



Transforming Religious Character Development to Prevent Bullying Among Santri: A Case Study of an Indonesian Islamic Boarding School

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Abstract

Bullying remains a persistent challenge in educational institutions, including Islamic boarding schools, where religious values are expected to foster respectful and harmonious social relationships. This study aimed to examine how the transformation of religious character development contributes to bullying prevention among santri at an Indonesian Islamic boarding school. Employing a qualitative case study design, the research was conducted at Pondok Pesantren Nurul Jadid, East Java, Indonesia, from January to May 2026. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and document analysis involving six purposively selected participants representing institutional leaders, counselors, mentors, and students. The data were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, while the interpretation was guided by Thomas Lickona's character education framework. The findings reveal that bullying prevention is achieved through the transformation of religious character development into an integrated educational system comprising four interconnected pillars: the Santri Trilogy as the foundation of moral understanding (moral knowing), intensive mentoring through the wali asuh program and Furudhul Ainiyah Akhlak reinforcement to cultivate emotional awareness (moral feeling), continuous religious habituation and counseling to promote prosocial behavior (moral action), and restorative educational sanctions that reinforce an anti-bullying culture. These findings demonstrate that sustainable bullying prevention depends on the systematic internalization of religious values through institutional culture rather than punitive disciplinary approaches alone. The proposed model contributes to the advancement of Islamic character education and offers practical guidance for developing safer, more inclusive, and value-based educational environments in Islamic boarding schools.

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INTRODUCTION

Bullying has become one of the most persistent challenges facing educational institutions worldwide because it undermines students' psychological well-being, social relationships, academic engagement, and long-term character development. Although anti-bullying policies have been widely implemented across schools and higher education institutions, aggressive behavior among students continues to occur in diverse educational settings, including faith-based institutions (D'Agostino, 2024; Wolff et al., 2025). Recent studies indicate that bullying extends beyond physical aggression and increasingly manifests in verbal humiliation, social exclusion, intimidation, and psychological harassment, all of which may produce lasting emotional consequences for victims (R.K. et al., 2025; Stańczykiewicz & Senczyszyn, 2024). This phenomenon has attracted growing scholarly attention because repeated exposure to bullying is associated with anxiety, depression, reduced academic motivation, diminished self-esteem, and weakened interpersonal trust (Alsawalqa, 2021; Ibrahim et al., 2024). Within educational environments that emphasize moral and character formation, the persistence of bullying creates a fundamental contradiction between institutional ideals and everyday social realities (Lohmeyer & Threadgold, 2023; Sukodoyo et al., 2026). Islamic boarding schools (pesantren), for example, are traditionally recognized as educational communities that

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cultivate religious commitment, moral discipline, and collective responsibility through intensive daily interaction. Consequently, the occurrence of bullying within such institutions raises important questions regarding the effectiveness of existing character education systems in preventing interpersonal violence. These circumstances demonstrate that strengthening character education requires not only the transmission of religious knowledge but also educational strategies capable of transforming moral values into consistent social behavior.

The complexity of bullying becomes even more evident within the context of Islamic boarding schools because students spend most of their daily lives in communal environments characterized by close interpersonal interaction and hierarchical social relationships. Pesantren are historically designed not merely as centers for religious instruction but also as institutions responsible for nurturing moral integrity, spiritual maturity, and social responsibility through continuous habituation, exemplary leadership, and collective living (Suwendi et al., 2024). Nevertheless, empirical evidence indicates that various forms of bullying continue to emerge despite the presence of strong religious traditions and institutional regulations (Kisbiyanto, 2025; Nasirudin et al., 2026). National reports have documented numerous bullying incidents occurring in Indonesian Islamic boarding schools, illustrating that verbal abuse, intimidation, social exclusion, and power imbalance remain significant concerns requiring systematic intervention. These incidents suggest that religious educational environments are not automatically immune to aggressive social behavior simply because they are founded upon religious principles. Instead, bullying appears to develop through complex interactions among institutional culture, peer dynamics, emotional regulation, and the internalization of moral values. This situation highlights the necessity of examining how religious character development is implemented in practice rather than assuming that religious instruction alone is sufficient to cultivate prosocial behavior. Therefore, investigating bullying within pesantren offers an important opportunity to understand how religious education can be transformed into a more effective mechanism for preventing interpersonal violence.

The urgency of addressing bullying in pesantren extends beyond protecting students from psychological harm because the phenomenon directly influences the credibility of Islamic educational institutions in fulfilling their fundamental educational mission. Contemporary Islamic education emphasizes that successful character formation is achieved when religious values become integrated into everyday attitudes, decision-making processes, and patterns of social interaction rather than remaining limited to cognitive understanding (Ihsanudin et al., 2026). Accordingly, bullying should not be interpreted solely as disciplinary misconduct but as an indication that the internalization of moral and religious values has not yet been fully achieved. Previous research has demonstrated that preventive strategies focusing exclusively on punishment or rule enforcement frequently produce temporary behavioral compliance without fostering genuine moral awareness (Dai & Wu, 2025; Haugh, 2021). Conversely, educational approaches that strengthen empathy, self-regulation, responsibility, and respectful communication tend to generate more sustainable behavioral transformation because students gradually develop intrinsic motivation to avoid harmful actions. Within pesantren, this objective requires educational systems capable of integrating spiritual guidance, emotional development, social mentoring, and institutional culture into a coherent character-building framework (Sarwadi & Raihan, 2025). Consequently, understanding how religious character development can be transformed into an effective anti-bullying strategy has become increasingly important for both educational theory and institutional practice. Such an investigation is expected to contribute not only to safer learning environments but also to the broader discourse on value-based education in contemporary Islamic societies.

