

Character Education Model at Pondok Pesantren Modern As-Suja'iyah, Blitar Regency (A Case Study on the Application of the Traditional Model and Thomas Lickona's Model)

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the integration of local religious tradition and digital vocational training in shaping the character and independence of santri (Islamic boarding school students). Using a qualitative case study approach, the researcher acted as the key instrument (human instrument), present directly in the field for six months (March–August 2026). Research subjects were determined purposively and developed through snowball sampling until data saturation was reached, involving caregivers (pengasuh), ustadz, and santri. Data were collected through participant observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. The data were analyzed interactively using the Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña model (condensation, display, and conclusion drawing), while data validity was tested through source and technique triangulation. The findings show that the synergy of kitab kuning (classical Islamic text) study, Nawa Sila, the habituation of krama language, and a live-streaming-based digital vocational program successfully transformed santri behavior from external compliance toward autonomous awareness (moral knowing, feeling, action). The novelty of this study lies in identifying refined krama language as a psychological instrument for emotional regulation, as well as the use of social media as a medium for practicing ethics (moral action). The theoretical implication extends Lickona's theory through the lens of Javanese local wisdom and tazkiyat al-nafs, while the practical implication provides a reference for an adaptive, humanistic boarding-school-based character curriculum.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Character education holds an essential function in developing human resources that are not merely academically competent but also possess solid moral and ethical integrity. Philosophically, this concept rests on the assumption that the essence of

education goes beyond the mere transfer of cognitive knowledge, constituting instead a process of forming the whole human being (humanizing humans). This paradigm is reinforced by Lawrence Kohlberg's Cognitive Moral Development Theory, which asserts that an individual's moral maturity develops through stages of deep understanding of the principles of justice and universal humanity. It is further reinforced by social constructivism theory, which states that the formation of human personality is strongly influenced by the quality of one's social environment. This paradigm affirms that mastery of knowledge without ethical orientation has the potential to cause functional deviations that are detrimental to society (Asmani, 2011). Therefore, the instilling of moral values such as honesty, responsibility, empathy, and justice is positioned as a determining variable in measuring an individual's contribution to the social order (Lickona, 2012; Ridwan, 2020).

Ideally, both formal and non-formal education systems should be able to produce outcomes that are balanced across intellectual, spiritual, and practical-skill capacities. In empirical reality, however, the dynamics of globalization, uncontrolled penetration of digital media, and shifts in cultural orientation have triggered a decline in the moral quality of the younger generation. This phenomenon aligns with Robert K. Merton's Social Disorganization Theory and Anomie Theory (1938; in Wanto, 2025), which explain that misalignment between taught normative values and the pressures of modernity can trigger deviant behavior and weaken informal social control within society. On one hand, modernity provides massive speed of access to information; on the other hand, this condition is closely linked to weakening social oversight, the erosion of politeness norms, and an identity crisis among adolescents, including students at religious institutions (Wahyudi, 2021).

A further consequence of this misalignment between the pace of modernization and moral reinforcement manifests as an increase in behavioral deviance, self-centered attitudes, and low competitiveness of education-institution graduates against the demands of global capability. As a way out based on this ecological framework, pesantren institutions are required to adjust their governance and culture (Dhofier, 2019). This solution is implemented through a comprehensive approach that combines traditional education methods with the strengthening of work skills, technological competence, and the instilling of universal moral values to build a self-control mechanism (internal locus of control) in santri (Darwanti et al., 2025).

Academic studies on the effectiveness of pesantren-based character education have been widely explored in prior literature. As a basis for scholarly currency, research by Mujahada and Rohmatullah (2025) examined the application of Thomas Lickona's eleven principles of effective character education at Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor. In addition, the study by Tobroni and Nurhakim (2023) analyzed the blending of classical and modern character-education thought, while research by Wanto (2025) examined pesantren adaptation strategies in the digital era. Nevertheless, this body of literature generally still focuses on a strict separation between purely classical tradition and general modernization (Nursyamsi et al., 2023; Muhajir, 2022; Rozi, 2023), and has therefore not fully explored a specifically integrated combined model (Mustapa et al., 2023).

Based on this analysis of the literature gap, the research gap addressed by this study lies in the limited field research on a comprehensive integration model between local tradition and digital entrepreneurship training in a cultural buffer region. The novelty of this study lies in its in-depth analysis of the application of the character

education model at Pondok Pesantren Modern As-Suja'iyah, Blitar Regency. This pesantren combines Thomas Lickona's character principles (2012), local wisdom (Nawa Sila), the habituation of krama language, the study of kitab kuning (Dhofier, 2019), as well as training in modern practical skills (sewing, screen printing, culinary arts) and digital marketing through live streaming on social media (Darwanti et al., 2025).

