



Independence of Santri: Exploring the Teachings of the Quran for the Awakening of the Spirit

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
<p>Keywords:</p> <p>Character development; Independent character; Islamic Boarding School; Religious education; Service Learning</p>	<p>This study examines the role of religious education in shaping students' independence and character development, particularly within Islamic boarding schools (<i>pesantren</i>). Religion plays a fundamental role in instilling moral values and guiding behavior, and in the <i>pesantren</i> environment, religious practices such as communal prayers, Qur'an recitation, and adherence to Islamic rituals foster noble character traits among students. Islamic education in <i>pesantren</i> not only deepens students' religious knowledge but also encourages the application of Islamic teachings in daily life, promoting personal growth and social responsibility. This study uses the Service Learning (SL) approach, combining academic learning with real-world community engagement. SL projects were conducted within <i>pesantren</i> settings, allowing students to practice autonomy and responsibility through community-centered projects that reflect Islamic values of self-reliance and compassion. Results indicate that students demonstrate a significant understanding of independence, relating it to Islamic principles such as self-sufficiency, resilience, and trust in God after putting forth effort. Findings suggest that students internalize the concept of independence not only as the ability to manage their own needs but also as a commitment to positively impacting their surroundings. The SL approach strengthens this sense of responsibility, bridging theoretical lessons with practical applications that enhance social skills, critical thinking, and self-discipline. The study concludes that <i>pesantren</i> education, enriched with SL-based activities, effectively nurtures independent, socially responsible individuals prepared to face contemporary challenges.</p>
<p>Article history:</p> <p>Received 2024-11-17 Revised 2024-12-15 Accepted 2024-12-16</p>	<p>Contribution: This research contributes to the discourse on educational methodologies in religious contexts, providing a framework for enhancing character education through experiential learning that aligns with Islamic principles.</p>

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1. INTRODUCTION

Religious teachings can significantly strengthen pupils' spirit for life by instilling core values, enhancing resilience, and fostering a sense of purpose (L. Smith et al., 2013). Religious education provides a solid moral framework that guides students in distinguishing right from wrong (Kittelmann Flensner, 2015). Teachings derived from religious texts encourage virtues such as honesty, compassion, and integrity (Butts & Rich, 2022). For instance, Islamic teachings emphasize the importance of justice and kindness towards others, which helps students develop a strong ethical foundation that influences their behavior and decision-making throughout life (Rahman, 2014). Participation in religious practices fosters a sense of belonging and community among students (Joseph, 2017; Koterski, 1993). Engaging in communal activities like prayers and celebrations reinforces social bonds and cultivates a supportive environment (Singha & Singha, 2023). This sense of community is crucial for emotional well-being, providing students with a network of support that can uplift their spirits during challenging times (Seedat & Roopchand, 2024).

Religious teachings often include narratives and principles that help students cope with adversity (Batchelder, 2022). For example, stories of prophets overcoming challenges can inspire resilience and perseverance (Hisyām, 2007). By learning that struggles are part of life and that faith can provide strength during difficult times, students are better equipped to handle personal challenges with a positive outlook. As highlighted in various sources, spiritual strength is derived from faith and reliance on a higher power. This belief can be particularly empowering for students, as it instills confidence that they are not alone in facing life's difficulties (Sung & Gounko, 2023). The idea that they can seek divine assistance encourages them to approach challenges with courage and determination (Mapfumo, 2024). Religious teachings often provide guidance on making life choices aligned with one's values and beliefs (D. R. Smith et al., 2018). This guidance helps students set meaningful goals and pursue paths that resonate with their spiritual convictions. By understanding their purpose through the lens of their faith, students are motivated to strive for personal growth and contribute positively to society (Michel, 2017). Many religious traditions emphasize the importance of service to others as a manifestation of faith. Engaging in community service projects not only strengthens the spirit but also cultivates empathy and compassion (Ainsworth et al., 2019; Schmid & Sheikhzadegan, 2022). Students learn that their actions can make a difference in the lives of others, reinforcing their commitment to social responsibility and enhancing their overall sense of fulfillment (Hoffmann, 2017; Razaghi et al., 2020; Sapsudin & Wibisono, 2024).

Religion plays a very important role in shaping an individual's character by instilling moral values and guiding behavior. As explained by Hasting (1974), religious teachings, especially those contained in the Qur'an and exemplified by the Prophet Muhammad SAW, provide moral guidelines that help individuals distinguish between right and wrong (Yunus & Qomaruzzaman, 2019). This belief, which is the core of religious belief, can have a positive influence on character development, cultivating traits such as patience, sincerity and optimism. Apart from that, religious culture implemented in the educational environment, such as congregational prayers, reading the Qur'an, and compliance with Islamic rituals, also plays a major role in developing noble character among students (Mustari & Rahman, 2014). Overall, religion not only influences personal traits but also interacts with environmental factors to influence a person's religiosity and psychological impact (Adnan et al., 2024).

