

A *Pesantren*-Based Model of Islamic Education for Cultivating *Santri* Character among University Students

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ABSTRACT

Islamic higher education institutions based on the *pesantren* system possess distinctive characteristics in integrating academic traditions with *pesantren* values. This integration serves as an important strategy in producing graduates who are not only intellectually competent but also possess strong religious character and noble morals. The concept of students with a *santri* spirit has become a relevant identity for Islamic higher education institutions in responding to the challenges of modernity and moral degradation among the younger generation. This study aims to: (1) analyze the model of *pesantren*-based Islamic education in shaping students with a *santri* spirit; and (2) examine the implementation of academic and *pesantren* cultures in students' daily lives. This study employed a qualitative approach using a case study design at the Institut Agama Islam Kyai Haji Ahmad Syairazi Al-Arsyadi (IAI KHAS Al-Arsyadi), Hulu Sungai Selatan Regency, South Kalimantan. Data were collected through observations of academic and *pesantren* activities as well as documentation of student development programs. Data analysis was conducted through data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing, with triangulation techniques employed to ensure data validity. The findings reveal that the *pesantren*-based educational model is implemented through the integration of academic and *pesantren* curricula, habituation of worship practices, reinforcement of Islamic manners (*adab*), and dormitory-based guidance systems. The implementation of this model contributes to the development of students' religious character, discipline, responsibility, and independence. This study contributes to the development of *pesantren*-based Islamic higher education models as an effort to cultivate students with a *santri* spirit in the contemporary era.

Keywords: *Islamic Education, Pesantren, Students with a Santri Spirit, Academic Culture, Islamic Higher Education.*

INTRODUCTION

Islamic higher education is expected not only to produce graduates with strong academic competence but also to develop individuals who are faithful, morally responsible, socially engaged, and committed to Islamic values. From an Islamic perspective, education constitutes an integral process of developing the intellectual, spiritual, moral, emotional, and

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social dimensions of the *insān kāmil*. Therefore, the success of Islamic higher education should be measured not merely by academic achievement and graduate employability but also by its capacity to cultivate honesty, trustworthiness, justice, moderation, and concern for the public good.¹

Globalization and digital transformation have made this responsibility increasingly complex. Information technology, artificial intelligence, social media, and digital learning provide opportunities to improve teaching, research, community engagement, and international academic collaboration.² At the same time, they generate challenges such as value shifts, instant-oriented culture, unverified information, misuse of technology in academic work, and declining ethical sensitivity and integrity.³ Islamic higher education must therefore integrate technological competence with critical thinking, digital literacy, social responsibility, and Islamic morality. This orientation aligns with the emphasis placed by international educational frameworks on the balanced development of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values.⁴

Character-related problems remain evident in higher education. Academic plagiarism, cheating, misuse of AI, weak scientific literacy, limited critical thinking, and an excessive emphasis on outcomes rather than learning processes indicate the need for systematic character education.⁵ Digital literacy should consequently extend beyond technical proficiency to include ethics, responsibility, and critical information evaluation.⁶ Social media also influences students' lifestyles and behavior; although it expands knowledge, uncontrolled exposure may weaken religiosity, discipline, integrity, and social concern. Islamic higher education institutions must therefore establish academic cultures grounded in honesty, integrity, digital ethics, and Islamic values through instruction, institutional role modelling, and continuous literacy and character development.⁷

The integration of modern knowledge and Islamic values should be embodied in curricula, teaching practices, academic culture, lecturer role modelling, institutional governance, and student activities. Character education should not be confined to a specific course but developed as an institutional culture that shapes all academic activities. Such integration is expected to produce graduates with academic competence, professional ethics,

¹ Fajriah Inayati and Irawan Yasmin Harahap, "Epistemologi Keilmuan Al-Attas Dalam Pengembangan Pendidikan Agama Islam | Jurnal PAI Raden Fatah," 2024, https://jurnal.radenfatah.ac.id/index.php/pairf/article/view/25188?utm_source=chatgpt.com; Hafiz Mahendra et al., "Konsep Pendidikan Islam Abuddin Nata," *El-Darisa: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 2, no. 2 (2023): 154–67.

² UNESCO, "Guidance for Generative AI in Education and Research | UNESCO," 2023, <https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/guidance-generative-ai-education-and-research>.