Building on this background, problem identification, and novelty of ideas, this study aims to systematically analyze the application of the character education model at Pondok Pesantren Modern As-Suja'iyah, Blitar Regency. The research focus is directed at two main aspects: first, analyzing the contribution of instilling local and religious traditional values (Nawa Sila and kitab kuning) to the formation of santri character (Ridwan, 2020; Wahyudi, 2021); and second, assessing the success of work-skills programs and the use of digital media in building santri independence in facing the challenges of the modern era (Mustofa et al., 2024; Wanto, 2025). The results of this study are expected to provide a theoretical contribution to the development of Islamic education studies as well as an empirical reference for other pesantren institutions in formulating adaptive character curricula.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study was systematically designed to examine in depth the implementation of the character education model at Pondok Pesantren Modern As-Suja'iyah, Blitar Regency. The main focus is directed at a synergistic analysis between local religious traditions such as the practice of Nawa Sila, the habituation of krama language, and the study of kitab kuning and the modernization of vocational programs together with the use of digital media (TikTok live streaming) in building santri independence. All these dimensions were examined through Thomas Lickona's theoretical framework of character education, which covers the aspects of moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action. The research was carried out over a period of six months, from March to August 2026.

In order to capture the full complexity of this social phenomenon, this study uses a qualitative approach in the form of a case study. This approach was chosen because the reality of character formation within the pesantren environment cannot be reduced to statistical figures, but instead demands an in-depth understanding of meaning, context, and the subjective interpretations of the actors directly involved. Here, the researcher acted as the key instrument (human instrument), engaging directly in the field to capture natural dynamics without artificial manipulation of variables. The researcher's presence at Pondok Pesantren Modern As-Suja'iyah, located in Dayu Village, Nglegok Subdistrict, Blitar Regency, enabled the building of emotional closeness and observational objectivity toward the santri's daily culture.

Research subjects/informants were determined purposively and continued through snowball sampling until a point of data saturation was reached an empirical condition in which information from new informants shows repetition and no longer yields variation in new findings. The main informants were classified into three crucial categories: first, the pesantren's caregiver (pengasuh) as holder of strategic policy and institutional philosophy; second, ustadz and ustadzah as frontline educators in daily moral guidance; and third, the santri themselves as the main subjects living within the boarding-school system while also undergoing the digital vocational program. All qualitative data gathered from these informants were then collected through technique triangulation,

comprising participant observation, in-depth interviews, and review of the pesantren's official documents.

The next stage was data processing and analysis, which referred to the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña. This analytical flow began with data condensation, the process of selecting, focusing, simplifying, and abstracting field notes and interview transcripts so that they converge on the essential information needed to answer the research questions. The data were then presented in the form of a systematic narrative (data display) to transparently map behavioral patterns and dynamics in the field. The final stage was conclusion drawing and verification, in which the meaning of the findings was tested consistently and continuously until valid propositions were established.

To ensure the credibility and scholarly validity of the research findings, the author applied two validity-checking techniques: source triangulation (comparing data across the caregiver, educator, and santri informants) and technique triangulation (cross-checking interview results, observation notes, and documentary archives). This entire methodological sequence was carried out through a structured procedure encompassing administrative preparation and literature review, the collection of empirical field data, in-depth analysis, and the preparation of the final academic accountability report.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Application of the Traditional Character Education Model and Thomas Lickona's Model at Pondok Pesantren Modern As-Suja'iyah

The implementation of character education at Pondok Pesantren Modern As-Suja'iyah, Blitar Regency, reflects a form of integration that successfully brings together traditional religious values with the demands of present-day character formation. The instilling of religious values at this institution is not merely taught as theoretical knowledge but is realized through the habituation of daily religious practice and the institutionalization of nine basic attitudes (Nawa Sila), which are directly exemplified by the pesantren's caregiver, KH. Saifudin Munip. This character formation is reinforced by the habituation of local Javanese culture through the obligatory use of refined krama language in daily interaction. As emphasized by Ustadz Totok, the cultivation of manners (tata krama) is positioned as the primary foundation that must precede the mastery of knowledge (al-adab fauq al-'ilm). The shared dormitory environment further strengthens this guidance through a mechanism of mutual reminding among santri, while adaptation to the times is accommodated through practical skills training such as screen printing, culinary arts, and the use of digital media, all still grounded in the principles of honesty and communication ethics.

