

Religious Character Education "Ngaji Laku" Based on Figure of Kiai's Character in Islamic Boarding School



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ABSTRACT: The oldest Islamic educational institution is pesantren which is also a component of community education. The expansion and growth of Islam Nusantara and other Islamic institutions in Indonesia have been greatly assisted by pesantren. This study aims to find out the religious character of "ngaji laku" and the practice of pesantren. This research is a field research using a qualitative approach. Pesantren Sabilul Ma'arif is one of the pesantren that implements "ngaji laku" character education in its education system, this is done by various activities in the form of mandatory prayers in congregation, reciting the Qur'an, fasting *suluk/mutih*, yellow Islamic books (Kitab Kuning), various sunnah prayers: *tahajjud*, *hajat*, *qabliyah subuh*, *kifaratul bauli*, *qabliyah duhur*, *ba'diyah duhur*, *qabliyah asar*, *ba'diyah maghrib*, *awwabin*, *rawatib*, *subutil iman*, *repentance*, *suluk*, *qabliyah isyak*, *ba'diyah isya'*, *witir*, *dikr practices and tarbiyah* (secret knowledge that no one should know) which not all boarding schools have. The religious element of "ngaji laku" is one that dominates education at Sabilul Ma'arif Islamic Boarding School.

KEYWORDS: Character, Education, Pesantren

I. INTRODUCTION

Pesantren, as the oldest educational institution in Indonesia (Falah, 2022; Ilyas & Sibuea, 2019) has produced many prominent scholars. Many prominent Muslims have been raised in pesantren. To date, there are no scholars who come from educational institutions other than pesantren, according to Mukti Ali, the process of creating a world of pesantren must be substantially supported by the government in addition to being an internal task of pesantren as a whole. During the period of regional autonomy, it is important to increase and develop the role of Islamic boarding schools in achieving national development goals, especially in the field of education, especially considering the state of a country experiencing a moral crisis or degradation. Pesantren is a place where moral principles are formed and developed, making it a leader and inspiration in the creation of national morality. So that progress is more important and meaningful and does not become hollow (Hanafi et al., 2021).

Before Indonesia's independence, pesantren were an integral part of the country's education system (Taufikin, 2021). These institutions are even distinctive, local, and Indonesian. As a result, pesantren are Islamic educational institutions that have a long history and have contributed greatly to the development of Islam in the archipelago and the establishment of other Islamic educational institutions in Indonesia. The uniqueness of pesantren lies not only in its history, but also in the network, culture, and practices adopted by this religious institution. Pesantren is considered a subculture of Indonesian society, especially in the Java region, because it has distinctive features that distinguish it. Pesantren are not just educational institutions, but also have a significant role in the struggle for indigenous nationalism. They serve as a base for intellectual and spiritual development for santri, focusing on the cultivation of religious values, love for the country, and the spirit of struggle for independence. As an educational institution, pesantren offer a holistic approach, which includes religious education, Arabic language, Islamic studies, and various aspects of social life. Santri are not only taught religious knowledge, but also given an understanding of social responsibility, ethics, discipline, and critical thinking skills (Anam et al., 2019; Rahayu et al., 2020; Sub & I, 2021).

Pesantren are also centers for the dissemination of Islamic knowledge and culture, which play an important role in strengthening the religious and cultural identity of Indonesian society. (Falah, 2022). Through an education system that focuses on character development and religious understanding, pesantren help build self-confidence and awareness of nationalism among indigenous youth. In the context of the history of Indonesia's national struggle, pesantren became a gathering place for nationalist thinkers, scholars, and religious leaders who were active in fighting for independence and social justice. Pesantren have given birth to many leaders and intellectuals who play an important role in the formation of the nation and state. Thus, pesantren play a role that cannot be ignored in the development of Nusantara Islam and the struggle of indigenous nationalists in Indonesia. Pesantren

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continue to act as educational institutions that produce prominent scholars, intellectuals, and community leaders who contribute to building a dignified nation (Anam et al., 2019).

Pesantren has unique qualities that have never been attempted by other educational systems. The five souls of pesantren, namely the following, involve the soul of pesantren: 1. A spirit based on sincerity 2. A spirit of simplicity 3. A spirit of *Ukhuwah Islamiyah* 5. A spirit of independence Because they are integrated with the community, boarding schools have a distinctive social foundation as religious educational institutions. Boarding schools often depend on, serve, and live in their communities. This vision requires the role and purpose of Islamic boarding schools to be in line with the ever-evolving development of the nation, society, and state. Meanwhile, pesantren can synergize as an operation as a catalyst for initiatives aimed at improving community welfare, given its social power. This can be seen from the accumulation of Islamic principles and spiritual life within the boarding school pesantren (Bakri, 2021; Rahayu et al., 2020; Sub & I, 2021).

