daily schedule reminders, and curated digital learning content for kitab supplementation. These uses do not replace the embodied practices; they document and support them, providing teachers with finer-grained data on student participation while keeping the core ritual face-to-face. Several teachers noted that the digital attendance log made it easier to identify students who needed mentoring conversations earlier than they otherwise would have.

Third, educational technology raises questions of educational technology governance that the pesantren is only beginning to address. The pesantren has drafted, but not yet formalised, an internal policy on student device use that distinguishes between learning-purposed devices, which are permitted in supervised contexts, and personal entertainment devices, which are not. Teachers expressed broad agreement that the right approach is selective integration rather than blanket prohibition, in line with Selwyn (2016) who argues that prohibition tends to push technology use underground rather than eliminate it. This selective integration logic, articulated as a principle of educational technology serving the hidden curriculum rather than displacing it, emerged as the practical heuristic guiding adoption decisions at Al Fatah.

Synthesis: Activities, Hidden Curriculum Forms, and Character Values

Drawing the empirical material together, Table 1 maps five core pesantren activities to the hidden curriculum forms they instantiate and the disciplinary character values they construct. The synthesis makes two claims visible. First, every named activity does double work: it accomplishes its overt purpose, such as worship or learning, while simultaneously transmitting an implicit lesson about time, authority, peers, and self. Second, the character values are not coupled one-to-one to specific activities; they emerge from the cumulative weight of the entire ensemble, which is why partial participation rarely produces the same character outcomes as full immersion.

DISCUSSION

The discussion situates the empirical findings within three bodies of literature: hidden curriculum theory and character education scholarship, the philosophy of educational technology, and recent work on educational technology integration in religious education. The aim is twofold: first, to clarify the theoretical contribution of the case to hidden curriculum scholarship; second, to articulate practical implications for educational technology design in institutions whose pedagogy is heavily implicit.

Pesantren Hidden Curriculum as a Moral Ecosystem

The findings extend the classical hidden curriculum theory of Jackson (1968) and Apple (2004) by showing that, in residential institutions like pesantren, the hidden curriculum is not a side-channel running alongside the explicit curriculum but the primary medium through which character is formed. Where Jackson described the hidden curriculum of schools as

transmitting routines such as queueing, evaluation, and tolerance for delay, the pesantren hidden curriculum transmits a richer and more demanding set of dispositions, including ritual punctuality, adab toward authority, and collective accountability. The total institutional character of the pesantren, where there is no time outside the curriculum, intensifies the operation of hidden mechanisms beyond what is observable in day schools.

The four internalisation mechanisms identified, that is, habituation, social supervision, modelling, and reflective identity formation, align with classical character education scholarship while adding texture specific to the residential Islamic context. Habituation echoes Aristotle (1999) and the long tradition of virtue ethics, while modelling is consistent with Bandura (1986). What is distinctive about the pesantren case is the integration of these mechanisms in a single institutional space and their continuity across years rather than across hours, which allows the migration of motivation from external to internal that Damon (2008) describes as central to mature character. The findings thus support the view of pesantren as a moral ecosystem, a term we use to denote a self-reproducing environment in which structural, social, and discursive elements jointly stabilise a particular pattern of character formation.

Educational Technology in a Hidden-Curriculum-Heavy Institution

The educational technology findings invite reflection on what integration looks like in institutions whose pedagogy is heavily implicit. The dominant integration discourse, drawn largely from formal schooling, treats educational technology as a tool to enrich explicit instruction, illustrate concepts, or assess learning (Mishra & Koehler, 2006; Bates et al., 2020). In pesantren, however, the most consequential pedagogy is implicit, embedded in routine and embodied in social practice. Educational technology integration in this setting must therefore be evaluated not only by its effect on explicit learning outcomes but also by its effect on the routines, rhythms, and relations through which the hidden curriculum operates.

Three integration design principles can be drawn from the findings. The first is preservation: educational technology should not be allowed to displace the embodied practices that anchor the hidden curriculum. Replacing congregational prayer with individual app-based prayer logging, for example, would dissolve the social supervision that makes congregational practice formative. The second is reinforcement: educational technology should be selected and configured to make the hidden curriculum more legible and supportable, for instance through attendance documentation that helps teachers identify students who need mentoring. The third is governance: the institution must hold the authority to define which digital affordances are admitted and which are bounded out, a stance consistent with the human-centred artificial intelligence framework of Shneiderman (2020) and the pluralist educational technology design principles articulated by Selwyn (2016).