Education has the main goal of conveying knowledge and skills to the next generation, both formally and informally. In this case, religious institutions function as places of education that teach religious knowledge and other knowledge, producing a generation that is not only intellectually intelligent but also strong in faith and morals (Salvador et al., 2014). Islamic boarding schools, as Islamic educational institutions, have a specific aim to guide students to become individuals who not only have in-depth religious knowledge but are also able to practice Islamic teachings in everyday life, both for themselves and for society (Mustari & Rahman, 2012). Through religious education that refers to the yellow books or "classical books", Islamic boarding schools strive to create noble individuals, as reflected in the main goal of Islamic boarding schools, which are based on Allah's commands in the Qur'an (Nashihin, 2017).

As time went by, Islamic boarding schools not only focused on teaching religious knowledge but also began to develop general education as part of efforts to create students who were more competent and ready to face the challenges of the times. However, Islamic boarding schools still maintain their

main role in maintaining, developing and spreading Islamic teachings, as has been the case for a long time (Dhofier, 1982). In this context, Islamic boarding schools have great potential to regenerate the spirit of independence in students, with a focus on developing academic self-concept, instilling a humanitarian spirit, and awareness of leadership based on teachings (Dhofier, 1982). Instilling these values can have a positive impact in shaping the character and independence of students, who are not only focused on spiritual aspects, but also in facing social and environmental challenges.

The importance of independent education for students in the context of Islamic boarding schools is a relevant thing to pay attention to, especially in facing the challenges of an increasingly complex era. Therefore, an important question that arises is to what extent is Islamic boarding school-style independence education still relevant and applicable in the lives of students today? Through this service, the potential of Islamic boarding schools will be explored in fostering a spirit of independence in students by referring to the teachings of the Qur'an. The main question that will be answered is how can students understand and practice the teachings of the Qur'an regarding independence in their lives.

2. METHOD

This research method uses an approach Service Learning (SL), which combines academic learning with real experience in society. In the context of Islamic boarding schools, SL involves students in projects that benefit society while applying the knowledge and skills they have learned in class (Plata & Moredo, 2021). The SL process includes a cycle of preparation, service, reflection, and celebration, which helps students understand the subject matter in a more in-depth and applicable way. These activities can also include direct services to individuals, groups, or advocacy work integrated into the Islamic boarding school curriculum (Adler-Kassner et al., 2023).

SL connects learning in Islamic boarding schools with real-world experiences, building students' sense of social responsibility, civic engagement, and personal growth. This approach develops practical skills, critical thinking, and the ability to manage risk (Khatani et al., 2023). The implementation of SL in this research was carried out through a partnership between universities and Islamic boarding schools, with students given autonomy in designing and implementing projects (Cress et al., 2023). Primary data sources were taken from the Ulumul Qur'an Al-Mustofa Islamic Boarding School in Sumedang and the Al-Idhar Kalimanggis Islamic Boarding School in Tasikmalaya Regency.

To ensure its effectiveness, it is important for students to be involved in planning and implementing projects and build strong bonds between them. This approach strengthens commitment, sharing, and sustainability, resulting in unique experiences and long-term positive impacts (Bingle et al., 2023). Overall, SL is an educational approach that provides great benefits for students, communities, and society by promoting social responsibility, civic engagement, and honing practical skills and critical thinking (Resch & Schritteser, 2023).

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Ulumul Quran Al Mustofa Islamic Boarding School

Ulumul Quran Al Mustofa Islamic Boarding School, located in Citali Village, Pamulihan District, Sumedang Regency, West Java, is one of the leading Islamic educational institutions in the field of Tahfidzul Quran. This Islamic boarding school stands firmly on land that initially only covered 1,400 square meters, thanks to the dedication of its founder, Dr. KH. Asep Mustofa Kamal, M.Ag. Throughout its journey, this Islamic boarding school has experienced rapid development and now has various facilities that support teaching and learning activities for the students. This Islamic boarding school, which is far from the hustle and bustle of residential areas, offers a calm atmosphere, making it an ideal place for memorizers of the Qur'an to focus on carrying out their activities without interference from the outside world.