Basically, Islamic boarding schools are *tafaqquh fiddin* institutions, which are institutions that focus on understanding and mastering religious knowledge whose task is to uphold the teachings of Islam and carry out the mission of the Prophet Muhammad. (Bakri, 2021). Pesantren is a structure meant to uphold the principles of Islam with a focus on education. The pesantren works to prepare its students to become experts in Islam, which is needed by the students of the pesantren. When the santri have completed their studies at the pesantren, they will face several possible next steps, depending on their goals and desires, they can then teach it to the community in which they live (Bakri, 2021).

Pesantren education does have a very unique character, both in terms of its system and in terms of its function. In line with the sociological and philosophical goals of Islamic education, national education has broader goals than just increasing devotion to God Almighty. National education aims to educate the nation's life, which includes the development of the intellectual, moral, social, and spiritual potential of individuals in order to achieve individual, community, and state welfare. However, the main goal of national education is still hampered by very strong barriers known as facts and reality, that there is a need for improvement in the education system to achieve this goal (Abdalla, 2021).

Some of the problems often identified are the lack of relevance of the curriculum to the needs of the world of work, the low quality of teaching and learning, the gap in access to education between urban and rural areas, and the lack of character education and moral values in the learning process. Many people believe that "school alone" cannot be trusted to teach the general public. Many criticize the morality and behavior of today's students who usually do worse with various actions that disturb many people. So it is important to consider the possibility of "boarding schools". This is where pesantren education will be tested whether it can fulfill these requirements or not. In addition, it will increase the capacity of pesantren to recognize the quality of Indonesian human beings in general.

Character refers to a description of behavior, especially student behavior that shows the importance of right and wrong, good and bad from a situation, in the sense that it refers to the mark or characteristic that exists in every human being. It is hoped that instilling character can help shape personality with the intention of improving what came before. Furthermore, the word character in Greek is *charassian*, which indicates the marks left on behavior as a result of character values. The concept of "character" is strongly tied to the behavior that one's character must always show in daily life.

During the time of the Prophet Muhammad, Islamic character development was found through the practice of *kaffah* lessons given by the Prophet (Hendayani, 2019). Whereas the purpose of character cultivation is expected to guide students to become human beings or *ulul albab* individuals. This does not only involve awareness in developing themselves and improving their lives, but also living these values regularly (Sahlan, 2012). Regarding the various objectives of character development, among others (A. H., 2018): (1) increasing students' potential in behavior; (2) increasing students' ability to become a more dignified person in various ways; and (3) acting as a filter to help students determine which cultures are appropriate and should be incorporated into their daily lives.

The main character of a kiai is indistinguishable from the persona taught in pesantren. What is meant by "kiai" is a person who is more steeped in religious knowledge or an Islamic religious figure who is appointed as a leader in an Islamic boarding school (Falah, 2022; Karim et al., 2023; Zamakhsyaray, 1985). The presence of a kiai in a pesantren is likened to a person's heartbeat. Since he is the pioneer, founder, manager, administrator, leader, and perhaps the only owner of the pesantren, the role of kiai is very important and vital. As a result, many pesantren eventually close because the ustadz died and did not have an heir to continue the family business (Bawani, 1990).

The discussion of leadership is still seen as very interesting to use as a study, especially when it comes to leadership in an educational environment because it is one of the key elements that decide whether an organization is successful or unsuccessful in achieving its goals (Soekamto, 1999). Currently, the national education system that has certain objectives is used to describe the education system in pesantren. The purpose of education in accordance with the national education system is to foster personal growth, moral development, and enrichment of the nation's civilization. A kiai is very important in a pesantren setting because it acts as a driving factor in the character development of santri, or students who attend pesantren. Kiai are in charge of advising, teaching, and setting an example to the santri (Sadiah, 2022). They contribute to the growth of spirituality, religious knowledge, and

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values of goodness and virtue in the santri. With the guidance of kiai, it is expected that santri can grow into individuals who have strong character, dignity, and contribute positively to society.

In the last five years, a number of studies on religious character education have been pursued. Miftahul Jannah describes it using the following techniques: Exemplary Method (*al-Uswah al-Hasanah*), Habituation Method (*Ta'widiyyah*), *Mau'izhah* and Advice Method, and *Qashah Method* (story), and (4) *Tsawâb* (Reward) and *Iqâb* (Punishment) methods are some of the methods used in Islam. While the action plan implemented is as follows: (1) Highlighting knowledge about the role of religion in daily life (*al-wa'yu al-nafsi*). not only encourages positive interpersonal relationships but also with God. (2) Reprimanding children directly when necessary as well as giving examples, (3) Exemplary/example, (4) Spontaneous action, which occurs at that moment suddenly, (5) Reprimand, (6) environmental conditioning, (7) routine activities, and (8) integrated discipline (aggressive discipline) are the next four types of discipline (Jannah, 2019).