Among Indonesian Islamic boarding schools, Pondok Pesantren Nurul Jadid provides an important context for examining this issue because it has developed various institutional innovations intended to strengthen students' religious character while simultaneously responding to bullying behavior. Preliminary observations and interviews with pesantren administrators, counselors, caregivers, and students indicate that bullying primarily occurs through verbal degradation, ridicule, social exclusion, excessive joking, and the misuse of seniority during students' adaptation to communal life. Although these behaviors are often perceived as ordinary aspects of pesantren culture, repeated exposure has generated psychological discomfort and disrupted harmonious relationships among students. In response, the institution has gradually shifted its character development paradigm from discipline-centered supervision toward a more comprehensive

educational approach emphasizing value internalization, mentoring, counseling, and reflective guidance. This transformation includes strengthening the Santri Trilogy as a moral foundation, implementing the wali asuh mentoring system, reinforcing Furudhul Ainiyah Akhlak learning, expanding counseling services, and introducing educational sanctions oriented toward rehabilitation rather than punishment. These initiatives suggest that preventing bullying requires a holistic educational ecosystem in which religious values are continuously practiced through daily interaction, institutional culture, and moral reflection (Jenuri et al., 2024). Rather than relying exclusively on formal regulations, the pesantren seeks to cultivate empathy, responsibility, and mutual respect as essential components of students' character formation. Therefore, the experience of Pondok Pesantren Nurul Jadid offers a valuable empirical setting for exploring how the transformation of religious character development may contribute to the establishment of a sustainable anti-bullying culture.

Previous studies have extensively examined the relationship between character education, Islamic educational values, and bullying prevention from various disciplinary perspectives. Research consistently demonstrates that religious values, positive school culture, and educators' role modeling contribute significantly to the development of students' moral character and prosocial behavior. Other scholars have argued that anti-bullying initiatives become more effective when educational institutions prioritize empathy, collaborative learning, and positive interpersonal relationships rather than relying exclusively on disciplinary sanctions. Within pesantren settings, studies have further shown that the internalization of Islamic values through habituation, discipline, collective worship, and exemplary leadership plays an important role in cultivating students' religious character (Arifianto et al., 2025). Recent investigations have also highlighted the contribution of Qur'anic character education, ukhuwah-based social interaction, and Islamic counseling in promoting harmonious relationships among students while reducing tendencies toward aggressive behavior. Furthermore, contemporary character education literature increasingly recognizes that sustainable moral development emerges through continuous interaction between institutional culture, interpersonal relationships, and students' reflective learning experiences rather than through isolated instructional activities (Jusubaidi et al., 2024; Lau & Shea, 2024). Collectively, these studies provide valuable theoretical foundations for understanding the educational importance of religious values in shaping positive student behavior. Nevertheless, they also indicate that the relationship between religious character development and bullying prevention remains a dynamic area requiring further conceptual and empirical refinement.

Despite these important contributions, several limitations remain evident in the existing body of knowledge. First, most previous studies have examined character education and bullying prevention as two relatively independent areas of inquiry, resulting in limited understanding of how religious character development functions as a comprehensive socio-moral intervention against bullying. Second, research conducted within Islamic boarding schools has predominantly focused on strengthening religious discipline, worship practices, institutional management, or moral instruction without explaining how these educational components interact systematically to transform students' social behavior (Kaliisa et al., 2022; Mahoney et al., 2021). Third, many anti-bullying studies continue to emphasize behavioral control, counseling interventions, or disciplinary mechanisms while paying comparatively less attention to the internalization of religious values as a foundation for sustainable behavioral change (Riegel, 2023; Sabir et al., 2025). Fourth, although Thomas Lickona's framework of moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action has been widely adopted in character education research, relatively few empirical studies have contextualized this framework within the distinctive educational traditions of Indonesian pesantren. Consequently, the existing literature has yet to explain how religious values, institutional culture, mentoring systems, and educational sanctions can be integrated into a unified framework for preventing bullying (Noe et al., 2026). These limitations reveal both theoretical and contextual gaps that warrant further investigation. Accordingly, a more holistic examination is required to understand how religious character transformation can function as an educational strategy that simultaneously strengthens spirituality, empathy, social responsibility, and anti-bullying behavior.

Building upon these limitations, the present study addresses a critical research gap by conceptualizing bullying prevention as an outcome of the transformation of religious character development rather than as an isolated disciplinary intervention. Unlike previous studies that

generally examine character education, counseling, or bullying prevention separately, this research integrates these dimensions into a comprehensive framework grounded in the educational traditions of Islamic boarding schools. The study adopts Thomas Lickona's theory as its primary analytical lens while contextualizing moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action through the implementation of the Santri Trilogy, the wali asuh mentoring system, the reinforcement of Furudhul Ainiyah Akhlak, structured religious habituation, counseling services, and educational sanctions (Said et al., 2025). Through this integration, the study seeks to explain how religious values evolve from normative teachings into practical social mechanisms that cultivate empathy, self-regulation, mutual respect, and collective responsibility among students (Ma et al., 2025). This perspective extends existing discussions by positioning pesantren not merely as institutions transmitting religious knowledge but as dynamic moral communities capable of fostering sustainable behavioral transformation (Widodo, 2026). Consequently, the study contributes to the theoretical development of character education by demonstrating how religious values may operate as social capital for preventing bullying within communal educational settings. At the practical level, the proposed framework offers an alternative model that may assist Islamic educational institutions in designing more preventive, humanistic, and value-oriented student development systems (Fauziah et al., 2026). Therefore, this research responds directly to the need for a more integrated understanding of bullying prevention within contemporary Islamic education.

