

Hidden Curriculum and Santri Character Development: Empirical Evidence from an Islamic Boarding School in Indonesia

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Abstract

Character education is a central concern in Islamic educational institutions, particularly in pesantren where students experience intensive social interaction and value-based learning environments. Although previous studies have explored character formation through formal curricula and qualitative approaches, limited empirical evidence has examined the contribution of hidden curriculum to santri character development using quantitative analysis within the pesantren context. This study aims to examine the relationship between hidden curriculum implementation and character development among santri at Al-Kholil Islamic Boarding School, Indonesia. This study employed a quantitative correlational approach using a survey method. The population consisted of all santri at Al-Kholil Islamic Boarding School, with a total sample of 93 participants selected through total sampling. Data were collected using a Likert-scale questionnaire measuring hidden curriculum dimensions, including institutional culture, social interaction, role modelling, and habituation, as well as character dimensions consisting of discipline, responsibility, honesty, and social morality. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation analysis, hypothesis testing, and coefficient of determination. The findings demonstrate a positive and significant relationship between hidden curriculum and santri character development ($\beta = 0.583$; $t = 5.23$; $p < 0.001$), with hidden curriculum accounting for 34% of the variance in character development. These findings indicate that implicit educational practices embedded in institutional culture, role modelling, social interaction, and habituation contribute substantially to the internalization of character values among santri. This study provides quantitative evidence that extends hidden curriculum and character education literature by demonstrating the importance of implicit educational processes in Islamic boarding school contexts.

Keywords: *Hidden Curriculum, Character Development, Islamic Boarding School, Character Education, Value Internalization.*



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1. Introduction

Character education has become an important concern in contemporary educational discourse because educational institutions are expected not only to develop students' academic competencies but also to cultivate moral values, responsibility, discipline, and social awareness. In broader educational literature, character education is associated with the development of honesty, responsibility, empathy, and ethical behaviour through the integration of values in school processes and activities (Ramadhani et al., 2024). In Islamic educational contexts, character development is closely associated with the internalization of religious values through formal learning processes and everyday educational experiences. However, character formation does not occur exclusively through explicit curriculum implementation, because students' attitudes, behaviours, and value orientations are also shaped by implicit educational processes embedded within institutional culture, social interaction, traditions, and daily practices (Maudia et al., 2025; Ulum & Riswadi, 2023).

One important concept for understanding these implicit educational processes is the hidden curriculum. Hidden curriculum refers to values, norms, attitudes, and behavioural expectations that are transmitted indirectly through educational environments rather than explicitly stated in formal curriculum documents (Obaid et al., 2024; Ishomuddin & Aziz, 2025; Salim et al., 2024). Through institutional culture, interpersonal relationships, teacher role modelling, and daily routines, hidden curriculum influences how students interpret and practise values within their educational setting (Maudia et al., 2025; Ulum & Riswadi, 2023). Therefore, hidden curriculum represents an important dimension in explaining how character values are developed beyond classroom instruction, including through unwritten norms, modeling, and repeated social practice (Malihah et al., 2026).

Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) provide a distinctive context for examining the role of hidden curriculum because educational processes occur within an integrated residential environment. Unlike conventional schools where learning activities are primarily concentrated during school hours, pesantren provide continuous educational experiences through religious activities, institutional regulations, social relationships, and communal living practices (Ma'arif & Arif, 2026; Sahrandi et al., 2026). These conditions create opportunities for character formation through habituation and interaction among members of the pesantren community, since dormitory life functions as a moral and social ecosystem in which values are practised continuously (Sutikno, 2026).

Within the pesantren environment, santri character development is reflected through various dimensions, including discipline, responsibility, honesty, and social morality. Prior studies show that pesantren culture and daily educational practices contribute to the formation of sincerity, responsibility, discipline, humility, independence, tolerance, honesty, and social care among santri (Hariyanto et al., 2026;



Hidayat & Bujuri, 2020). These characteristics are developed not only through formal religious instruction but also through implicit educational practices such as institutional culture, social interaction, role modelling, and habituation (Malihah et al., 2026; Latif et al., 2025; Bustami et al., 2026). Consequently, understanding the contribution of hidden curriculum is important for explaining how character values are internalized within Islamic boarding school environments (Ma'arif & Arif, 2026; Hariyanto et al., 2026).