Awaliyani Mahmudiyah and Mulyadi said that the process of religious character formation at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Based on Pesantren Miftahul Ulum Kesamben Wetan involves several activities that support it. Some of these activities include:

1. Dhuha prayer: Learners are included in the Dhuha prayer activity, which is a sunnah worship in the morning. Through Dhuha prayer, students are taught to have discipline in carrying out worship from an early age.
2. Tahfizul Qur'an: Learners are taught to memorize and study the Qur'an on a regular basis. This tahfizul Qur'an activity helps to improve learners' relationship with the holy book and deepen their understanding of Islamic teachings.
3. Praying in congregation: Learners are encouraged to perform congregational prayers regularly. Through congregational prayers, learners learn about togetherness, cooperation, and discipline in carrying out worship.
4. Courtesy: Learners are taught to behave politely and have noble character in interacting with others. Ethics and manners in speaking, behaving, and being polite are an important part of religious character building.
5. Religious activities: Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Miftahul Ulum Kesamben Wetan organizes various religious activities such as Eid al-Fitr celebrations, Eid al-Adha, zakat distribution, takjil distribution, and breaking the fast together. These activities provide opportunities for learners to strengthen their appreciation of religious values and practice social skills in sharing with others.

Through these activities, Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Based Pesantren Miftahul Ulum Kesamben Wetan seeks to form the religious character of students by strengthening religious values, developing a love for the Qur'an, encouraging congregational worship, teaching polite ethics, and involving students in religious activities. Every Friday there is a recitation of Surah Yasin, Friday legi sharing, recitation of Juz Amma, memorization of daily prayers, and active pesantren activities. The challenges include aligning the school's vision and mission with what parents expect, dealing with student tardiness, students' abilities during the learning process, and students' reluctance to follow teachers' instructions (Mahmudiyah, 2021). Rifa Lutfiyah, and Asif Az Zafi stated that RA Hidayatus Shibyan Temulus uses several ways to instill religious character through value internalization, including the exemplary method, habituation method, storytelling method, *reward and punishment method*, field trip method, and singing method. However, infrastructure, environment, parental practices, students' understanding of the value of character education, and other factors all contribute to and hinder the cultivation of religious ideals (Lutfiyah & Az Zafi, n.d.).

Neng Rina Rahmawati, Vena Dwi Oktaviani, Desi Erna Wati, Sofi Septiani, Julaeha Nursanlah, Ella Anggraeni. Mokh Iman. Firmansyah explained that *akhlaq al-karimah*, which is defined as faith and obedience to God's commandments and is manifested in personal and community life, is a term used in Islam to describe religious character. A person's moral and social values can be expressed through religious attitudes and behaviors. Religious character reflects a person's commitment to religion and involves psychological factors that influence an individual's experience and relationship with God. Religious character involves aspects of faith, adherence to religious teachings, and daily religious practices (Abdullah et al., 2019). This includes activities such as worshiping, practicing religious commandments, praying, and adhering to the moral principles taught by the religion. Religious character also includes values such as piety, honesty, humility, tolerance, compassion, and concern for others. In the psychological dimension, religious character involves an individual's relationship with God on a personal level. This includes spiritual experiences, feelings of closeness to God, self-understanding as a being responsible to Him, and the role of religion in giving meaning and purpose to life.

Thus, from a sociological perspective, religious character is an attitude that genetically sustains religious principles and manifests in behavior that respects social diversity. Regarding the review By maintaining the principles of *qawlan ma'rufan*, *qawlan sadidan*, *qawlan balighan*, *qawlan kariman*, *qawlan maysuran*, and *qawlan layyinan layyinan* (Rahmawati et al., 2021). Religious character is tied to morals in communication. Character education at the Manarul Huda Bandung Islamic Boarding School is implemented with a habituation approach in the form of daily, weekly, and monthly activities, according to Dian Popi Oktari and Aceng Kosasih. Daily activities, namely learning activities in class and daily activities such as wirid, tartiban, and Dhuha and Tahajud prayers. Pasa sunnah on Mondays and Thursdays, *Riyadhoh*, *Istighosah*, and reading surat Yasin on Friday nights are all weekly events. The monthly task is to make a commitment to use the Prophet's blessings to exalt him. At Manarul Huda Islamic Boarding School, character education is the most significant program Religion and independence are instilled into students at school. Students are imbued with a religious mindset through routine activities, starting from waking up to sleeping. In an effort to foster

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santri independence, this boarding school also offers specialty programs in entrepreneurship, agriculture, and animal husbandry (Kosasih & Oktari, n.d.).

Some previous research results have discussed many pesantren, but those that focus on specific practices related to character building are still few. The difference between the study and previous research is that the Sabulil Ma'arif pesantren has incorporated character education and "ngaji laku" into its curriculum. So, the purpose in this study was to investigate how pesantren build character combined with the practice of "ngaji laku" into the curriculum. So that students get a lot of positive impacts. With so many positive impacts, it will add new scientific insights from pesantren to be utilized by the wider community.