³ Holmes et al., *AI in Education | Center for Curriculum Redesign*, October 30, 2018, <https://curriculumredesign.org/our-work/artificial-intelligence-in-education/>; Enkelejda Kasneci et al., "ChatGPT for Good? On Opportunities and Challenges of Large Language Models for Education," *Learning and Individual Differences* 103 (April 2023): 102274, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lindif.2023.102274>; Neil Selwyn, "Should Robots Replace Teachers?: AI and the Future of Education | Wiley," Wiley.Com, September 2019, <https://www.wiley.com/en-gb/should-robots-replace-teachers-ai-and-the-future-of-education-p-9781509528967>.

⁴ OECD/INFE, "OECD/INFE 2023 International Survey of Adult Financial Literacy | OECD," 2023, https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/oecd-infe-2023-international-survey-of-adult-financial-literacy_56003a32-en.html; UNESCO, "Guidance for Generative AI in Education and Research | UNESCO."

⁵ Kasneci et al., "ChatGPT for Good?"; UNESCO, "Guidance for Generative AI in Education and Research | UNESCO."

⁶ Davy Tsz Kit Ng et al., "Conceptualizing AI Literacy: An Exploratory Review," *Computers and Education: Artificial Intelligence* 2 (January 2021): 100041, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.caeai.2021.100041>.

⁷ Muhammad Naguib Al-Attas (Syed.), *The Concept of Education in Islam: A Framework for an Islamic Philosophy of Education* (International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization, 1991).

critical thinking, social awareness, and commitment to Islamic and humanitarian values. This approach corresponds with the broader objective of twenty-first-century higher education to balance academic competence with character, social responsibility, empathy, integrity, ethical decision-making, and global citizenship.

Within this context, *pesantren* offers a relevant educational tradition for strengthening character. As one of Indonesia's oldest Islamic educational institutions, *pesantren* emphasizes *adab*, religious habituation, discipline, communal life, and the continuous internalization of Islamic values through role modelling.⁸ Its educational strength lies in balancing cognitive learning with affective, spiritual, and moral development. Integrating higher education with *pesantren* traditions may therefore provide an alternative model for producing intellectually competent graduates with moral integrity and Islamic character.

The concept of university students with a *santri* character represents an emerging paradigm in Islamic higher education.⁹ Such students are expected not only to possess academic competence but also to demonstrate religiosity, discipline, responsibility, independence, and noble character. This concept is increasingly relevant as higher education institutions seek to produce graduates who can adapt to modern change without losing their Islamic identity. Previous studies confirm that *pesantren* contributes to religious character, discipline, and learner independence,¹⁰ while studies of Islamic value internalization and academic culture show their importance for strengthening students' religious identity and intellectual development.

Nevertheless, earlier studies have generally examined *pesantren* education, academic culture, and character formation separately. Most have focused on traditional *pesantren* or character education in schools and madrasas, while studies integrating higher education and *pesantren* systems remain limited. Research specifically examining how *pesantren* values are combined with academic culture to form university students with a *santri* character is also scarce. This gap is significant because integrating academic and *pesantren* cultures may produce graduates who combine intellectual excellence, moral integrity, noble character, and spiritual maturity.

Institut Agama Islam Kyai Haji Ahmad Syairazi Al-Arsyadi (IAI KHAS Al-Arsyadi) represents an Islamic higher education institution that integrates academic traditions with *pesantren* values. Character formation is supported through residential life in the *ma'had*, religious guidance, worship habituation, moral development, and spirituality-oriented programs. This model reflects the *pesantren* emphasis on balancing knowledge acquisition, character development, and spiritual formation. The institution was therefore selected as the research setting because its educational structure provides a relevant context for examining a *pesantren*-based Islamic education model in higher education.

The novelty of this study lies in analyzing *pesantren*-based Islamic education in higher education as an integrated system that combines academic culture with *pesantren* culture. Unlike previous studies that address *pesantren* education, character education, or academic culture separately, this study examines the simultaneous integration of the academic curriculum, residential *ma'had* life, worship habituation, *adab* formation, *musyrif* mentoring, and academic culture. Accordingly, this study aims to analyze the *pesantren*-based Islamic

⁸ Zamakhsyari Dhofier, *Tradisi pesantren: studi pandangan hidup kyai dan visinya mengenai masa depan Indonesia* (LP3ES, 2011).