Theoretically, this integrative practice shows a very close correspondence with Thomas Lickona's holistic character-development framework and is further supported by various strands of classical and modern educational thought. The habituation practiced at this pesantren fully realizes the interconnection of Lickona's three dimensions: linking moral understanding (Moral Knowing) through the study of classical texts, moral feeling (Moral Feeling) through the cultivation of empathy and love of goodness, and moral action (Moral Action) through compliance with dormitory rules. This phenomenon simultaneously reinforces behaviorist theory's explanation of the role of environmental

shaping and role modeling in establishing lasting habits. The instilling of manners through krama language also supports KH. Imam Zarkasyi's thinking on the importance of harmoniously integrating Islamic teachings with local wisdom. Fundamentally, this entire process of guidance reflects Al-Ghazali's view on the balance between purification of the soul (tazkiyat al-nafs) and intellectual attainment, and is consistent with Kohlberg's stages of moral development, demonstrating that the pesantren is able to produce santri of high integrity.

Comparatively, the field findings of this study both reinforce and extend the reach of thinking from various relevant prior studies. These results align with the study by Mujahada and Rohmatullah (2025), which affirmed the effectiveness of Lickona's model in building awareness from within the self and a mutually caring environment through the balanced reinforcement of thought, feeling, and behavior. The success of this value integration also supports the view of Fatimah et al. (2025), who position Islamic education as a means of forming the perfect human being (insan kamil) through the unification of divine values, manners, and social ethics. Specifically, the findings regarding the role of the dormitory environment confirm the analysis of Aisyah et al. (2025) concerning the contribution of communal life to strengthening santri honesty and personal integrity. In addition, the pesantren's flexibility in blending local tradition with modern skills reinforces the views of Mukri et al. (2024) and Nugraheni and Firmansyah (2021) regarding the resilience of pesantren in maintaining a balance among spiritual, intellectual, and emotional dimensions without losing their national identity.

The novelty of this study lies in revealing, in a coherent manner, how the integration between pesantren tradition, local culture, and Western character theory actually works. The use of refined krama language in this study is found not only to function as a linguistic communication tool but also to act as a psychological means of regulating speech-related emotion and sharpening santri's feelings the very core of Lickona's moral feeling dimension. Through the atmosphere of communal dormitory life, moral knowledge is successfully transformed from mere theory into an ethical awareness fused into daily behavior. Practical-skills training and social-media ethics then serve as an illustrative means that tests the usefulness of these character values in addressing real challenges in modern society.

3.2 Santri Responses to the Application of the Traditional Character Education Model and Thomas Lickona's Model at Pondok Pesantren As-Suja'iyah

The santri gave a very positive response to the implementation of character education at Pondok Pesantren Modern As-Suja'iyah, Blitar Regency. This adjustment and positive acceptance were grounded in three main factors: independent awareness in complying with the rules, harmonious relationships among santri, and a sense of togetherness that grew out of the caregivers' role modeling. As expressed by senior santri Laila Khoiriyah Famuji, the dormitory atmosphere felt conducive because the rules were not perceived as threats of punishment but were instead internalized as daily habits, including in the application of Nawa Sila and the use of refined krama language. Observations within the dormitory environment confirmed the presence of positive social control through the habit of politely reminding one another and cooperating to maintain shared facilities. This was further affirmed by Alfiyah Nur Hayati's statement explaining that carrying out activities collectively eliminated awkwardness, while the discipline of

the ustadz who always arrived early at the mosque cultivated a sense of respectful restraint and awareness against laziness.

Theoretically, this positive santri response and perception shows a coherent fit with Thomas Lickona's character-development framework. Lickona asserts that effective character formation must comprehensively touch three dimensions: moral understanding (Moral Knowing), moral feeling (Moral Feeling), and moral action (Moral Action). Santri awareness of the meaning behind the rules reflects strong moral understanding; the feeling of comfort along with respectful restraint against wrongdoing illustrates an already-built moral-feeling dimension; while active involvement in dormitory routines becomes the concrete manifestation of moral action. This phenomenon is consistent with the assertion of Mujahada and Rohmatullah (2025) that all three dimensions must operate together so that character education does not stop at mere conceptual memorization. In addition, this collective habituation supports education-policy directions concerning the creation of a conducive learning environment, and is consistent with Al-Ghazali's doctrine on the importance of purifying the soul (*tazkiyat al-nafs*) as the foundation for the emergence of consistent, noble character.