II. RESEARCH METHODS

To find evidence and get closer to the truth, researchers in this study conducted *field research*, namely going directly to the place of investigation. Empirical research, which is research where data and information are collected through fieldwork, is another name for this type of research. The methodology in this research is qualitative. The method used by researchers is descriptive qualitative because it aims to obtain a rich and detailed understanding of the religious character under study and comprehensively about religious character based on the utilization of the Qur'an in developing the personality of students in Islamic boarding schools. With the intention of describing and analyzing a phenomenon, event, perception, action, and idea of both individuals and groups, qualitative techniques are used (Sukmadinata, 2012). Based on the metaphysics of postpositivism, which is used to study natural objects and make researchers as vital instruments. The significance of generalization is highlighted by the final product of qualitative research. Through observation, interviews, and documentation (Cohen et al., 2018; M. Djamal, 2015; Sugiyono, 2017).

Researchers analyze the data so that conclusions can be made when all the data has been collected. Information obtained through observations, interviews, and documentation was then analyzed using a qualitative descriptive analysis approach, which is a method of processing information presented as words or phrases rather than numbers or tables. The following steps were used in the data processing method (Lexy J. Moleong, 2013):

1. Data reduction, a step in the analytical process that involves emphasizing, compacting, focusing, eliminating irrelevant information, and organizing data in a way that allows conclusions to be reached. The information collected in this case came from a study of the religious nature of "ngaji laku" based on the morals of the scholars, as well as observations, interviews and documentation.
2. Presentation of data, information that allows conclusions to be formed is presented. The arrangement provides a variety of organized facts from which conclusions may be derived.
3. Conclusions and verification, In qualitative research, no conclusions will be formed until the data collection procedure is completed.

The conclusions obtained require confirmation by reviewing field notes to gain more specific knowledge while looking and asking questions. (Febriantika & DKK, 2020). Pesantren Sabulil Ma'arif Cendono in Dawe, Kudus, is where the research was conducted.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Character in Arabic is almost synonymous with akhlaq, which refers to the behavior that expresses one's personality. Al-Ghazali gives an example of how morality is demonstrated by sincere actions. Lickona, on the other hand, sees character as one who reacts to circumstances in the best possible way and with moral action. Lickona argues that moral knowledge, moral sentiment, and moral activity are three interconnected components of character (Kosasih & Oktari, n.d.). The author describes character as an attitude that reflects one's personality in behaving, speaking, dressing, and worshipping God based on the definition of character given above. Character education comes from the idea of character. One strategy to help people develop positive habits is character education, especially for the younger generation, so that children can grow up with good character from an early age. Indeed, character education has been a concept since the 1900s. One person who is credited with popularizing this idea is Thomas Lickona, especially after the publication of his book *Eduacation for Character: How Our Schools Can Teach Respect and Responsibility*. Lickona managed to spread awareness of the value of character education through his efforts. Character education, according to Lickona, should focus on three main areas: knowing, loving, and doing good (Alimah, 2020).

Character education, is an effort to teach children how to solve problems ethically and use those skills in everyday life at home, at school, and in the community. In addition, Fakry Gaffar proposes a concept of character education that he thinks is important (Abdullah et al., 2019; Bates, 2019). Character education is the transmission of life lessons so that the recipient can incorporate them into daily behavior. There are three keys that can be drawn from the two definitions of character education that have been put forward: 1) the process of value transmission, 2) developing one's personality, and 3) becoming a unit of behavior. Character education aims to strengthen and develop values that can improve student behavior that is not in accordance with the expected character values, improve children's behavior inside and outside the classroom, and develop healthy relationships between families and communities are part of the character education process. Global values such as those related to religion, morality,

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citizenship, customs, culture and law should be instilled in children from an early age. Countries with different cultures, beliefs, races, customs, nationalities and backgrounds can unite under this idea as it is very easily accepted by all walks of life.

While the nine universal principles that make up character education, such as love for God and all His creations, creativity, independence and responsibility, honesty or reliability, decency and respect, generosity, mutual cooperation and cooperation. Children need to be educated with character education from an early age, especially in primary school. The Ministry of National Education states that students in primary and secondary schools must learn eighteen character education values, including religious values, tolerance, honesty, hard work, discipline, independence, creativity, democracy, nationalism, curiosity, love for the country, friendship, respect for achievement, love of peace, care for the environment, love to read, responsibility, and social responsibility. Islamic moral education and character education are related. Many academics have proposed the idea of morality, including: Al-Ghazali in his famous book "*Ihyâ 'Ulûm al-Dîn*" defines morality as follows berikut (Al-Ghazali, n.d.):

الخلق عبارة عن هيئة في النفس راسخة عنها تصدر الأفعال بسهولة ويسر من غير حاجة إلى فكر و رؤية

Based on this understanding, a person's habitual behavior is what is meant by character. Character is a mirror of his inner behavior and is usually repeated so that his actions do not need to be thought out beforehand (Halim, 2000).

The techniques used by the Qur'ân to address issues of morals or character are not only theoretical but also conceptual and internal. Human character reflects the admirable and repulsive principles of the time when the Qur'ân was revealed, in human history and reality. This is in accordance with the character of the Prophet as the most ideal human being who has been an example to other people throughout history.