(Sumber: Profil Pesantren, 02/10/2024)

The Ulumul Quran Al Mustofa Islamic Boarding School was founded with a noble aim, namely to produce a generation that not only masters memorizing the Al-Quran, but also studies religious sciences such as fiqh, tafsir and other Islamic boarding school sciences. This reflects the name of the Islamic boarding school itself, "Ulumul Quran," which means that all knowledge studied here is centered on the Qur'an as the main source of knowledge. The teaching of the Al-Quran in this Islamic boarding school is not only limited to memorization, but also includes correct pronunciation (tahsin), appreciation through recitations, as well as discipline in practicing the noble morals taught by the Al-Quran (Admin, 2024a).

One of the superior programs at the Ulumul Quran Al Mustofa Islamic Boarding School is Tahfidzul Quran, where students are taught to memorize the Al-Quran in its entirety. This process is carried out using a structured and systematic method, accompanied by guidance from teachers who are experts in their fields. Not only that, this Islamic boarding school also has a Quran tilawatil program, which trains students to read the Al-Quran in a clear, fluent and beautiful manner. Students who are able to master this reading will gain a deeper understanding of the verses of the Qur'an, both in terms of meaning and recitation (Admin, 2024a).

Apart from teaching Al-Quran, this Islamic boarding school also provides integrated formal education through SMA Plus Ulumul Quran Al Mustofa. This school was founded in 2019 in response to the needs of the community who want their children to receive a strong religious education as well as quality academic education. With a curriculum that combines general and religious studies, SMA Plus aims to produce graduates who not only excel in memorizing the Al-Quran, but are also able to compete at national and international levels (Admin, 2024a). Since its inception, SMA Plus Ulumul Quran Al Mustofa has attracted the attention of many parents in Sumedang and its surroundings. This is proven by the high level of public interest in wanting to send their children to this school. Thanks to the support of the Ulumul Quran Al Mustofa Islamic Boarding School Foundation, this school has received various recognition and accreditation from the authorities, including an operational permit from the West Java Provincial Education Office. Apart from that, SMA Plus is also involved in the Masagi West Java Driving School and School program, which emphasizes character building and holistic development of student potential (Admin, 2024a).

Plus Ulumul Quran Al Mustofa High School is also committed to producing graduates who have moral character, excel in achievement, and are intelligent intellectually and spiritually. Students are not only taught to memorize the Al-Quran, but are also given balanced academic and non-academic skills. Thus, graduates are expected to be able to apply Quranic values in everyday life, both in the Islamic boarding school, family and community environment (Admin, 2024a). Another excellent program at the Ulumul Quran Al Mustofa Islamic Boarding School includes the study of the yellow book, which includes

various Islamic disciplines such as nahwu, shorof, tafsir, hadith, fiqh, and ushul fiqih. By studying these classical books, students are guided to understand the basics of Islamic teachings in a deep and comprehensive way. Apart from that, this Islamic boarding school also provides language education, such as Arabic and English, to broaden the students' horizons in understanding Islamic and global literature (Admin, 2024a).

This Islamic boarding school is also committed to producing students who are capable in various scientific disciplines and have intellectual, emotional and spiritual intelligence (IQ, EQ and SQ). Through a holistic educational approach, the Ulumul Quran Al Mustofa Islamic Boarding School does not only focus on academic aspects, but also character development. This is in line with the Islamic boarding school's vision to produce a generation that has integrity, has a deep understanding of religion, and is able to apply akhlakul karimah values in every aspect of life (Admin, 2024a). In carrying out the educational process, collaboration between parents, teachers and the Islamic boarding school is the key to success. Support from various parties, from student guardians to teaching staff, plays a very important role in creating a conducive and harmonious learning environment. With this inclusive approach, the Ulumul Quran Al Mustofa Islamic Boarding School hopes to be able to produce graduates who not only excel in academics, but also have strong emotional maturity and spiritual maturity (Admin, 2024a).

With all the superior facilities and educational programs, the Ulumul Quran Al Mustofa Islamic Boarding School continues to strengthen its position as one of the best Islamic boarding schools in West Java. This Islamic boarding school is committed to continuing to develop the potential of students and produce a Quranic generation that is ready to face the challenges of the times, bring the values of the Qur'an into everyday life, and play an active role in building a society with noble morals (Admin, 2024a).

Al-Idhhar Islamic Boarding School

Al-Idhhar Islamic Boarding School which is located at Mekar Jaya RT. 027 / RW. 08, Kalimanggis, Manonjaya, Kalimanggis, District. Manonjaya, Tasikmalaya Regency, West Java, is a prominent Islamic educational institution with a salafiyah-Shafi'iyah approach. This Islamic boarding school focuses on the recitation and study of the yellow book (turats), which is a classical Islamic scientific tradition. The education system used is semi-formal, combining traditional elements with disciplined teaching methods, thereby creating a structured learning atmosphere but still prioritizing closeness between teachers and students. Al-Idhhar offers an environment that supports students to study religious teachings with patience and sincerity, and prepares them to become obedient and knowledgeable individuals (Admin, 2024b).