Comparatively, these findings on santri responses both reinforce and complement previous research results. Consistency is seen with the study by Mujahada and Rohmatullah (2025) at KMI Gontor, which demonstrated that a comprehensive character approach can cultivate caring and an inner drive toward good deeds among santri. The integration of local culture through the use of *krama* language and communal discipline also supports the analysis by Mukri et al. (2024) on the thinking of KH. Imam Zarkasyi, which states that santri character is effectively formed through environmental order and structured activities. Furthermore, the tradition of politely reminding one another in the dormitory confirms the findings of Aisyah et al. (2025) at Pesantren Ngalah Pasuruan regarding the important role of communal life in sharpening mutual respect and social sensitivity among santri.

Psychologically and sociologically, the transformation of santri attitudes from fear-based compliance to awareness-based compliance occurs through a shift from external drive (controlled motivation) toward internal drive (autonomous motivation). When all dormitory members carry out positive behavior simultaneously, peer pressure—which usually has a negative impact—instead turns into a constructive group drive consistent with the religious institution's identity. As a result, santri conform not out of fear of sanctions but out of a desire to maintain harmony with jointly held values. Viewed through social learning theory, directly witnessing the caregivers' role modeling proves more effective in awakening santri awareness than mere verbal instruction. This blending of Javanese cultural manners with Lickona's character framework turns the dormitory into a genuine training ground, a place where good values grow naturally until moral knowledge turns into conviction and finally forms firmly rooted habits.

3.3 The Impact of Applying the Traditional Character Education Model and Thomas Lickona's Model on Santri at Pondok Pesantren As-Suja'iyah

The application of a character education model based on the integration of tradition and Thomas Lickona's framework at Pondok Pesantren Modern As-Suja'iyah, Blitar Regency, clearly produces a systemic impact on the formation of santri personality. Based on data analysis through in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and

documentary study, three main factual impacts emerged. First, the realization of independent worship discipline driven by the power of role modeling, in which santri consistency in carrying out pesantren routines and performing prayers on time grows from the concrete example set by ustadz who are always the first to arrive at the mosque. Second, the crystallization of social ethics grounded in local wisdom through mastery of refined krama language and the institutionalization of the nine basic values (Nawa Sila), which places the nobility of manners above personal interest in daily interaction. Third, the building of a synergistic and conducive dormitory environment, marked by the strengthening culture of polite mutual reminding and a collective togetherness that removes awkwardness in consistently doing good.

This positive impact shows a very strong theoretical alignment with the core principles of modern character education and religious doctrine. The success of character formation at this pesantren is consistent with the direction of national education policy, which emphasizes the importance of habituation and the creation of a supportive learning environment, and is in line with the spirit of the Seven Habits of Great Indonesian Children Movement (G7KAIH) in building worship discipline. Specifically, this achievement reflects the successful formation of Thomas Lickona's three complete character dimensions: moral understanding (Moral Knowing), cultivated through the study of kitab kuning and Nawa Sila; moral feeling (Moral Feeling), reflected in respectful restraint and sincere reverence for the pesantren; and moral action (Moral Action), embodied through ritual discipline and polite speech. In addition, the habit of using krama language affirms Al-Ghazali's thinking regarding the importance of purifying the soul (tazkiyat al-nafs) and cultivating manners as an absolute prerequisite toward the attainment of the perfect human being (insan kamil).

Comparatively, the empirical impacts found in this study both reinforce and extend relevant prior research results. This finding is consistent with the study by Mainuddin, Tobroni, and Nurhakim (2023), which affirmed that Lickona's three character dimensions converge with the concept of moral development within the Islamic tradition. This integration between religious values and modern character principles also corroborates the findings of Mughada and Rohmatullah (2025) at KMI Gontor, which demonstrated that an integrated approach within the dormitory environment can build alignment between santri feeling and behavior through the formation of a mutually caring community. In addition, the success of making krama language and Nawa Sila into identity-forming elements further supports the findings of Aisyah et al. (2025) at Pesantren Ngalah Pasuruan, which underscore the pesantren's strategic role in uniting noble religious values with tolerant attitudes in community life.

Mechanistically, the success of this guidance impact is supported by a mutually reinforcing environmental ecosystem that shapes santri behavior. Viewed through behaviorist theory, positive reinforcement given consistently such as the caregivers' role modeling and the positive influence of peers encourages santri to repeat commendable actions on an ongoing basis. Over time, compliance that was initially externally driven develops into inner awareness, which theoretically aligns with Kohlberg's stages of moral development toward a higher level of consciousness. The use of refined krama language also proves to be more than a mere linguistic communication tool; it acts as an effective means of training emotional regulation and self-reflection, so that the character formed becomes whole, mature, and firmly rooted in the santri's personality.