Morality is the practice of an activity performed by the heart consistently without the need for reflection. Morals are character or innate traits found in a person's heart and reflected in behavior and actions that are done automatically and without having to be consciously considered. This definition shows that morals are not something that is learned or forced, but rather traits that are already inherent in a person naturally. Good morals will appear spontaneously and consistently in daily behavior and actions without reflection. Traits that are embedded in the spirit, practiced consistently, and manifest naturally without requiring much thought and consideration beforehand (Deswita, 2010).

If a person can demonstrate elements of religious teachings in his life either overtly or implicitly, then he can be considered religious. There are several viewpoints offered in presenting the criteria of religiosity. Three requirements are as follows (Soelaeman, 1988):

- 1) Self-engagement with the absolute
- 2) Linking conscious activity with a value system sourced from the absolute
- 3) Surrender, life and death, to the absolute

One of the pesantren that incorporates character education and "ngaji laku" into its curriculum is Pesantren Sabilul Ma'arif. The Kiai and his staff use habituation and exemplary techniques to implement character education in this pesantren. Students are accustomed to participating in activities that foster religious character, including mandatory prayers in congregation, reciting the Qur'an, fasting *mutih*, studying the yellow book, and performing various sunnah prayers including tahajjud prayers, hajat, qabliyah subuh, kifaratul bauli, qabliyah dhuhur, ba'diyah dhuhur, qabliyah asar, ba'diyah maghrib, awwabin, subutil iman, taubat, suluk, qabliyah isyak, ba'diyah isya', witr and there are tarbiyah practices that not all boarding schools have.

The Kiai and his staff use habituation and exemplary techniques to implement character education in this pesantren. Students are accustomed to following religious character building exercises such as praying in congregation and reading the Qur'an, fasting *suluk/mutih* (10 days, 20 days, 40 days), studying the yellow book, and performing various sunnah prayers including tahajjud, hajat, qabliyah subuh, kifaratul bauli, qabliyah dhuhur, ba'diyah dhuhur, qabliyah asar, ba'diyah maghrib, awwabin, rawatib, subutil iman, taubat, suluk, qabliyah isyak, ba'diyah isya', witr, dhikr practices and tarbiyah (secret knowledge that no one should know) which not all boarding schools have. This research aims to find out the religious character of "ngaji laku" and the practices of the boarding school which are so many and not all boarding schools run. All of these practices are carried out by all students every day both in the boarding school and at home. The students must have the nature of *rabithah* (feeling supervised by the teacher).

Pondok Pesantren Sabilul Ma'arif is a Muslim boarding school that incorporates character education into its curriculum. The kiai and his staff use habituation and exemplary techniques to implement character education in this pesantren. Students are accustomed to participating in activities that develop noble morals, such as praying in congregation, reading the Qur'an, fasting, learning the Qur'an, and other forms of sunnah worship. At Pesantren Sabilul Ma'arif, religious character plays a big role in teaching. Every action that can strengthen belief in Allah SWT reflects religious character.

The most prominent character in education at Pesantren Sabilul Ma'arif is the religious character known as "ngaji laku". This religious character is reflected in every activity aimed at increasing faith and piety in God. "Ngaji laku" refers to an approach to religious education that encourages learners to not only learn religious teachings, but also apply them in their daily lives. Learners are encouraged to practice religious teachings in all aspects of life, whether in worship, interacting with others, or in carrying out social responsibilities.

Pesantren Sabilul Ma'arif is committed to teaching Islamic values to students and helping them internalize and apply these values in their daily lives. Every activity in the pesantren, such as the teaching of the Qur'an, congregational worship, recitation,

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dhikr, as well as involvement in social and humanitarian activities, is directed at forming a strong and active religious character. With the "ngaji laku" approach, Pesantren Sabilul Ma'arif tries to create an educational environment that allows students to grow into individuals who have a deep understanding of religion, and are able to apply these values in everyday life with full awareness and responsibility to Allah *Subhanahu Wa Ta'ala*.

Religious character is also developed outside the classroom through students' daily routines, the students at Pesantren Sabilul Ma'arif have a habit of waking up from sleep to sleep. They are used to waking up every day at 02.30 WIB to perform tahajud prayers. This activity is not only an act of worship, but also a mental training for the students to wake up at night and worship more sincerely. After performing tahajud prayer, the students continue with the dawn prayer in congregation and dhikr. These dawn prayers and dhikr activities provide an opportunity for the students to strengthen their bond with God and start the day with full awareness of His presence. In addition, the students at Pesantren Sabilul Ma'arif are also accustomed to performing the Dhuha prayer in the morning at around 07.00 WIB. Dhuha prayer is a sunnah worship performed after sunrise. This Dhuha prayer activity provides an opportunity for students to deepen their relationship with Allah and fill the morning with useful worship.