These principles converge on a contribution that we frame as educational technology serving the hidden curriculum. The framing reverses the usual integration logic, which asks how an institutional pedagogy can be reorganised to accommodate technology. Instead, it asks how technology can be selected, configured, and bounded to amplify an existing pedagogy whose value lies precisely in its embodied, social, and routine-based character. This framing is generalisable beyond pesantren to other institutions, including monastic schools, military academies, and apprenticeship-based training, where character formation depends on residential immersion in a structured normative environment.

Implications for Educational Technology Design and Policy

The findings have direct implications for educational technology design and for institutional policy. For designers, the case underscores the importance of designing for context rather than context-free affordances. A messaging tool optimised for office productivity may be poorly suited to a residential institution where the schedule itself is the primary coordination mechanism; a learning analytics dashboard designed for individual feedback may underserve an institution whose feedback runs through peer networks and teacher modelling. Designers working with religious educational institutions, in particular, would benefit from extended ethnographic engagement before specifying requirements, in line with the participatory design tradition (Iversen et al., 2010).

For institutional policy, the findings highlight the need for an internal educational technology policy that explicitly distinguishes between technology that serves the hidden curriculum and technology that competes with it. Such a policy can be articulated using a *maqasid syariah* lens, considering the protection of religion, intellect, and lineage, which together encode a concern with student attention, character, and intergenerational moral transmission (Auda, 2008). Policy elements likely to be effective include shared institutional smartphone storage during ritual hours, teacher-curated digital learning channels, and periodic review of educational technology adoption decisions in consultation with *kiai*, *ustadz*, and senior students.

For broader educational technology theory, the case invites a reconsideration of what counts as integration. Most integration models, including TPACK (Mishra & Koehler, 2006), conceptualise integration as the alignment of technology with content and pedagogy in the explicit curriculum. The *pesantren* case suggests an additional dimension: alignment with the implicit curriculum, that is, with the routines, rituals, and relational patterns through which institutions transmit character. We propose this as a worthwhile direction for further theoretical work on educational technology integration in tradition-rich institutions.

Limitations and Boundary Conditions

Several limitations qualify the findings. First, as a single-case study, the analysis cannot establish that the patterns observed at Al Fatah generalise statistically to the wider *pesantren* population. The strength of the design lies in depth rather than breadth, and replication across *pesantren* of different traditions, sizes, and locations would strengthen the conclusions. Second, the six-month fieldwork captures the present moment but cannot trace the long-term trajectory of disciplinary character into adult life. Longitudinal designs that follow alumni would add valuable evidence on the durability of hidden-curriculum-formed character. Third, the focus on senior students and teachers privileges those most fluent in articulating the hidden curriculum; the experience of newer students, who are still in the compliance stage, deserves dedicated attention in further research. Despite these limitations, the case provides a coherent account of how hidden curriculum and educational technology interact in a tradition-rich educational institution, and offers a framework that can be tested and refined in subsequent work.

CONCLUSION

This study examined how disciplinary character is constructed at Pondok Pesantren Al Fatah through hidden curriculum mechanisms, and how educational technology mediates those mechanisms. Three principal conclusions can be drawn. First, the hidden curriculum operates as a moral ecosystem in which collective ritual, structured rules, teacher modelling, and peer culture jointly produce disciplinary character through habituation, social supervision,

modelling, and reflective identity formation. The character outcomes thus produced, including time discipline, adab, personal responsibility, and collective order, are mutually reinforcing rather than discrete competencies, in line with the holistic conception of character in Islamic educational thought.

Second, educational technology mediates the hidden curriculum in three patterns: it can disrupt the embodied rhythm on which habituation depends; it can reinforce the hidden curriculum when selectively integrated under institutional governance; and it can raise governance questions that the institution must address through deliberate policy. The principle that emerged at Al Fatah, namely educational technology serving the hidden curriculum rather than displacing it, offers a generalisable design heuristic for educational technology integration in residential institutions whose pedagogy is heavily implicit.

Third, the case contributes to educational technology theory by suggesting an additional dimension of integration alignment, beyond content and pedagogy in the explicit curriculum, namely alignment with the implicit curriculum through which institutions transmit character. This dimension deserves further theoretical development and empirical testing, particularly in religious, military, and apprenticeship-based educational institutions where residential immersion plays a central pedagogical role. Practically, the findings invite institutional leaders, technology designers, and policymakers to approach educational technology integration in tradition-rich institutions with sensitivity to the hidden pedagogy that constitutes their distinctive educational power.

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