⁹ Abdul Basyit et al., *Ilmu Pendidikan Islam: Landasan Pokok Arab Pendidikan Islam Demokratis* (Indigo Media, 2025).

¹⁰ Moch Ariffin, "Internalisasi Nilai-Nilai Pendidikan Islam Dalam Membentuk Karakter *Santri*," *Turatsuna: Jurnal Keislaman Dan Pendidikan* 1, no. 2 (2019): 52–59.

education model used to develop university students with a *santri* character and to examine the implementation of academic and *pesantren* cultures in students' daily lives.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach to obtain an in-depth understanding of how a *pesantren*-based Islamic education model is implemented to develop university students with a *santri* character. This approach enabled the exploration of participants' experiences, perspectives, and educational practices within an Islamic higher education institution integrated with *pesantren* life.¹¹

The study was conducted at Institut Agama Islam Kyai Haji Ahmad Syairazi Al-Arsyadi (IAI KHAS Al-Arsyadi), Hulu Sungai Selatan Regency, South Kalimantan. The institution was selected because it integrates higher education with *pesantren*-based residential life and explicitly promotes the development of students with a *santri* character. Participants included institutional leaders, lecturers, *pesantren* or dormitory administrators, *musyrif*, and students directly involved in academic and *pesantren* activities. Informants were selected through purposive sampling based on their knowledge, experience, and relevance to the research focus.¹²

Data were collected through observation, in-depth interviews, and document analysis. Observations focused on lectures, Islamic studies sessions, congregational worship, character-building activities, and students' daily life in the residential environment. Interviews were conducted with institutional leaders, lecturers, *pesantren* administrators, *musyrif*, and students to examine the implementation of the educational model and the process of forming a *santri* character. Documents such as the institutional vision and mission, academic guidelines, *pesantren* regulations, student activity schedules, and character-development programs were also analyzed.

The data were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, consisting of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification.¹³ Analysis was conducted continuously throughout data collection to identify patterns in the integration of academic and *pesantren* cultures. Trustworthiness was strengthened through source and method triangulation by comparing data from observations, interviews, and documents, as well as through member checking to confirm the accuracy of the researchers' interpretations with participants.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Pesantren-Based Islamic Education as an Integrated Academic and Religious System

The findings indicate that the *pesantren*-based Islamic education model at Institut Agama Islam Kyai Haji Ahmad Syairazi Al-Arsyadi (IAI KHAS Al-Arsyadi) is implemented through the systematic integration of higher education and *pesantren*-based formation. Formal academic learning is combined with residential life in the *ma'had*, congregational worship, Qur'anic and Islamic studies, *adab* formation, mentoring by *musyrif*, and structured religious activities. These components do not function as separate programs but form a unified

¹¹ John W. Creswell- Cheryl N. Poth, "Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design," 2018, <https://www.sagepub.com/shop/buy-a-book/qualitative-inquiry-and-research-design-4-246896>; Robert K. Yin Robert K. Yin, "Case Study Research and Applications," SAGE Publications Ltd, 2026, <https://uk.sagepub.com/en-gb/asi/case-study-research-and-applications/book250150>.

¹² Michael Quinn Patton Michael Quinn Patton, "Qualitative Research & Evaluation Methods," 2015, <https://collegepublishing.sagepub.com/products/qualitative-research-evaluation-methods-4-232962>.

¹³ Matthew B. Miles et al., *Qualitative Data Analysis* (SAGE, 2014).

educational system directed toward developing students' academic competence, spirituality, morality, and social responsibility. An institutional leader described the model as follows:

"We do not separate academic education from pesantren formation. Lectures develop students' intellectual competence, while activities in the ma'had strengthen their worship, discipline, adab, and responsibility. Both are designed as one educational system with the same objective: producing graduates who are academically competent and morally grounded."

This statement demonstrates that the institution does not position *pesantren* activities merely as supplementary religious programs. Instead, academic and residential education are designed to support the same graduate profile. During formal academic hours, students participate in lectures, discussions, assignments, seminars, and other scholarly activities. Outside the classroom, their education continues through congregational worship, Islamic studies, mentoring, communal responsibilities, and daily interactions within the *ma'had*. Education therefore occurs continuously across academic, religious, and social settings. A *pesantren* administrator similarly stated:

"The ma'had is not merely a place for students to live. It is an extension of the educational process, where students learn discipline, responsibility, worship, social interaction, and respect for teachers through their daily routines."