Based on these considerations, this study aims to analyze how the transformation of the religious character development model is implemented to address bullying behavior among students at Pondok Pesantren Nurul Jadid, Paiton, Probolinggo. Specifically, the study explores the institutional strategies employed to internalize religious values, strengthen students' moral awareness, and establish an educational culture that discourages bullying through continuous character formation. By examining the interaction between religious traditions, mentoring practices, institutional culture, and educational guidance, the study seeks to generate a comprehensive understanding of character transformation within the unique context of Islamic boarding schools. Theoretically, the findings are expected to enrich the literature on Islamic character education by extending Thomas Lickona's framework into the socio-cultural environment of pesantren while proposing a more integrated conceptual model of bullying prevention. Practically, the study provides evidence-based insights for school leaders, counselors, policymakers, and Islamic educational practitioners in designing character development programs that prioritize empathy, moral responsibility, and restorative educational practices. Furthermore, the proposed model may serve as a reference for other Islamic educational institutions seeking to strengthen safe, inclusive, and respectful learning environments through the systematic internalization of religious values. Ultimately, this research aspires to demonstrate that sustainable bullying prevention cannot rely solely on institutional regulations but must be rooted in the transformation of students' moral character through meaningful educational experiences. In doing so, the study contributes to the broader discourse on character education by highlighting the strategic role of religious values in fostering socially responsible and ethically grounded educational communities.

METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research approach using a single-case study design to investigate the transformation of the religious character development model in addressing bullying behavior among students at Pondok Pesantren Nurul Jadid, Paiton, Probolinggo, Indonesia. A qualitative case study was considered the most appropriate design because the research aimed to obtain an in-depth understanding of a complex social phenomenon within its real-life institutional context, where the boundaries between the phenomenon and its setting are inseparable (Agilan, 2026; Annamalah, 2024). Rather than examining causal relationships through statistical procedures, the study sought to explore how religious values were interpreted, implemented, and institutionalized through everyday educational practices that contribute to bullying prevention. The analysis was guided by Thomas Lickona's character education framework, particularly the dimensions of moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action, which served as the theoretical

foundation for interpreting the transformation of religious character development within the pesantren environment. This design enabled the researchers to examine institutional culture, educational practices, mentoring systems, counseling services, and students' lived experiences as an integrated educational process rather than as isolated variables.

Research Setting and Duration

The study was conducted at Pondok Pesantren Nurul Jadid, located in Paiton District, Probolinggo Regency, East Java, Indonesia. The institution was intentionally selected because it is one of the largest Islamic boarding schools in Indonesia and has developed comprehensive religious character education programs that explicitly aim to prevent bullying through value internalization, mentoring, counseling, and restorative educational practices. Its residential educational system provides a unique context in which students engage in continuous religious, academic, and social interactions, making it an appropriate setting for examining the relationship between character development and bullying prevention. Fieldwork was carried out from January to May 2026, allowing prolonged engagement with participants and enabling the researchers to observe institutional activities across different educational settings and daily routines.

Participants and Sampling Technique

Participants were recruited using purposive sampling, a technique commonly employed in qualitative case study research to identify information-rich individuals who possess direct experience with the phenomenon under investigation (Langbein et al., 2021; Rana et al., 2023). Inclusion criteria required participants to be actively involved in student guidance, religious character development, counseling services, disciplinary management, or to have direct experience with the implementation of anti-bullying programs. Based on these criteria, six participants were selected, comprising the Secretary of LKP Miftahus Surur, one LKP administrator, one counselor from LKP Miftahus Surur, the Head of the Guidance and Mentoring Division (BK/WA), the Regional Coordinator of BK/WA Syekh Jumadil Kubro, and one student representing the beneficiaries of the character development program. These participants represented diverse institutional perspectives regarding policy formulation, educational implementation, supervision, counseling, and students' experiences. Participant recruitment continued until data saturation was achieved, as indicated by the recurrence of similar information and the absence of substantially new themes during subsequent interviews.

Research Instruments

In qualitative inquiry, the researcher functioned as the primary research instrument responsible for planning, collecting, interpreting, and validating the data. To support systematic data collection, several complementary instruments were prepared, including semi-structured interview guidelines, participant observation protocols, document analysis sheets, and reflective field note templates. The interview guide consisted of open-ended questions focusing on participants' understanding of bullying, religious character development, mentoring practices, counseling mechanisms, educational sanctions, institutional culture, and perceived behavioral changes among students. Observation protocols were designed to document students' daily religious activities, mentoring interactions, counseling sessions, disciplinary implementation, and communal educational practices. Documentary sources included institutional regulations, counseling reports, student development manuals, disciplinary records, educational policy documents, photographs, and other institutional archives relevant to character education and bullying prevention. The integration of these instruments facilitated methodological triangulation and provided comprehensive evidence from multiple perspectives.

Trustworthiness of the Study

The credibility and trustworthiness of the research were established following the criteria proposed. Before field implementation, the interview guide and observation protocols underwent expert validation involving two senior scholars specializing in Islamic education and qualitative research methodology. Their suggestions were incorporated to improve conceptual relevance, clarity, and contextual appropriateness. A pilot interview was subsequently conducted to evaluate the flow and comprehensibility of the interview questions. During fieldwork, the credibility of the findings was strengthened through prolonged engagement, persistent observation, source

triangulation, method triangulation, member checking, peer debriefing, and maintaining a detailed audit trail documenting every stage of the research process. These procedures enhanced the credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability of the findings.