Discipline and diligence in carrying out these worship services are an important part in shaping the religious character of the santri at Pesantren Sabilul Ma'arif. With a structured worship routine and carried out with full awareness, students are trained to become individuals who are religiously obedient, have sincerity in worship, and are able to develop their spirituality. The purpose of this exercise is to help students develop the habit of being grateful for all the gifts that Allah SWT has given them. The establishment of a congregational fard prayer schedule that must be obeyed by every student who is able to develop the character of *Ukhuwah Islamiyah*. All students are expected to follow sunnah prayers and wiridan as part of the boarding school activities after maghrib prayers in order to always remember Allah SWT in dīkr.

Every *selapan* (five weeks), the students of Sabilul Ma'arif Islamic Boarding School routinely carry out *lapanan* activities every Friday wage. *Lapanan* activities are *tawajjuhan* activities (dhikr, tahlil, istighosah, prayer together). This *lapanan* activity is carried out every Friday night for 40 days. This activity aims to introduce and gain a deeper understanding of the characteristics of the Prophet Muhammad SAW, and to take an example from him in everyday life. Rasulullah SAW is considered a perfect example in all aspects of life, including morals, behavior, attitudes, and relationships with God and fellow humans.

In this activity, the students will be taught about the stories and deeds of the Prophet Muhammad, as well as the teachings he conveyed. They will learn values such as honesty, kindness, patience, generosity, simplicity, and forgiveness that characterized the Prophet Muhammad. In addition, the students will also be given the opportunity to practice the traits of the Prophet Muhammad in their daily lives. They will be encouraged to implement these principles in interactions with others, in worship, in carrying out responsibilities, and in facing life's challenges. Through this activity, it is hoped that the students can recognize and emulate the characteristics of the Prophet Muhammad as an example to follow in building character and living life. By internalizing and practicing the traits of the Prophet Muhammad, it is hoped that the students can become a good person, have a noble attitude, and become a role model for others around them. In addition, the goal is to be istiqomah in carrying out the obligations of the kiai's practice orders.

Planning for the formation of religious characters at Sabilul Ma'arif Islamic Boarding School begins with the admission process of new students. In the admission of new students, there are steps taken to ensure that the students accepted have the potential and seriousness in developing religious characters. Some steps that may be taken are as follows:

1. Selection and interview: Prospective santri will undergo a selection and interview that involves questions related to their beliefs, motivations, and readiness to participate in boarding school education. This aims to ensure that prospective students are committed to developing a religious character.
2. Religious assessment: Prospective santri will be assessed in terms of their religious knowledge, ability to read the Qur'an, as well as their understanding and practice of worship. This assessment helps select prospective santri who have a good religious foundation and are ready to develop a religious character at the boarding school.
3. Orientation: After being accepted as new students, they will follow an orientation program that emphasizes religious values, pesantren rules, and expectations for religious character building. They will be given an understanding of their roles and responsibilities as santri in strengthening spiritual life and religious values.
4. Religious curriculum: The boarding school will have a religious curriculum that includes learning the Qur'an, hadith, fiqh, aqidah, as well as worship practices such as prayer, fasting, and dhikr. These materials are designed to strengthen religious understanding and improve the religious practices of santri.
5. Guidance and role modeling: Students will be guided by kiai, ustadz, or other mentors who have knowledge and experience in religious character building. They will provide spiritual guidance, provide role models in the practice of worship, and provide direction in living daily life in accordance with religious values.

Through this planning, Pondok Pesantren Sabilul Ma'arif tries to ensure that prospective new students have awareness and readiness in developing religious characters. Furthermore, the education and coaching process at the pesantren will continue to strengthen their religious character through a holistic and structured approach. The pesantren decides whether the person is worthy

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of being accepted as a santri or not depending on the kiai of the pesantren. So not everyone can become a santri or be recognized as a ruhani student.

This pesantren is a salafiyah type, which means that the education and teaching approach it adopts refers to the understanding and application of Islamic teachings based on the *salafusshalih* (early generations of Muslims). In this context, the materials taught to the santri are usually yellow classical books, which are a collection of classical Islamic books that discuss various aspects of religion, such as tafsir, hadith, fiqh, and Islamic history. Education in this salafiyah boarding school emphasizes the importance of applying the knowledge gained in daily life.

The concept of "ngaji laku" refers to the practice of practicing and implementing the religious teachings learned in the yellow book into every aspect of daily life. The goal is that religious knowledge is not only theoretical knowledge, but also manifested in real actions and behaviors that are in accordance with Islamic values. In addition, in this pesantren, *Tartiban* or Q&A activities with the kiai are important moments in the educational process. Santri have the opportunity to ask questions and discuss directly with the kiai or ulama who are the mentors in the pesantren. Through this activity, santri can deepen their understanding of Islamic teachings, get clarification on the questions they have, and obtain direct guidance in practicing religion correctly. *Tartiban* activities can usually be carried out at any time, either in a formal setting such as routine recitation or in an informal setting such as when the students gather with the kiai.