The residential environment thus functions as an educational space in which values are translated into daily practices. Students do not merely learn about discipline, responsibility, and Islamic morality conceptually; they are required to practice these values through compliance with schedules, participation in congregational activities, management of shared facilities, and interaction with peers and mentors. This finding reflects Al-Attas's (1991)¹⁴ concept of *ta'dib*, which places the formation of civilized and morally responsible individuals at the center of Islamic education. Education is not limited to transferring knowledge but is intended to establish the proper relationship among knowledge, conduct, responsibility, and morality. Tafsir (2015)¹⁵ similarly emphasizes that Islamic education should develop intellectual, spiritual, emotional, and social potential as an integrated whole.

The findings are also consistent with Haryanto et al. (2024),¹⁶ who found that *pesantren*-based universities integrate religious values with modern academic knowledge and reject the separation between religious and general sciences. Their study identifies values such as *amānah*, *tawāḍu'*, *istiqāmah*, moderation, balance, simplicity, and exemplary conduct as foundations of *pesantren*-based higher education. In the context of IAI KHAS Al-Arsyadi, these values are reflected not only in religious programs but also in expectations concerning academic honesty, respectful communication, responsibility in completing assignments, and commitment to institutional rules.

The integration of academic and *pesantren* cultures is particularly visible in the relationship between critical inquiry and *adab*. Students are encouraged to express arguments, analyze problems, and participate in scholarly discussions, but these activities are expected

¹⁴ Al-Attas (Syed.), *The Concept of Education in Islam*.

¹⁵ Ahmad tafsir, "Ilmu Pendidikan / Ahmad Tafsir," DPK Kepri, 2015, <https://dpk.kepriprov.go.id/opac/detail/3q925>.

¹⁶ Sri Haryanto et al., "Uniting Tradition and Modernity: Scientific Paradigms of *Pesantren*-Based Universities," *Nazḥruna: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 7, no. 3 (2024): 684–704, <https://doi.org/10.31538/nzh.v7i3.48>; Fandy Ahmad, "Liberating Discipline Pedagogy in Indonesian Character Education," *Al-Munawwarah: Journal of Islamic Education* 1, no. 2 (2025): 110–22, <https://doi.org/10.38073/almunawwarah.v1i2.3426>.

to remain grounded in honesty, humility, and respect for lecturers and fellow students. A lecturer explained:

“In the classroom, students are encouraged to think critically and express their arguments. However, critical thinking must remain accompanied by adab, honesty, and respect for different opinions. Academic competence should not be separated from Islamic ethics.”

This integration ensures that academic freedom is not understood as freedom from ethical responsibility. Reading, research, scientific writing, and discussion contribute to intellectual development, while *pesantren* traditions provide the moral framework through which such competence is exercised. Academic writing, for instance, is connected with honesty and avoidance of plagiarism, while intellectual disagreement is regulated by courtesy and respect.

Siswati et al. (2023)¹⁷ similarly show that value education in *pesantren*-based universities is formed through the interaction of teachers, students, dormitories, mosques, books, institutional regulations, supervision, and religious discussions. These elements create a comprehensive value ecosystem rather than relying on isolated character-education courses. Ubab et al. (2026)¹⁸ further demonstrate that *pesantren* values can be integrated through curricular, co-curricular, and extracurricular activities, supported by distinctive learning traditions and lecturer role modelling.

The role of *musyrif* is also central to this integrative system. While lecturers mainly guide academic development, *musyrif* accompany students in their residential, religious, and personal lives. Their responsibilities include supervising activities, encouraging worship, addressing behavioral problems, and helping students adapt to institutional routines. The relationship between academic guidance and residential mentoring allows character formation to continue beyond the classroom.

The findings also support Saputra et al. (2025),¹⁹ who describe dormitory programs as structured social environments that shape students' religious habitus through repeated practice, supervision, and peer interaction. The durability of this formation, however, depends on the consistency of institutional culture and the continuity of value reinforcement. This means that the *ma'had* should not function only through schedules and regulations but also through meaningful mentoring and exemplary conduct.