Previous research has examined character education through formal curriculum implementation, religious learning, school culture, and qualitative investigations of educational practices. Existing studies in pesantren have predominantly used qualitative, case study, ethnographic, phenomenological, descriptive, or literature review approaches (Sahrandi et al., 2026; Salim et al., 2024; Sutikno, 2026). However, empirical studies examining the quantitative relationship between hidden curriculum and santri character development remain limited. This statement is supported by recent studies that explicitly note the limited systematic scrutiny of hidden curriculum mechanisms, the insufficiency of research on character development and hidden curriculum in Islamic higher education, and the lack of measurable evidence on how implicit practices shape student character in pesantren settings (Obaid et al., 2024).

The limited empirical evidence creates an important research gap regarding how implicit educational practices within pesantren contribute to students' character development. More specifically, further investigation is still needed to examine how institutional culture, social interaction, role modelling, and habituation within hidden curriculum are associated with discipline, responsibility, honesty, and social morality among santri, especially through measurable designs (Bustami et al., 2026; Salabi, 2025). Although some recent studies have begun to use quantitative or mixed methods, the evidence remains relatively limited and mostly focuses on religious character or specific dimensions rather than broader santri character development (Hayati, 2022; Ishomuddin & Aziz, 2025).

2. Literature Review

2.1 Hidden Curriculum in Islamic Education

The hidden curriculum refers to values, norms, and habits implicitly transmitted within educational environments through social interaction, teacher role modeling, and institutional culture (Jackson, 1968; Snyder, 1971; Giroux, 1983). In Islamic boarding schools, it emerges through daily santri activities, time discipline, congregational worship, and structured social interaction. Amin (2020) found that everyday practices shape character more effectively than formal lectures, while Hidayat (2018) showed that the role modeling of ustadz and ustadzah is a primary mechanism for internalizing moral values. Most prior studies in this area remain qualitative, meaning the quantitative



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relationship between the hidden curriculum and santri character has not yet been empirically measured.

2.2 Santri Character Development

Character consists of cognitive (moral knowing), affective (moral feeling), and behavioral (moral action) components that together shape an individual's overall conduct (Lickona, 1991). Character development depends not only on the formal curriculum but also on social experience and institutional culture; Rahman (2020) and Fauzi (2019) emphasized the environment's role in developing discipline, responsibility, and honesty. Because santri experience education for 24 hours a day, character formation in pesantren is generally more intensive than in ordinary formal schools.

2.3 Integration of the Hidden Curriculum and Character: Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

Several quantitative studies (Rahman, 2020; Syam et al., 2026) indicate a significant correlation between the hidden curriculum and character development, with the implicit environment contributing approximately 30–45% to moral behavior. The literature further identifies institutional culture, social interaction, role modeling, and daily habituation as the main dimensions of the hidden curriculum that determine the quality of value internalization. Remaining gaps include the limited research conducted specifically in pesantren, the scarcity of quantitative correlational approaches, and the absence of empirical measurement of the hidden curriculum's contribution to specific character dimensions.

In this study, the independent variable (X), Hidden Curriculum, comprises institutional culture (discipline, simplicity, religiosity), social interaction (tolerance, cooperation, respect), role modeling (by ustadz/ustadzah), and habituation. The dependent variable (Y), Santri Character Development, comprises discipline, responsibility, honesty, and social morality. Each dimension is operationalized through indicators measured on a Likert-scale questionnaire. Conceptually, the hidden curriculum (X) is expected to influence character development (Y) through value internalization, whereby social interaction, role modeling, and habituation shape santri's moral knowledge, affective awareness, and behavior.