Data Collection Procedures

Data collection was conducted systematically through four interconnected stages: preparation, fieldwork, verification, and documentation. Initially, the researchers obtained institutional permission and ethical approval from the pesantren administration, followed by instrument preparation and participant recruitment. Participant observation was subsequently conducted to understand students' daily activities, religious routines, mentoring practices, counseling services, and patterns of social interaction within the boarding school environment. Semi-structured interviews were then carried out individually with each participant in a confidential setting to encourage open discussion regarding bullying experiences and character development practices. Each interview lasted approximately 45–90 minutes, was audio-recorded with participants' informed consent, and transcribed verbatim immediately after the interview sessions. Documentary evidence was collected throughout the fieldwork period to complement observational and interview findings. Reflective field notes were continuously maintained to document contextual information, researchers' observations, methodological decisions, and emerging analytical insights. The overall research workflow is summarized in Figure 1. The flowchart illustrates the complete sequence of the study, beginning with problem identification and literature review, followed by instrument development, participant selection, data collection, qualitative analysis, verification procedures, and the interpretation of findings based on Thomas Lickona's character education framework. Presenting the research process in a visual format enhances methodological transparency and enables future researchers to replicate the study within comparable educational contexts.

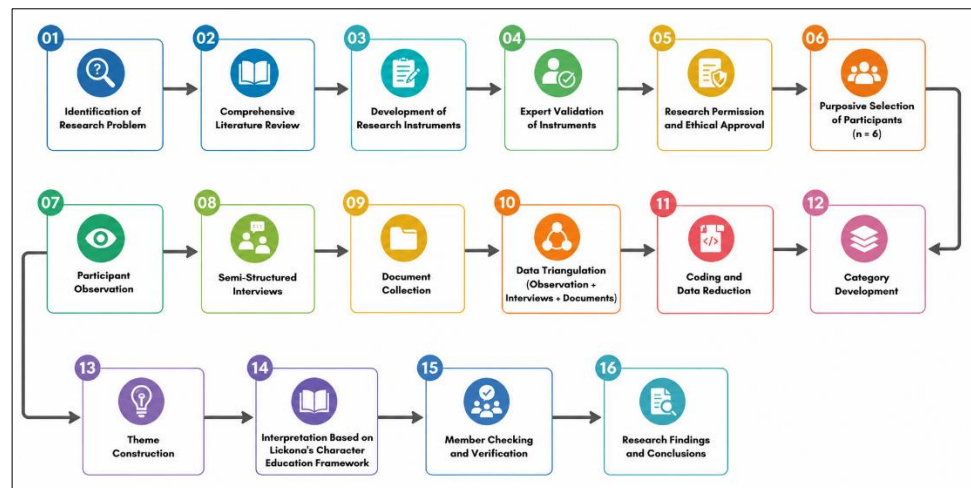


Figure 1. Research Procedure of the Qualitative Case Study

As illustrated in Figure 1, the research followed a systematic and iterative qualitative process. Data collection and analysis were conducted concurrently, allowing preliminary interpretations to inform subsequent observations and interviews. The integration of participant observation, semi-structured interviews, documentary analysis, triangulation, coding, thematic development, member checking, and theory-driven interpretation ensured that the findings were grounded in empirical evidence while maintaining analytical rigor and methodological trustworthiness.

Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using the interactive model of qualitative data analysis proposed. Data analysis began simultaneously with data collection through repeated reading of interview transcripts, observation records, documentary evidence, and reflective field notes to achieve data familiarization. The first analytical stage involved data reduction, during which meaningful units related to religious character development and bullying prevention were identified through open coding. Similar codes were then grouped into broader conceptual categories using axial

coding, allowing relationships among mentoring practices, counseling activities, institutional culture, religious habituation, educational sanctions, and students' behavioral transformation to emerge systematically. These categories were subsequently synthesized into overarching themes corresponding to the dimensions of moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action within Thomas Lickona's character education framework. The themes were interpreted through constant comparison across interviews, observations, and documentary evidence to ensure analytical consistency. Finally, conclusions were drawn through iterative interpretation and continuous verification using triangulation, member checking, peer debriefing, and audit trail documentation. This analytical strategy ensured that the findings accurately represented participants' experiences while maintaining methodological rigor, credibility, and theoretical coherence.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Religious Character Development Based on the Santri Trilogy

The formation of religious character within the Nurul Jadid Islamic boarding school environment is not solely based on the transmission of religious knowledge, but also grounded in a value system that serves as the foundation for guiding the behavior of students. This value system functions as a guideline that directs the process of character internalization, ensuring that every form of character development has a clear orientation toward the formation of individuals who are faithful, virtuous, and responsible. Therefore, character transformation at the Nurul Jadid Islamic Boarding School is carried out through a framework of values inherited from its founder as a guideline for developing the moral, spiritual, and social awareness of students. This process is aligned with the concept of the Santri Trilogy formulated by Kiai Zaini Mun'im, the founder of the Nurul Jadid Islamic Boarding School, which encompasses three main principles: Al-Ihtimamu bil Furdhli al-'Ainiyah (fulfilling individual obligations), Al-Ihtimamu bi Tarki al-Kaba'ir (avoiding major sins), and Al-Tahalli bi al-Akhlaq al-Karimah (adorning oneself with noble character). These three principles serve as the foundation for shaping the moral awareness of students, enabling them to understand, internalize, and apply religious values in both personal and social life.

The character development of santri at Islamic boarding schools is directed toward establishing a balance between individual piety and social concern. The Secretary of LKP Miftahus Surur explained that pesantren do not only function as religious educational institutions but also serve as spaces for personality formation through the strengthening of spiritual, ethical, and humanitarian values. Behaviors such as mocking, belittling, or harming fellow santri are understood not merely as violations of regulations but also as indicators of the suboptimal internalization of moral values, particularly the principle of Al-Tahalli bi al-Akhlaq al-Karimah, which emphasizes guarding one's speech, respecting others, and building harmonious social relationships. Pondok Pesantren Nurul Jadid views that the formation of religious character and the prevention of bullying behavior must begin with the strengthening of moral knowing as the foundation of character education. Therefore, the pesantren organizes various systematic development programs to instill religious values, ethics, and social responsibility among santri. The implementation of these programs is coordinated by LKPNJ through the BK/WA Bureau of Pesantren Affairs as the unit responsible for the guidance, mentoring, and supervision of santri behavior.