Accordingly, the distinctiveness of the model at IAI KHAS Al-Arsyadi lies not simply in the existence of a campus and a dormitory within the same institution. Its central characteristic is the intentional integration of academic learning, residential formation, religious habituation, mentoring, and institutional culture. The model can therefore be understood as an educational ecosystem in which intellectual development, worship, morality, and social responsibility reinforce one another. Such an approach seeks to produce graduates who do not merely possess academic qualifications but are also capable of using their knowledge ethically and responsibly.

Formation of University Students with a *Santri* Character

¹⁷ Vialinda Siswati et al., “Supporting Pesantren-Based Higher Education to Internalize Value Education,” *Indonesian Journal of Islamic Education Studies (IJIES)* 6, no. 2 (2023): 207–22, <https://doi.org/10.33367/ijies.v6i2.4433>.

¹⁸ Abdullah Ubab et al., “Integration of Pesantren Values in Islamic Religious Education,” *Tadrib: Jurnal Pendidikan Agama Islam* 12, no. 3 (2026): 260–72, <https://doi.org/10.19109/tadrib.v12i3.34661>.

¹⁹ Riza Saputra et al., “The Transformation of Religious Habitus Among Mahasantri Through a Dormitory Program: A Sociological Analysis from Pierre Bourdieu's Perspective,” *Jurnal Sosiologi Agama* 19, no. 2 (2025): 103–14, <https://doi.org/10.14421/jsa.2025.192-02>.

The findings suggest that the implementation of *pesantren*-based Islamic education contributes to the development of university students with a *santri* character. In this study, the concept does not simply refer to students who reside in a *pesantren* or participate in religious activities. It describes students who combine academic competence with religious commitment, discipline, independence, integrity, responsibility, *adab*, and social concern.

The formation of these characteristics occurs through several interconnected mechanisms: habituation, role modelling, mentoring, institutional regulation, communal life, and academic engagement. Religious and spiritual commitment is strengthened through congregational prayer, Qur'anic studies, Islamic learning, and spiritual guidance. Discipline is developed through structured academic and residential schedules. Independence emerges as students manage lectures, assignments, personal needs, worship, and communal responsibilities. Integrity is cultivated through both academic rules and religious awareness of honesty and accountability. A student described the influence of residential routines as follows:

“Before living in the ma’had, I was not very disciplined in managing my time. The structured schedule gradually taught me to balance lectures, assignments, worship, and other responsibilities.”

This experience shows that discipline is not developed exclusively through verbal instruction. It emerges through repeated practice within a structured environment. Students must organize their time around academic responsibilities, worship, dormitory activities, and social obligations. Consistent participation gradually transforms external rules into patterns of self-regulation. Another student explained the process of religious habituation:

“At first, some activities felt difficult because I was not accustomed to such a structured routine. After following them consistently, congregational prayer and religious study became part of my daily habits.”

This finding supports Shiddiqi and Kibtiyah (2026),²⁰ who demonstrate that *pesantren*-based learning strengthens discipline, responsibility, honesty, independence, and spiritual awareness through religious instruction, worship habituation, moral discipline, and teacher exemplification. Habituation is effective because students repeatedly encounter the same values in different situations. Worship, cleanliness, punctuality, academic responsibility, and interpersonal ethics become interconnected aspects of their daily lives.

The role of *musyrif* is particularly important in facilitating this process. Students come from different family, educational, and religious backgrounds, and therefore do not adapt to *pesantren* life at the same pace. Some have previous boarding-school experience, whereas others encounter collective worship and structured residential routines for the first time. A *musyrif* stated:

“Students come from different educational and family backgrounds. Some are already accustomed to pesantren life, while others need more time to adapt. Therefore, the guidance cannot be exactly the same for every student.”

This statement highlights the need for differentiated and personal mentoring. The role of the *musyrif* is not limited to monitoring attendance or enforcing rules. It also includes

²⁰ Ahmad Wifaqi Shiddiqi and Asriana Kibtiyah, “Integrating Pesantren Values into Islamic Religious Education for Character Strengthening,” *Urwatul Wutsqo: Jurnal Studi Kependidikan Dan Keislaman* 15, no. 2 (2026): 858–73, <https://doi.org/10.54437/urwatulwutsqo.v15i2.3139>.

listening to students' concerns, providing advice, correcting behavior, and encouraging gradual improvement. Another *musyrif* explained:

"Our role is not limited to monitoring attendance or enforcing dormitory regulations. We also accompany students personally, listen to their problems, remind them about worship, and guide their attitudes and relationships with others."