(Sumber: profil Ponpes, 02/10/2024)

This Islamic boarding school is under the leadership of KH. Mimin Muhaemin, a charismatic cleric and broad-minded in religious knowledge. He is known as a figure who is steadfast in carrying out classical Islamic education, while still embracing the changing times wisely. Apart from that, he was accompanied by his wife, Ai Pipih Apipah, who also had an important role in managing the Islamic boarding school. Together, they create a strong religious atmosphere based on love, where the students feel comfortable in gaining knowledge and developing their potential (Admin, 2024b).

KH's children. Mimin Muhaemin, namely Kiki Syukri Musthafa, Lu'lu Abdullah Afifi, Dudu Sa'duddin Taftazani, and Abu Yazid Busthami, also contributed to teaching at the Islamic boarding school. They are graduates of Madrasatul Quran Tebuireng Jombang, one of the leading Islamic educational institutions in Indonesia. Armed with this education, they continued the teaching traditions passed down by their father, and helped strengthen the scientific base at the Al-Idhhar Islamic Boarding School. Their presence as young teachers provides a new dynamic in the teaching and learning process, as well as adding depth to the knowledge taught to students (Admin, 2024b).

Apart from leaders and teachers, this Islamic boarding school also has senior students such as Aliyuddin and Fuad Hasan who play a role in mentoring other students. Aliyuddin and Fuad Hasan are role models for younger students, both in terms of discipline and enthusiasm for learning. Their presence strengthens the learning culture in Islamic boarding schools, as well as creating an atmosphere of togetherness that supports the personal and spiritual development of all students (Admin, 2024b).

In the Islamic boarding school organizational structure, KH. Mimin Muhaemin serves as leader and main advisor. He was assisted by a board of students chaired by Fuad Hasan, who worked together with other members such as Kiki Syukri Musthafa, Lu'lu Abdullah Afifi, Dudu Sa'duddin Taftazani, and Abu Yazid Busthami. They play an active role in managing daily life at the Islamic boarding school, ensuring that teaching and learning activities run smoothly and in accordance with the educational goals that have been set. This santri council is a liaison between the boarding school leadership and the santri, thereby creating effective communication between all parties (Admin, 2024b).

Apart from that, this Islamic boarding school has a Rois or head of the santri, which is currently held by Maman, with his deputy being Fajar. They are responsible for the leadership of the santri, organizing various santri activities, and maintaining harmony among the santri. This leadership structure makes the life of the students at the Al-Idhhar Islamic Boarding School more organized and orderly, and helps build leadership character among the students (Admin, 2024b). The financial department is also well managed by Aji Ridwan as the santri treasurer, accompanied by Randi as his representative. They are responsible for managing the finances needed for santri operations, from daily needs to special activities. This good management ensures that every activity runs smoothly without financial obstacles (Admin, 2024b).

In the administrative sector, the santri secretary, led by Hadi, with Fajar as his deputy, plays an important role in managing all administrative aspects. They ensure that all student activities, both routine and incidental, are recorded and properly managed. This structure makes it easier to manage the Islamic boarding school as a whole so that every activity carried out is well-coordinated (Admin, 2024b). Learning activities at the Al-Idhhar Islamic Boarding School are monitored by the recitation coordinator, who is currently held by Nanang and assisted by Mubin. Their job is to organize the recitation schedule, ensure the presence of students in every learning activity, and facilitate the students' learning needs. With a recitation coordinator, the teaching and learning process can take place systematically and in an orderly manner (Admin, 2024b).

The typology of students at the Al-Idhhar Islamic Boarding School is quite diverse, as stated by Kiki Musthafa. Some students are quiet but very fluent in reciting the Qur'an, some are active and capable of expressing their opinions. However, some tend to close themselves off because they feel they are not yet skilled, as well as those who try to show their abilities but actually still need to learn a lot. The diversity of students' characters reflects the dynamics of Islamic boarding school life, where each individual has a unique way of learning and developing (Admin, 2024b).

Acquisition of Religious Knowledge and Life Skills

The findings of this study present a harmonious analysis of the multifaceted benefits of religious education in Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*), particularly through the lens of the Service Learning (SL) approach. The primary role of *pesantren* is to impart religious knowledge, which forms the bedrock of students' moral and ethical frameworks. This knowledge is not merely theoretical; it encompasses teachings that guide behavior, instill values and shape character. For instance, students learn about the principles of honesty, integrity, and compassion as prescribed in Islamic texts (Ebrahimi, 2017).