Ainul Yaqin, as the Coordinator of BK/WA for the Syekh Jumadil Kubro Region, explained that routine socialization delivered by regional leaders every week serves as a medium for guidance, evaluation, and strengthening santri's understanding of religious character values and the dangers of bullying behavior. This activity functions as a preventive measure to develop moral awareness before deviant behaviors emerge. Before BK/WA was established, the guidance and development of santri were still centered on the security and order division, with the primary orientation focused on disciplinary enforcement, such as the determination of sanctions and their implementation. As a result, character development had not been carried out in a structured and sustainable manner. The establishment of BK/WA subsequently became an institutional transformation that shifted the approach to student development from merely disciplinary supervision toward a more educational and preventive model oriented toward strengthening the religious character of santri.

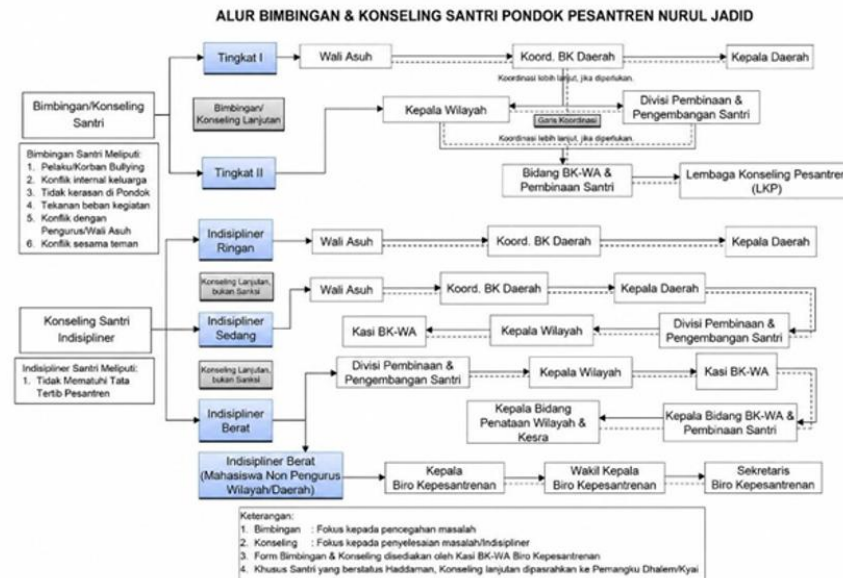


Figure 2. Guidance and Counseling Flow at Nurul Jadid Islamic Boarding School

In addition, the study of the Akhlaqul Lil Banin book, which is conducted every Thursday night, serves as a medium for internalizing moral values, social etiquette, mutual respect, and social responsibility. Therefore, santri are not only able to understand moral concepts cognitively but also capable of applying them as guidelines in interacting with others. The LKP administrator, Zaki Maulana, further explained that character development is carried out reflectively by guiding santri to understand the moral consequences of every action. Santri are provided with an understanding that excessive joking, degrading language, and actions that cause harm to others contradict the principle of Al-Ihtimamu bi Tarki al-Kaba'ir, which emphasizes self-restraint from behaviors that undermine moral values and social harmony. Thus, behavioral changes are expected to emerge from internal awareness rather than merely from adherence to regulations.

The research findings indicate that character development in Islamic boarding schools has undergone a transformation from a pattern of compliance toward a process of value internalization, which is shaped through an understanding of the relationship between humans and Allah through the fulfillment of religious obligations, the relationship with oneself through the control of negative behaviors, and social relationships through the implementation of akhlakul karimah. LKP counselor Adiyatno Hidayat explained that counseling also plays a significant role in enhancing empathy, self-awareness, and the ability of santri to understand the boundaries of social interaction. Based on the results of the observation, the implementation was carried out through religious guidance, direction from the administrators, deliberations, and social assistance in the dormitory. The prevention of bullying is not only conducted through rules and sanctions but also through character education that fosters awareness, responsibility, empathy, and concern for others.



Figure 3. Character Development Activity Socialization

These findings serve as the primary foundation in character formation because individuals need to understand values before they are able to love and apply them in their actions. In the context of Pondok Pesantren Nurul Jadid, moral knowing becomes the initial gateway for students (santri)

to recognize right and wrong behaviors, understand the social consequences of an action, and develop self-control in communal life. Therefore, bullying is not merely understood as a violation of pesantren regulations, but rather as a moral issue that requires the development of awareness and behavioral transformation.

Table 1. Implementation in the Development of Santri's Religious Character as an Effort to Prevent Bullying

Character Dimension	Form of Implementation in the Pesantren	Contribution to Bullying Prevention
Understanding moral values	Religious studies, guidance from administrators, and student development programs	Developing santri's awareness to appreciate and respect others
Awareness of negative behaviors	Counseling and individual mentoring	Assisting santri in recognizing forms of verbal, social, and emotional bullying
Understanding the impact of actions	Behavioral evaluation and developmental discussions	Fostering awareness of the social consequences of actions that harm others
Knowledge of religious values	Establishment of pesantren cultural practices	Making religious values a guideline in building social relationships

Thus, the transformation of religious character development among santri at Pondok Pesantren Nurul Jadid becomes a fundamental basis for establishing an anti-bullying culture. Through education, mentoring, and exemplary conduct, the pesantren not only develops santri who understand religious values but also enables them to internalize these values in their social lives. This process produces santri with religious character, noble morals, responsibility, and concern for maintaining harmonious relationships among fellow individuals.