Mentoring therefore connects institutional values with students' personal experiences. Rules may establish behavioral expectations, but mentoring helps students understand the meaning behind those expectations. Through dialogue and guidance, students are encouraged to develop internal awareness rather than merely comply because of external supervision. The findings also demonstrate that *santri* character is reflected in academic behavior. A lecturer stated:

"The santri character can be seen not only in religious activities but also in students' academic behavior. Honesty in completing assignments, discipline in attending classes, respect for lecturers, and responsibility in group work are also important indicators."

This observation is significant because it prevents *santri* identity from being reduced to ritual performance. Religious character must be visible in how students study, communicate, complete assignments, use information, and interact with others. Academic dishonesty, plagiarism, and irresponsible use of technology contradict the ethical values promoted through *pesantren* education, even when students actively participate in ritual activities.

The findings align with Ramayulis (2002),²¹ who argues that the success of Islamic education is measured by learners' ability to integrate knowledge and Islamic values into everyday conduct. They are also consistent with Yusuf et al. (2026),²² who found that student *pesantren* foster discipline and independence through structured habituation, time management, and the integration of academic and religious routines. Their findings suggest that students develop not only personal discipline but also leadership capacity through organizational involvement and communal responsibility. Another important dimension is *adab* toward lecturers, teachers, peers, and knowledge. One student explained:

"One of the most important things I learned here is how to maintain adab toward lecturers, teachers, and fellow students. We are allowed to express different opinions, but we must communicate them respectfully."

Respectful conduct does not eliminate critical thinking. Rather, it provides an ethical framework for intellectual interaction. Jasminto and Rofi'ah (2025)²³ similarly emphasize that *pesantren* traditions can integrate *adab*, moderation, sincerity, and scholarly responsibility into contemporary educational practices. This combination produces students who can engage critically with knowledge without losing humility and respect.

²¹ Ramayulis, *Ilmu pendidikan Islam* (Kalam Mulia, 2002).

²² Syaifulloh Yusuf et al., "The Internalization of Character Values among Santri: A Case Study at Budi Mulia Student Pesantren Yogyakarta," *At-Ta'dib* 21, no. 1 (2026): 86–111, <https://doi.org/10.21111/at-tadib.v21i1.21>.

²³ Jasminto Jasminto and Siti Rofi'ah, "Moderation, Character, and Pesantren Traditions: Actualization of KH. Hasyim Asy'ari's Ideas in Islamic Religious Education," *Urwatul Wutsqo: Jurnal Studi Kependidikan Dan Keislaman* 14, no. 1 (2025): 159–79, <https://doi.org/10.54437/urwatulwutsqo.v14i1.2073>.

Communal life also develops social concern and cooperation. Students share facilities, participate in collective activities, and respond to the needs of their peers. A student stated:

“Living together teaches us to care about other people. When a friend is sick or experiencing difficulties, we are encouraged to help. This makes the relationship among students stronger.”

Based on these findings, the *santri* character developed at IAI KHAS Al-Arsyadi can be organized into six interrelated dimensions: religious-spiritual commitment, discipline and self-regulation, independence, integrity and responsibility, *adab* toward teachers and others, and social concern. These characteristics are not produced automatically or uniformly. Students differ in motivation, prior experience, and ability to adapt. Therefore, the model should be understood as creating conditions that facilitate and strengthen *santri* character rather than guaranteeing identical outcomes for every student.

The formation of such character is highly relevant in the context of globalization and digital transformation. Cahyono et al. (2024)²⁴ argue that *pesantren* values such as sincerity, independence, simplicity, leadership, and professionalism remain important for producing morally grounded individuals in the digital era. Students require technological competence and intellectual flexibility, but these capabilities must be accompanied by ethical responsibility and spiritual resilience. The *santri* character therefore represents a synthesis between Islamic identity and contemporary academic competence.