While students gain religious knowledge, they simultaneously cultivate essential life skills that are vital for personal and professional success in contemporary society. Two key skills highlighted in the findings are critical thinking and self-discipline. In an increasingly complex world, the ability to analyze information, evaluate arguments, and make informed decisions is crucial. The religious curriculum encourages students to question, reflect, and engage with their beliefs critically. This analytical mindset enables them to navigate challenges effectively and make sound judgments based on Islamic principles. *Pesantrens* also cultivate self-discipline. The structured environment of *pesantren* fosters self-discipline through daily routines that include prayers, study, and communal activities. Students learn to manage their time effectively, prioritize responsibilities, and adhere to commitments. This discipline is essential not only for personal growth but also for achieving long-term goals in various aspects of life (Kurniawan, 2023).

The study emphasizes the significance of integrating academic learning with community service through the SL approach. This integration creates a dynamic learning environment where theoretical knowledge is applied in practical settings. Students engage in community-centered projects that reflect Islamic values such as compassion, empathy, and social responsibility. Through participation in community service, students develop a deeper understanding of societal needs and challenges. This hands-on experience cultivates compassion as they witness firsthand the impact of their efforts on others' lives. Moreover, it fosters a sense of commitment to positively affecting their surroundings. Students learn that their actions can contribute to the well-being of their communities, reinforcing the idea that individual success is intertwined with collective progress (C. Tan & Ibrahim, 2017).

The harmonious blend of religious education and practical life skills equips students to face contemporary challenges with confidence. As they internalize both their religious teachings and the importance of civic engagement, they emerge as well-rounded individuals who are not only knowledgeable about their faith but also capable of addressing real-world issues. The findings suggest that students perceive independence as more than just self-sufficiency; it encompasses a responsibility towards others. This empowerment encourages them to take initiative in their communities, whether through volunteer work or leadership roles in social projects (B. P. Tan et al., 2018). By fostering this sense of agency, *pesantren* education prepares students to be proactive contributors to society.

The findings reveal that religious education in *pesantren* transcends mere acquisition of knowledge; it plays a pivotal role in shaping independent individuals equipped with critical thinking and self-discipline. The integration of academic learning with community service not only enhances these skills but also instills a profound sense of compassion and commitment to societal betterment. This holistic approach positions students to navigate contemporary challenges effectively while remaining grounded in their Islamic values, ultimately contributing to the development of responsible and engaged citizens (Nordin et al., 2024).

This research provides valuable insights into the transformative role of religious education within Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) by demonstrating how such institutions foster independence and character development among students. By employing the Service Learning (SL) approach, the study highlights the practical application of Islamic teachings in real-world contexts, illustrating how communal engagement enhances students' understanding of autonomy, social responsibility, and moral values (Mustofa, 2019). The findings reveal that students not only acquire religious knowledge but also develop essential life skills, such as critical thinking and self-discipline, which are crucial for navigating contemporary challenges. Furthermore, the study emphasizes the importance of integrating academic

learning with community service, showcasing how this synergy cultivates a sense of compassion and commitment to positively impacting society.

4. CONCLUSION

The students at the Ulumul Quran Al Mustofa Islamic Boarding School and the Al-Idhhar Islamic Boarding School have a diverse understanding of independence based on the teachings of the Al-Qur'an. Students from the Ulumul Quran Al Mustofa Islamic Boarding School generally show a more progressive and holistic understanding. They not only understand independence as the ability to manage oneself without depending on others, but also link it to spiritual values such as *tawakkal* (surrendering oneself to Allah) and *ihsan* (doing one's best). This understanding reflects the view that independence includes hard work accompanied by full trust in Allah, in line with the teachings of the Qur'an and Hadith.

Meanwhile, students at the Al-Idhhar Islamic Boarding School emphasize the practical aspects of independence, namely the ability to be responsible for one's own actions and work hard to achieve goals without relying too much on other people. Although their views also include the value of personal responsibility and autonomy, spiritual dimensions such as *tawakkal* have not been the main focus. From these two approaches, it can be seen that the educational context influences the students' understanding of independence in their respective Islamic boarding schools. The Ulumul Quran Al Mustofa Islamic Boarding School emphasizes a balance between independent business and a spiritual attitude, while the Al-Idhhar Islamic Boarding School is more conservative in emphasizing technical aspects and social responsibility. This research reveals that the Al-Qur'an's teachings about independence can be adapted in various ways in the context of Islamic boarding school education, reflecting the flexibility of Islamic teachings in supporting the independence of the community in accordance with the demands of the times.

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