The Role of Caregivers in Strengthening the Religious Character of Santri

The Secretary of LKP Miftahus Surur explained that character development at Nurul Jadid Islamic Boarding School is directed toward strengthening mutual respect, polite communication, and social awareness. Within the communal life of the pesantren, every santri is required to recognize that their words and actions have an impact on others. Therefore, behaviors such as mocking, belittling, excluding others, and excessive joking are regarded not only as violations of institutional regulations but also as reflections of low empathy and moral sensitivity. Based on this perspective, bullying prevention is focused on strengthening moral feeling, namely the ability of santri to understand others' feelings, regulate their behavior, and establish harmonious social relationships.

This strengthening is implemented through the wali asuh program, which replaces the previous mentoring pattern that relied more heavily on general advice, religious lectures, and collective supervision by administrators. Although effective in conveying moral values, this approach has not been able to provide personal guidance for the social and emotional development of santri. As an innovative mentoring approach, the wali asuh program provides more intensive assistance through interpersonal relationships between caregivers and their assigned santri. Through sharing activities, santri are given opportunities to express their experiences, discuss problems, and engage in self-reflection, so that the mentoring process does not merely resolve issues but also fosters empathy, responsibility, and social awareness as preventive measures against bullying.

Furthermore, character strengthening is carried out through the recalling activities of Furudhul Ainiyah (FA) materials, particularly discussions on moral values. This activity aims to re-internalize moral principles so that they do not remain limited to the cognitive aspect but become habits in daily life. The materials presented emphasize the importance of maintaining one's speech, respecting others, controlling emotions, and developing a culture of compassion. By integrating personal mentoring through the wali asuh program and value reinforcement through FA recalling activities, Nurul Jadid Islamic Boarding School develops a more comprehensive character-building system in fostering empathy and preventing bullying behavior within the pesantren environment. The implementation of FA Akhlak material recalling is carried out within a small group setting, namely rooms or groups of students living in the same dormitory environment. The methods applied include discussions, question-and-answer sessions, experience reflections, and case discussions

directly related to the daily lives of students. Wali asuh do not merely deliver the material again, but also encourage students to connect moral values with social realities, such as the ethics of joking, maintaining speech, respecting peers, and resolving conflicts without engaging in actions that may lead to bullying. This small-group approach makes the mentoring process more intensive because wali asuh are able to understand the character and development of each student more closely.

The role of wali asuh in developing religious character is reflected through a mentoring pattern that emphasizes empathy, responsibility, and self-awareness. Students are not only directed to comply with pesantren regulations but are also guided to understand the moral values underlying each regulation. They are encouraged to realize that maintaining good character is not merely a personal obligation, but also a form of social responsibility in creating a peaceful and respectful pesantren environment. When problems occur among students, resolution is carried out through communication and guidance approaches. Students are not immediately subjected to punishment; instead, they are guided to understand the root causes of the problems and the impact of their behavior on others. Students are encouraged to view the issue from the perspective of the affected party so that they can understand that ridicule, humiliation, or social exclusion may have psychological consequences. Through this process, students not only recognize that such actions are wrong but also understand the moral reasons why these behaviors should be avoided. This is consistent with the explanation provided by the LKP Administrator, Zaki Maulana, who stated that the resolution of students' problems is carried out through dialogue and guidance so that they are able to understand the moral consequences of every action. This approach demonstrates that character education in Islamic boarding schools is not merely oriented toward rules and sanctions, but is directed toward transforming awareness through the process of value internalization. As stated in Thomas Lickona's concept, moral character will be strongly formed when values have been embedded within an individual's feelings, thereby encouraging the emergence of positive behavior consciously. The LKP Counselor, Adiyatno Hidayat, also explained that the enhancement of empathy is one of the important aspects in preventing bullying behavior. Through counseling services and mentoring, students are guided to understand the position of victims and realize that actions perceived as jokes may cause emotional harm to others. This approach helps students develop self-control, understand the boundaries of social interaction, and establish healthy relationships with others.



Figure 4. Implementation of Akhlak FA material recalling with the supervising guardian

The observation results indicate that the strengthening of moral feeling through the role of caregivers is carried out through the habituation of positive communication, exemplary behavior, personal guidance, and behavioral evaluation. The dormitory environment serves as a strategic space because the intensity of students' interactions takes place continuously. Through sharing activities and recalling FA Akhlak materials in small groups, students are accustomed to reflecting on their social experiences and internalizing moral values in real-life situations. The findings of this study demonstrate that moral feeling serves as a bridge between the understanding of moral values and the actual actions of students in preventing bullying. Through the role of caregivers and the reinforcement of FA Akhlak materials, students not only understand that bullying is an inappropriate behavior but also develop emotional awareness to avoid such actions. This guidance process makes bullying prevention more preventive in nature by fostering empathy, care, and social awareness from

an early stage. Thus, the transformation of religious character development through the strengthening of moral feeling, caregiver guidance, and the recalling of FA Akhlak materials at Nurul Jadid Islamic Boarding School demonstrates that character formation does not stop at the level of religious knowledge but develops into moral awareness reflected in daily behavior. The Islamic boarding school functions as a space for character formation that instills the values of compassion, responsibility, and respect for others as the foundation of students' social life.

The Habituation of Religious Behavior through Daily Worship, Mass Community Service, and Counseling

One form of transformation in religious character development can be observed in the changes in the implementation patterns of students' daily worship practices, particularly in the practice of shalat tahajjud (night prayer). Based on the research findings, at the previous stage, the implementation of shalat tahajjud was still considered an encouragement rather than an obligation for all students. The practice of this worship activity depended largely on each student's individual awareness, resulting in inconsistent levels of participation among students. However, through an evaluation process and the strengthening of the guidance system, the Islamic boarding school transformed its approach by establishing shalat tahajjud as one of the routine activities that must be performed by all students. This transformation indicates a shift in the character development approach, namely the formation of religious behavior through a structured habituation system that is planned and integrated into the daily life of the boarding school. According to the explanation provided by the Secretary of LKP Miftahus Surur, this policy change was implemented not merely to increase students' compliance with worship regulations, but also as a character-building strategy aimed at instilling values of discipline, patience, self-control, and personal responsibility.