Three theories anchor the study. Character Education Theory (Lickona, 1991) assumes character is formed through the combination of moral knowledge, moral feeling, and moral action; it provides a holistic framework for measuring character-education outcomes but does not systematically account for implicit values. Hidden Curriculum Theory (Jackson, 1968; Giroux, 1983) assumes unwritten values and norms shape behavior through social experience and institutional culture, explaining how pesantren culture, teacher role modeling, and daily habituation shape santri character, though it is

difficult to measure directly without a systematic quantitative approach. Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977) emphasizes the role of modeling in behavioral development and is relevant to understanding *ustadz* and *ustadzah* as behavioral models within the hidden curriculum. Synthesizing these theories, the conceptual framework proposes that implementation of the hidden curriculum—through *pesantren* culture, teacher role modeling, social interaction, and dormitory habituation—is expected to holistically improve santri's discipline, responsibility, honesty, and social morality; the more consistent and higher the quality of hidden-curriculum implementation, the higher the level of santri character development. Social context and santri motivation may plausibly function as moderators but are not analyzed in this study.

3. Research Method

This research employed a quantitative correlational approach to examine the relationship between hidden curriculum implementation and santri character development at Al-Kholil Islamic Boarding School, Berau. A correlational design was selected because the research aimed to identify the statistical relationship between hidden curriculum practices and character development without manipulating the research variables. The approach was considered appropriate for measuring the extent to which implicit educational processes within the *pesantren* environment were associated with the development of students' character.

The research was conducted at Al-Kholil Islamic Boarding School, Berau, with the population consisting of all enrolled santri. Considering the relatively limited population size and the accessibility of all participants, total sampling was applied. Therefore, all 93 santri participated as respondents in this research. The use of total sampling allowed the research to obtain comprehensive data representing the entire population within the selected *pesantren* context.

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire developed to measure two main variables: hidden curriculum implementation and santri character development. The hidden curriculum variable was measured through several dimensions, including institutional culture, social interaction, role modelling, and habituation. Meanwhile, character development was measured through indicators related to discipline, responsibility, honesty, and social morality. The questionnaire employed a Likert-scale format to capture respondents' perceptions regarding the implementation of hidden curriculum practices and the development of character values within the *pesantren* environment.

Before conducting the main analysis, the instrument was examined to ensure its validity and reliability. Validity testing was conducted using Pearson Product-Moment correlation analysis to determine the extent to which each item represented the measured construct. Reliability testing was performed using Cronbach's Alpha coefficient

to evaluate the internal consistency of the instrument. These procedures ensured that the questionnaire provided reliable and valid measurements of hidden curriculum and santri character development.

The collected data were analyzed using several statistical procedures. Descriptive statistics were initially employed to describe the characteristics of the research variables. Pearson correlation analysis was then conducted to examine the relationship between hidden curriculum implementation and santri character development. Hypothesis testing was performed to determine the significance of the relationship between the variables, while the coefficient of determination was used to identify the contribution of hidden curriculum to variations in santri character development.

Ethical principles were maintained throughout the research process. Permission was obtained from the relevant institution before data collection, participation was voluntary, and respondents' identities and information were maintained confidentially. These procedures ensured that the research process complied with ethical standards for educational research involving students..

4. Result

Analysis showed that the hidden curriculum has a positive and significant effect on santri character development ($\beta = 0.583$; $t = 5.23$; $p < 0.001$), indicating that the relationship is statistically significant at the 0.001 level. The coefficient of determination indicated that the hidden curriculum contributes 34% to the variance in santri character development at Al-Kholil Islamic Boarding School, with the remaining variance attributable to factors outside the model.

Table 1. Summarizes The Key Statistical Outputs Of The Hypothesis Test.

Statistic	Value	Interpretation
Standardized coefficient (β)	0.583	Positive relationship
t-value	5.23	Significant ($p < 0.001$)
Coefficient of determination (R^2)	34%	Contribution of X to Y

Table 1. Summary of Correlation and Hypothesis-Testing Results

5. Discussion

5.1. Relationship Between the Hidden Curriculum and Santri Character Development

The results indicate that the hidden curriculum has a positive and significant effect on santri character development ($\beta = 0.583$; $t = 5.23$; $p < 0.001$). This finding is consistent



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with Lickona's (1991) character education theory, which holds that character develops not only through moral knowing but also through moral feeling and moral action. Values transmitted implicitly through institutional culture, teacher role modeling, social interaction among santri, and daily habituation were shown to improve discipline, responsibility, honesty, and social morality. This finding supports Rahman (2020) and Syam et al. (2026), who found a significant relationship between the hidden curriculum and student discipline, albeit in formal-school contexts, and aligns with Hidayat's (2018) emphasis on teacher role modeling as a means of value internalization, consistent with the intensive interaction between santri and educators observed at Al-Kholil Islamic Boarding School.