This provides an opportunity for santri to continuously improve their knowledge and understanding of religion and clarify any doubts or misunderstandings that may arise in their learning process. With a combination of yellow Islamic classic book teaching that refers to salafiyah understanding and *Tartiban* activities that provide space for discussion and deeper understanding, this salafiyah-type pesantren aims to form santri who have a solid understanding of religious teachings and are able to apply them well in their daily lives. Kiai are informal leaders elected by the community, who assume real leadership responsibilities and are respected for their charm *pesonanya* (Dirawat & DKK, 1985). Kiai are further recognized as future leaders. Charismatic people are referred to as kiai. such as those who are aware of the values, attitudes, and patterns of behavior that are emphasized on an inspiring vision because the ambitions of the people they lead can be influenced by charismatic leaders by internalizing these values, attitudes, and patterns tersebut (Yuki, 1999). In Central and East Java the term "kiai" is used, although "ajengan" is more commonly used in West Java. In modern Indonesia, the term "kiai" is sometimes used to describe a cleric with significant social influence but no formal authority as the leader of a pesantren (Izzah, 2011). Kiai are sometimes regarded as having a far-reaching position, especially by the majority of the lay public, due to their extensive knowledge of Islam and their ability to understand the majesty of God and the mysteries of nature. They display their privilege in a variety of ways by wearing clothing that symbolizes piety, such as the peci and turban (Zamakhsyary, 1985). Martin Van Bruinessen asserts that the kiai's task is more than that of a teacher. He officiates at important rites and recites prayers in many religious and cultural traditions (Bruinessen, 1994). Serving as spiritual advisor to the pious and personal counselor in matters pertaining to their lives. The center of leadership is therefore the kiai, and character development within the pesantren and the environment. The work of a kiai has enormous influence on both the community and the pesantren because of his knowledge and religious charm. A kiai acts as a leader as well as a teacher in the educational process in the pesantren environment. A kiai has two roles: one as a *Mudarris*, or teacher who gives the subject matter to the students, and another as a *Muallim*, who not only teaches the subject matter but is also in charge of making sure the Islamic students understand it. Then came *Murabbi*, which is another way of saying "caretaker", followed by *Mursyid*, which means "shaping the personality of the santri" and "directing and guiding what is good and what is bad". The principles known as the "five souls" of Islamic boarding schools are one example of ideals that are very decisive in shaping the character of the students who take care of them. These ideals are used as a foundation that inspires all actions of the pesantren. The following are the characteristics of Pacajiwa Islamic Boarding School: (a) sincerity; (b) simplicity; (c) independence; (d) brotherhood; and (e) freedom in choosing the arena of conflict and life. Even said, not all pesantren follow this code of conduct, and the example of a kiai is very important to shape the character of the santri.

1. Sincerity Education

We can see how the sincerity of a Kiai Hasyim Asy'ari who struggled and spent his life in the boarding school since the establishment of the Tebu Ireng Islamic Boarding School in 1899 AD, until the end of his life, has shown his role as a kiai in instilling sincere morals towards santri. He continued to serve until his death in 1947 at Pesantren Tebu Ireng Jombang. M. Kiai Syukri, a teacher at the La Tansa Pesantren based in Lebak Banten, once said: "Pesantren is a sea of struggle and sincerity, so you must maintain your sincerity and fighting spirit. Establishing a pesantren should not be intended to seek wealth, or gain authority, popularity or glory, if that is the intention, the pesantren is difficult to develop".

2. Simplicity Education

The character of a Kiai is very devoted to simplicity. Mustafa Ya'kub refutes the claim that Kiai Ahmad Muhammad Rasimin lives in Jaha Village, 4 KM south of Anyer. The salaf pesantren is led by him. He had a fairly easy life. His house is no more beautiful than the students' rooms. His house has no motorized equipment, let alone a car. The students live in huts made of bamboo. A small river divides the students into male and female groups. While the female students use the restroom inside the local mosque, the male students bathe in a pond fed by the river. We can infer from this story that a kiai is far from pampered. The education

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program has given the children a sense of sufficiency. This straightforward character-building exercise is continued until the student graduates.