This transformation demonstrates a process of strengthening the understanding of the importance of worship as a form of responsibility for a Muslim. Furthermore, through consistent habituation, these values develop into concrete actions that become embedded in students' daily lives. This habituation process demonstrates that religious character is not formed solely through the transmission of religious values but requires repeated experiences that establish positive behavioral patterns. Furthermore, the research findings indicate that the habituation of daily worship practices has implications for the development of students' social behavior. The values acquired through spiritual activities do not end solely in the relationship between individuals and God but are directed toward the formation of social morals, such as maintaining speech, respecting others, avoiding harmful behavior, and developing concern for fellow students. Thus, the transformation of worship habituation becomes one of the preventive strategies implemented by the Islamic boarding school in developing internal moral control that can reduce the potential emergence of bullying behavior.

The transformation of religious character development was also identified through the advancement of environmental cleanliness activities within the Islamic boarding school. Initially, cleanliness activities were primarily focused on maintaining the internal environment of the boarding school as part of developing students' discipline and responsibility toward their shared living space. However, the research findings indicate an expansion in the orientation of character development, namely through the involvement of students in social cleanliness activities outside the boarding school environment, one of which is participation in cleaning activities at the Waste Disposal Site (TPS). According to the Head of BKWA, Taufiq Hidayah, the involvement of students in public environmental cleanliness activities represents an expansion of the meaning of character development. Students are not only educated to maintain cleanliness as an individual and communal obligation within the boarding school but are also directed to develop concern for the broader social environment. This transformation demonstrates that religious values have begun to be transformed into social practices that provide benefits for society.

This is further reinforced by the Coordinator of the Regional BKWA Syaikh Jumadil Kubro, Ainul Yaqin, who explained that collective social activities serve as a medium for character education because they provide direct experiences for santri to interact with the community. Through these activities, santri learn about social responsibility, cooperation, respect for the environment, and the importance of individual contributions to collective interests. The transformation of these cleaning activities reflects the development of santri, who not only understand that cleanliness is part of

religious values but also develop a sense of concern for environmental conditions and community needs. This process is essential in building anti-bullying character because the attitude of respecting the social environment is closely related to the ability to respect other individuals within the community. Thus, cleaning activities are no longer understood merely as administrative activities of the pesantren but have developed into instruments for fostering social character. This transformation demonstrates that religious education in pesantren has a broader orientation, namely shaping santri who possess both personal piety and social piety.

In addition to habituating religious practices and social activities, the transformation of religious character development at Pondok Pesantren Nurul Jadid is also realized through the strengthening of counseling services as a mentoring system for santri. The research findings indicate that counseling services do not only function as a place for resolving problems when violations or conflicts occur but have developed into a mentoring space that assists santri in dealing with various psychological, social, and adaptation challenges within the pesantren environment. Based on an interview with LKP Counselor Adiyatno Hidayat, counseling services play an important role in understanding the personal conditions of santri, particularly new santri who experience difficulties in adapting to the pesantren environment. The mentoring process is carried out through interpersonal communication that enables santri to express the problems they encounter, including conflicts with peers, social pressures, and experiences related to bullying behavior. The transformation of counseling services is reflected in the shift in the paradigm of handling students' problems. Whereas previously problem resolution was largely directed toward providing reprimands or sanctions for violations, the current approach places greater emphasis on the processes of guidance, self-reflection, and behavioral change. Students involved in social conflicts are not only given consequences for their actions but are also guided to understand the impact of such behaviors on others. According to Admin LKP Zaki Maulana, the existence of counseling services has become an essential component in establishing a more humane educational system because every student-related issue is understood based on its underlying background and conditions. This approach enables Islamic boarding schools to prevent bullying through early detection of social problems that emerge within students' interactions. Counseling services play a role in strengthening individuals' abilities to understand others' feelings, develop empathy, and recognize the moral consequences of certain actions. The counseling process helps students not only understand that bullying is a form of inappropriate behavior but also comprehend the moral reasons why such actions should be avoided.

Based on the overall research findings, the transformation of religious character development at Nurul Jadid Islamic Boarding School demonstrates a shift from a rule-based guidance system toward a value-internalization-based guidance system. This transformation occurs through the strengthening of daily worship practices that cultivate individual moral control, the expansion of cleanliness activities into practices of social responsibility, and the development of counseling services as mechanisms for psychological and social support. These three forms of transformation indicate that religious character within the context of Islamic boarding schools is not only understood as spiritual piety but also as social capital in establishing harmonious relationships among students and creating a boarding school culture that is responsive to bullying behavior.

Strengthening Anti-Bullying Through Educational Sanctions

In the life of an Islamic boarding school, the implementation of religious values is reflected in the behavior of students (santri) who are able to maintain their speech, respect others, avoid actions that demean other individuals, and resolve various issues wisely in accordance with Islamic teachings. Therefore, efforts to prevent bullying at Nurul Jadid Islamic Boarding School are not only carried out through strengthening religious understanding and moral development but also through the enforcement of regulations accompanied by the implementation of educational sanctions. The application of these sanctions is directed as part of the development process so that students become aware of the consequences of every action, develop a sense of responsibility, and cultivate mutual respect in communal life within the boarding school environment. The implementation of sanctions within the Islamic boarding school environment is not merely interpreted as punishment but as a moral education process aimed at guiding students to conduct self-reflection and improve themselves. When a student commits an action that contradicts the values of *akhlakul karimah*,

including behaviors that lead to bullying such as mocking, belittling, disturbing the comfort of peers, or engaging in actions that cause social or emotional harm, the boarding school provides consequences aimed at developing moral awareness.