3.4 Challenges in Implementing Holistic Character Education at Pondok Pesantren As-Suja'iyah and Their Solutions

The implementation of holistic character education at Pondok Pesantren Modern As-Suja'iyah, Blitar Regency, is not free from internal dynamics, particularly adaptation barriers and discipline gaps among new santri. Empirical facts in the field show that new santri frequently experience psychological turbulence (culture shock) in the form of being overwhelmed by the dense schedule of activities from dawn until night, anxiety from separation from family (homesickness), and difficulty adjusting to the culture of timely congregational worship. In response to these issues, the pesantren management initiated solutions in the form of a persuasive, non-violent parenting approach through individual guidance (counseling), empathetic mentoring, and weekly dormitory-room-based evaluation. In addition, in responding to the challenges of the digital era, the pesantren applies technology-moderation regulations by restricting gadget use, redirecting it productively toward entrepreneurial activities such as marketing santri-made screen-printed t-shirts and culinary products on the pesantren's official social media so as to instill honest and responsible business ethics.

This strategy for handling santri discipline and adjustment shows strong alignment with Thomas Lickona's character-development framework, which emphasizes the triadic reinforcement of moral aspects. The persuasive parenting approach and the gradual introduction of technology regulations train santri's moral understanding (Moral Knowing) and moral feeling (Moral Feeling), so that they are encouraged to voluntarily realize moral action (Moral Action) without feeling pressured. The routine of daily worship habituation and discipline at this pesantren is also consistent with Regulation of the Minister of Primary and Secondary Education No. 6 of 2026 on building an excellent culture through the Seven Habits of Great Indonesian Children Movement (G7KAIH), particularly its pillars of discipline and spirituality. Epistemologically, this pattern also confirms Al-Ghazali's teaching on the importance of balancing the development of rational intelligence with efforts to purify the soul (tazkiyat al-nafs) in order to produce a mature personality.

Comparatively, this practice of handling challenges at Pesantren As-Suja'iyah both reinforces and complements previous research findings. These results resonate with the study by Mujahada and Rohmatullah (2025), which demonstrated the effectiveness of integrating religious values with modern educational principles in shaping balanced santri character. The humane, non-violent approach applied by the caregivers also supports the conclusion of Aisyah et al. (2025) that an attentive, safe dormitory environment serves as the main foundation for building students' personal integrity. In addition, the wise and productivity-oriented technology-management policy further complements Wanto's (2025) idea concerning the strategic role of pesantren institutions in guiding and safeguarding the religious character of adolescents amid the rapid current of digitalization.

Mechanistically, the success in resolving santri adaptation barriers is rooted in the deliberate, carefully measured structuring of the environmental ecosystem. From the perspective of behaviorist theory, changes in santri attitude are driven by positive reinforcement that replaces physical sanctions with personal mentoring and periodic review. A friendly and supportive dormitory atmosphere is able to ease the emotional pressure on new santri, allowing the values of manners and discipline to be internalized as a form of personal awareness. The use of internet access for entrepreneurial activities

also acts as an intelligent habituation strategy, one that successfully turns the potential for technology misuse into a means of self-development grounded in inner awareness (autonomous motivation).

4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The character education model at Pondok Pesantren Modern As-Suja'iyah, Blitar Regency, constructs an integration between local religious tradition and Thomas Lickona's character framework. The synergy of kitab kuning study, the institutionalization of the nine basic values (Nawa Sila), and the habituation of refined krama language form a cohesive ethical foundation. This spiritual and cultural dimension is enriched through modern vocational preparation and live-streaming-based digital entrepreneurship. This holistic approach facilitates the transformation of santri awareness across the domains of moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action. A behavioral shift occurs from external compliance to autonomous awareness, while simultaneously minimizing culture shock among new santri through a persuasive, humanistic parenting approach.

These findings extend the reach of Thomas Lickona's Character Education Theory when combined with Javanese local wisdom and the doctrine of tazkiyat al-nafs. Refined krama language functions not only as a linguistic medium but also as a psychological instrument for regulating emotion and sharpening moral-feeling sensitivity. This model provides an applicable reference for religious-institution managers in designing adaptive character curricula. The use of social media for santri business proves that digital technology can be functioned as a vehicle for practicing ethics (moral action), so that modernization strengthens competitiveness without eroding spiritual identity.

Pesantren management needs to formulate a standardized operational module documenting the synthesis of Nawa Sila, linguistic manners, and digital business ethics in order to sustain this model across generations of educators. In addition, regulators and other pesantren managers are advised to replicate this tradition-digital vocation integration model as a humanistic, dormitory-based character-development strategy relevant to the dynamics of the times. Meanwhile, future researchers are advised to conduct a longitudinal quantitative study to measure the long-term impact of this model's application on the career success and social maturity of alumni within society.

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