5.2. Strengthening and Developing Theory

This study reinforces the assumptions of Jackson (1968) and Giroux (1983) that the hidden curriculum is an important mechanism of character formation, while adding an empirical dimension rarely examined in pesantren settings. The findings show that the effects of the hidden curriculum can be statistically measured, strengthening theoretical claims about the internalization of moral values through everyday practice and institutional culture. The study further develops Lickona's (1991) theory by showing that implementing moral values through social interaction, habituation, and role modeling strengthens not only moral knowing and moral feeling but also moral action, yielding more complete and consistent character development. In this sense, the hidden curriculum functions as an environmental mediator connecting character-education theory with actual practice in Islamic education.

5.3. Critique of Previous Theories and Findings

Prior studies have largely been qualitative or conducted in general schools (Amin, 2020; Fauzi, 2019), leaving the quantitative contribution of the hidden curriculum to character dimensions inadequately measured. The present findings show that empirical measurement enables clearer mapping of the relationships among construct dimensions institutional culture, role modeling, social interaction, and habituation and their contribution to character development. Another limitation of prior literature is its limited integration of holistic character dimensions (discipline, responsibility, honesty, and morality), which this study addresses directly.

5.4. Scientific Contribution and Implications

Theoretically, the study provides empirical evidence that the hidden curriculum significantly influences santri character development and expands the literature on character education in Islamic contexts. Socially, it demonstrates that a structured pesantren environment can cultivate a generation with strong moral integrity and



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discipline. Practically, it suggests that pesantren can optimize the hidden curriculum through improved teacher role modeling, daily value habituation, and stronger institutional culture. At the policy level, the findings can inform national guidelines for character education grounded in implicit values, particularly within Islamic educational institutions (UNESCO, 2022).

5.5. Contemporary Relevance

This research is relevant to Society 5.0, in which integrating spiritual, moral, and social values is essential to preparing younger generations for globalization and technological change. The findings show that moral-value internalization through the hidden curriculum is not merely normative but can be empirically measured and predicted, opening opportunities for pesantren to adapt the hidden curriculum to contemporary needs without compromising the fundamental values of Islamic character education.

6. Conclusion

The findings demonstrate that hidden curriculum implementation is positively and significantly associated with santri character development at Al-Kholil Islamic Boarding School, Berau. The statistical analysis indicates that hidden curriculum contributes to variations in character development, demonstrating the importance of implicit educational practices within the pesantren environment. Through institutional culture, social interaction, role modelling, and habituation, hidden curriculum provides an important educational context in which character values are experienced and reinforced in students' daily lives.

The relationship between hidden curriculum and santri character development highlights that character formation in Islamic boarding schools extends beyond formal curriculum implementation. The values reflected through discipline, responsibility, honesty, and social morality are developed through continuous interaction between formal educational processes and implicit institutional practices. These findings extend discussions on hidden curriculum and Islamic character education by providing quantitative evidence regarding the relevance of informal educational mechanisms in shaping students' character within a pesantren context. Practically, the findings suggest that Islamic boarding schools should strengthen positive institutional cultures, educator role modelling, meaningful social interactions, and consistent habituation practices as complementary components of character education. The integration of hidden curriculum into educational planning can support the development of holistic character formation among santri.

However, the findings should be interpreted within the context of the research limitations. The research was conducted in a single Islamic boarding school using a



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correlational design; therefore, the results indicate relationships and contributions rather than causal effects. Further research involving broader pesantren contexts, comparative designs, and longitudinal approaches is recommended to explore the sustainability and wider applicability of hidden curriculum in Islamic character education.

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