Supporting Factors, Challenges, and Implications of the Model

The implementation of the *pesantren*-based Islamic education model is influenced by several supporting and inhibiting factors. The main supporting factors identified in the study are institutional leadership commitment, the availability of the *ma'had*, active participation of lecturers and *musyrif*, structured character-development programs, clear regulations, and a strong religious institutional culture. These elements allow academic and *pesantren* education to function as a coordinated system.

Institutional commitment is essential because integration requires clear policies, scheduling, financial support, human resources, and coordination among academic and residential units. An institutional leader explained:

“The integration of academic and pesantren education requires institutional commitment. It must be supported through policies, schedules, facilities, human resources, and coordination among lecturers, administrators, and musyrif.”

This statement demonstrates that *pesantren*-based formation cannot depend solely on individual initiatives. It must be incorporated into the institution's vision, governance, curriculum, student services, and quality-assurance system. Zubaidi et al. (2024)²⁵ similarly found that *pesantren* values become sustainable when they are integrated into curriculum development, extracurricular programs, academic activities, and institutional regulations. Institutionalization protects character education from becoming incidental or ceremonial.

²⁴ Cahyono Cahyono et al., “Pesantren Education as Indonesia's Indigenous Heritage: Nurturing Moral Education in the Digital Era,” *At-Ta'dib* 19, no. 1 (2024): 176–93, <https://doi.org/10.21111/at-tadib.v19i1.67>.

²⁵ Ahmad Zubaidi et al., “Transformation of Islamic Boarding School Education: Integration of Trilogy Values and Five Student Awareness in Curriculum Development,” *Edukasia Islamika* 9, no. 2 (2024): 163–84, <https://doi.org/10.28918/jei.v9i2.8905>; Erizka Nurianti et al., “Attitude Formation of Students According to Hadratus Shaykh K.H. Hasyim Asy'ari: An Examination of the Book of Adabul Alim Wa Muta'alim,” *Al-Munawwarah: Journal of Islamic Education* 1, no. 2 (2025): 101–9, <https://doi.org/10.38073/almunawwarah.v1i2.2731>.

The availability of the *ma'had* also supports continuous formation. However, residential infrastructure alone is insufficient. The *ma'had* requires adequate facilities, clear management, appropriate mentor–student ratios, and coordinated activities. A student noted: *“The programs are beneficial, but several activities would be more effective if the study rooms, dormitory facilities, and spaces for discussion were more adequate.”* This finding indicates that physical conditions influence students’ comfort, participation, and learning effectiveness. Limited dormitory capacity, study areas, or worship facilities may reduce the quality of implementation, particularly as student numbers increase.

Human resources constitute another important factor. Lecturers, administrators, and *musyrif* must consistently demonstrate the values expected from students. Their involvement supports coordination between academic expectations and residential guidance. Nevertheless, mentoring becomes difficult when the number of students exceeds the capacity of available supervisors. A *musyrif* stated:

“Personal mentoring becomes difficult when one musyrif is responsible for too many students. Some students require intensive assistance, but limited human resources mean that not every problem can be addressed immediately.”

This challenge suggests that effective mentoring requires not only committed individuals but also manageable workloads, training, and clear coordination. Without these supports, supervision may become limited to attendance and discipline rather than meaningful personal development.

Another challenge concerns the heterogeneity of students’ backgrounds. Students enter the institution with different levels of religious knowledge, discipline, family support, and *pesantren* experience. Those unfamiliar with residential education may struggle to adapt to collective worship, time restrictions, and communal responsibilities. Adaptation should therefore be facilitated through orientation, gradual guidance, and differentiated mentoring instead of relying exclusively on sanctions.

Digital technology and social media constitute an additional challenge. Technology provides access to learning resources, communication, and academic innovation, but excessive or irresponsible use may disrupt discipline, reduce direct interaction, and encourage academic dishonesty. A lecturer explained: *“Technology supports learning because students can access references easily. However, without adequate supervision, it may also encourage distraction, plagiarism, and dependence on instant information.”* A student similarly acknowledged:

“Social media sometimes makes it difficult to manage time. I may intend to use my phone briefly, but it can take much longer. The dormitory regulations help remind us to use technology more responsibly.”