3. Independence Education

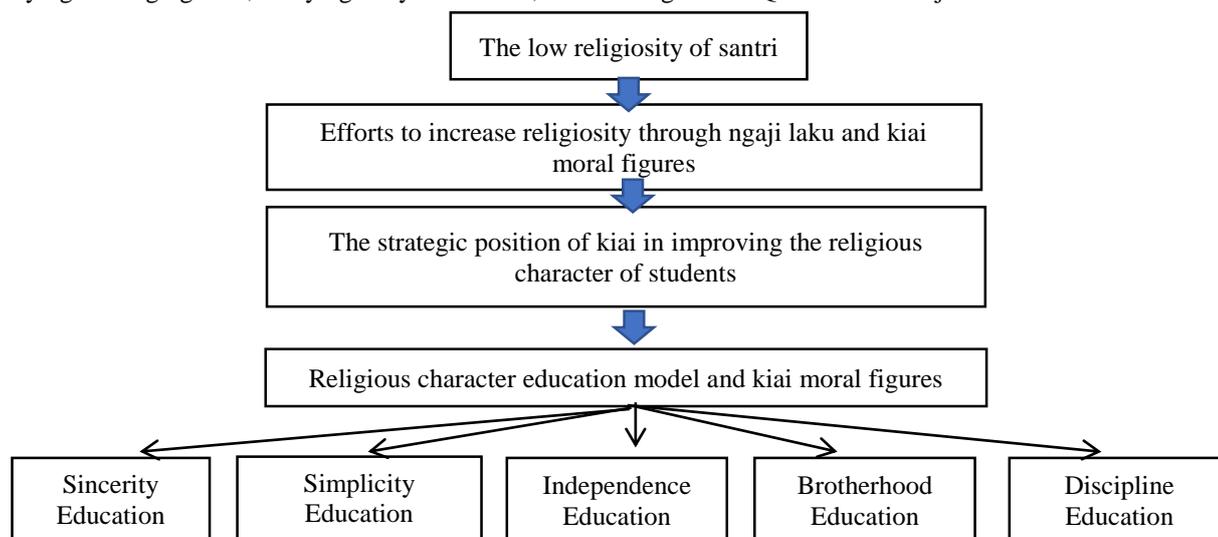
The facts of nature and life play an important role in the development of autonomous character, or kiai. Discipline and earnestness, independence and hard work, religion, togetherness, caring, gentleness, simplicity, respect, courtesy, responsibility, honesty and sincerity are the types of autonomous characters produced (Ilyas & Sibuea, 2019). All of these are developed through agricultural methods and educational programs used in pesantren. Regarding the daily routine of the santri, it shows their tendency to be more capable and courageous in making and taking their own decisions, such as money management, shopping planning, daily activity planning, and so on. This is inseparable from the fact that they do not live with their parents and the needs of pesantren that encourage independent living for their santri. Santri can live with other Santri friends who are basically the same age as them and have the same tendencies. Santris tend to have high independence if freedom of behavior is associated with daily routines.

4. Brotherhood Education

A kiai in a pesantren has demonstrated the character of brotherhood throughout his life (Watson, 2019). In pesantren, the ideal of ukhuwah is nurtured in one room consisting of 5 to 10 santri with various personalities and regional backgrounds who are expected to develop ukhuwah both inside and outside the pesantren. When the santri graduate and establish pesantren in their respective areas, the lineage of the teachers still exists, showing the loyalty of the santri flock. Although they have been separated for years since leaving the pesantren where they studied, there is a sense of familiarity between them.

5. Discipline Education

Worship activities show the discipline instilled by kiai to their students (Karim et al., 2023). For example, waking up early to perform Qiyamullah, then attending congregational prayers at the mosque, reading the Kitab Kuning in the morning, and so on. And students who do not comply with the norms set by the boarding school will be subject to different forms of discipline. These principles of discipline are developed as a result of Kiai's example, when a Kiai gives an example to his students, Kiai wakes up before dawn, prays in congregation as an imam, fills the recitation of the Kuning book every day, and so on. As expressed by the santri of Pondok Pesantren Sabilul Ma'arif that "we learn discipline because we see our kiai/ustadz who model first, starting from praying in congregation, studying the yellow book, memorizing the Al-Qur'an and muraja'ah schedules".



IV. CONCLUSIONS

A pesantren that incorporates character education and "ngaji laku" into its curriculum is Pesantren Sabilul Ma'arif. The kiaiKiai and his staff use habituation and exemplary techniques to implement character education in this pesantren. Students are accustomed to participating in activities that foster religious character, including mandatory prayers in congregation, reciting the Qur'an, fasting *suluk / mutih* (10 days, 20 days, 40 days), studying the yellow book, and performing various sunnah prayers including tahajjud prayers, hajat, qabliyah subuh, kifaratul bauli, qabliyah dhuhur, ba'diyah dhuhur, qabliyah asar, ba'diyah maghrib, awwabab, rawatib, subtil iman, taubat, suluk, qabliyah isyak, ba'diyah isya', witr, dhikr practices and tarbiyah (secret knowledge that no one should know) which not all boarding schools have. The religious character of "ngaji laku" is a prominent characteristic in education at Pesantren Sabilul Ma'arif. This character is reflected in every activity carried out at the pesantren, with the aim of increasing the faith and piety of the students to God.

The "ngaji laku" approach teaches santri not only to learn religious teachings, but also to practice them in their daily lives. In this context, ngaji is not only limited to reading the Qur'an, but also involves the application of religious values in daily behavior. Through various activities, such as daily worship, dīkr, recitation, recitation, as well as training and coaching that focus on good deeds, the students at Pesantren Sabilul Ma'arif are invited to live a life based on religious teachings with sincerity. In addition,

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education at Pesantren Sabilul Ma'arif also emphasizes the importance of building mutual respect, helping, and caring for others. This is integrated with religious values so that students not only focus on relationships with God, but also on relationships with fellow humans. With this "ngaji laku" approach, Pesantren Sabilul Ma'arif aims to form a strong and consistent religious character in every santri. The santri are taught to have firm faith, practice religious values in daily life, and become role models for the wider community.

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