These statements show that digital technology is not inherently contrary to *pesantren* education. The challenge lies in developing students’ self-regulation, critical literacy, and ethical awareness. UNESCO (2023)²⁶ emphasizes that digital transformation creates both opportunities and risks for education, requiring attention to academic integrity, responsible technology use, and digital ethics. OECD/INFE (2023)²⁷ similarly stresses that twenty-first-century education should integrate knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values.

The institution therefore needs to position technology as a learning instrument while establishing clear ethical guidance. An institutional leader stated:

²⁶ UNESCO, “Guidance for Generative AI in Education and Research | UNESCO.”

²⁷ OECD/INFE, “OECD/INFE 2023 International Survey of Adult Financial Literacy | OECD.”

“The institution does not intend to reject technology. Our task is to guide students so that technology supports learning and da‘wah rather than weakening discipline, academic integrity, and social responsibility.”

This orientation reflects the adaptive character of *pesantren*-based higher education. Tradition and modernity are not treated as mutually exclusive. Haryanto et al. (2024)²⁸ and Zubaidi et al. (2024)²⁹ demonstrate that *pesantren*-based institutions can maintain their religious identity while incorporating contemporary academic and technological practices. The central requirement is that modernization remains guided by institutional values.

Practically, the findings indicate that the *pesantren*-based education model can serve as a reference for other Islamic higher education institutions seeking to integrate academic excellence with Islamic character formation. Its implementation may include the integration of Islamic values into the curriculum, residential *ma‘had* programs, structured mentoring, worship habituation, lecturer role modelling, academic-integrity education, and responsible digital-literacy programs. However, the model should not be replicated mechanically. Each institution needs to adapt it to its leadership capacity, infrastructure, student characteristics, local culture, and educational objectives.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that the effectiveness of *pesantren*-based Islamic education depends on institutional commitment, adequate facilities, coordinated mentoring, consistent program implementation, and the ability to respond to technological change. When these elements are properly managed, the model can support the development of graduates who are academically competent, spiritually grounded, disciplined, morally responsible, socially concerned, and capable of engaging with global and digital transformation without losing their Islamic identity.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the *pesantren*-based Islamic education model at Institut Agama Islam Kyai Haji Ahmad Syairazi Al-Arsyadi (IAI KHAS Al-Arsyadi) is implemented through the integration of higher education and *pesantren*-based student development. This integration is reflected in the combination of academic and *pesantren* curricula, residential life in the *ma‘had*, worship habituation, *adab* formation, mentoring by *musyrif*, and the development of an academic culture that upholds ethics, literacy, and integrity. The model creates a learning ecosystem oriented not only toward the mastery of knowledge but also toward the continuous development of students’ spirituality, morality, and character.

The findings also show that the implementation of this *pesantren*-based education model contributes to the formation of university students with a *santri* character, reflected in religiosity, discipline, independence, responsibility, integrity, and the ability to internalize Islamic values in both academic and social life. The success of the model is supported by institutional leadership commitment, the active involvement of lecturers, *musyrif*, and *pesantren* administrators, the availability of a residential guidance system, and a religious institutional culture. Nevertheless, its implementation still faces several challenges, including the diversity of students’ backgrounds, limited facilities and infrastructure, and the influence of digital technology, which requires the continuous strengthening of digital literacy and academic ethics.

Theoretically, this study reinforces the concept of Islamic education as an integrative educational system that combines academic competence with Islamic character formation through the internalization of *pesantren* values. Practically, the model implemented at IAI

²⁸ Haryanto et al., “Uniting Tradition and Modernity.”

²⁹ Zubaidi et al., “Transformation of Islamic Boarding School Education.”

KHAS Al-Arsyadi may serve as a reference for other Islamic higher education institutions seeking to develop pesantren-based student development systems as a strategy for producing graduates who are academically excellent, morally upright, spiritually mature, and capable of responding to the challenges of Islamic higher education in the era of globalization and digital transformation.

Based on these findings, Islamic higher education institutions are encouraged to strengthen the integration of academic and pesantren cultures through adaptive curriculum development, capacity building for lecturers and *musyrif*, the improvement of character-development systems, and the ethical use of digital technology grounded in Islamic values. Future research should examine pesantren-based Islamic higher education across different institutions using comparative or mixed-methods approaches in order to develop a more comprehensive and widely applicable educational model.

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