Based on the research findings and the documentation of decisions made by the Pesantren Court, the handling of violations is carried out through an examination process and decision-making procedures in accordance with the level of violation committed by the students. The sanctions imposed are not only oriented toward punishment but are also directed as a means of religious guidance and character formation. According to Fathol Latif, one form of sanction implemented is the obligation to recite the Qur'an regularly at the makbarah every day for a certain period of time. This sanction aims to guide students in improving their spiritual relationship with Allah SWT, conducting self-introspection, and developing attitudes of patience, responsibility, and self-control. The coaching process is reinforced through the mandatory reporting form mechanism coordinated by the Security and Order Division as a form of supervision over the implementation of sanctions. During the coaching period, students are accustomed to performing daily religious practices in a disciplined manner, such as performing the five daily congregational prayers, sunnah rawatib and tahajjud prayers, as well as reciting dhikr and istighfar after prayers. These practices aim to foster spiritual awareness, reduce selfish attitudes and seniority culture, develop emotional control, and purify the heart from feelings of envy, hatred, resentment, and arrogance. Thus, the implementation of sanctions in Islamic boarding schools not only provides a deterrent effect but also becomes part of the process of cultivating *akhlakul karimah* (noble character) and preventing bullying behavior.

In addition to the obligation to recite the Qur'an, the Islamic boarding school also implements sanctions in the form of regularly reciting shalawat and istighfar with a specified number of repetitions each day. This practice is not merely a consequence of violations committed by students but also serves as a spiritual development method aimed at fostering inner awareness and strengthening the religious character of students. From the perspective of character education, this activity constitutes part of the moral action process, namely the formation of good behavior through consistent habituation, allowing religious values to be internalized and become part of the students' character in their daily lives. Another form of sanction is the preparation of a written statement made before the Pesantren Court and witnessed by the assigned caregiver. This sanction serves as a means of instilling moral responsibility because students consciously acknowledge their mistakes and commit themselves not to repeat the same behavior. In the context of bullying prevention, the written statement functions as a medium to strengthen awareness that every action has consequences for the social environment and the comfort of other students. In addition to religious-based sanctions, the Islamic boarding school also provides further guidance through counseling services (BK), caregivers, and the pesantren security administrators. This assistance aims to ensure that students do not merely carry out sanctions formally but also undergo a process of behavioral transformation. Students are provided with guidance, advice, and reflection to help them understand their mistakes and improve their patterns of social interaction.

The administrator of LKP Zaki Maulana also explained that the success of the guidance process can be observed through changes in the students' attitudes after receiving mentoring. Students who had previously committed violations were guided to be able to maintain appropriate speech, regulate their emotions, and build better social relationships with their peers. This indicates that sanctions constitute part of the character transformation process rather than merely serving as a form of punishment. In relation to bullying, the implementation of moral action through sanctions and guidance functions to develop students' self-control. Students not only understand that bullying is a wrongful act but are also trained to replace negative behaviors with positive actions, such as respecting their peers, apologizing, maintaining effective communication, and resolving conflicts through deliberation.

inherent outcome of systematically organized religious character development. Such an interpretation also addresses the theoretical gap identified in the introduction concerning the limited understanding of how religious values become operational mechanisms for preventing interpersonal violence in Islamic educational settings.

Another important finding concerns the central role of the wali asuh mentoring system and the reinforcement of Furudhul Ainiyah Akhlak in cultivating moral feeling, which bridges students' cognitive understanding of moral values and their emotional capacity to practice those values in everyday social interactions. The findings indicate that intensive mentoring enables students to develop empathy, emotional awareness, and personal responsibility through reflective dialogue, small-group discussions, and individualized guidance instead of relying exclusively on collective supervision or disciplinary enforcement. This transformation demonstrates that bullying prevention becomes more effective when educational institutions intentionally nurture students' emotional competence alongside their religious knowledge. Within Lickona's theoretical framework, moral feeling occupies a strategic position because moral knowledge alone does not necessarily encourage ethical behavior unless individuals also develop empathy, compassion, and emotional commitment toward others. The mentoring model implemented at Pondok Pesantren Nurul Jadid therefore illustrates how religious character education can operationalize moral feeling through continuous interpersonal relationships that encourage students to consider the emotional consequences of their words and actions. Consequently, bullying is prevented not primarily because students fear institutional sanctions but because they gradually internalize empathy as an essential religious and social obligation.

The present findings also correspond with contemporary literature emphasizing the importance of supportive educational relationships in fostering students' socio-emotional development. Previous studies have consistently reported that positive school culture, educator role modelling, and collaborative learning environments contribute significantly to empathy, respectful communication, and harmonious peer relationships (Jenuri et al., 2024; Jusubaidi et al., 2024). Likewise, Lau and Shea (2024) argued that sustainable character formation emerges through continuous interaction between institutional culture, reflective learning, and meaningful interpersonal engagement rather than through formal moral instruction alone. The mentoring practices observed in this study support these conclusions while extending them within the distinctive context of Indonesian Islamic boarding schools. Unlike previous research that generally emphasized mentoring as an educational support strategy, the present findings demonstrate that the wali asuh system functions simultaneously as a mechanism for emotional regulation, conflict prevention, psychological support, and religious character formation. This multidimensional function reflects the unique characteristics of pesantren education, where caregivers continuously accompany students throughout their residential life and therefore possess greater opportunities to cultivate empathy through authentic daily interactions. As a result, the study provides stronger empirical evidence that personalized religious mentoring represents an important preventive strategy for reducing bullying in communal educational environments.

The findings further indicate that the transformation of religious character development reaches its practical manifestation through structured religious habituation, including obligatory worship, collective social service, and counseling programs that strengthen moral action. Unlike conventional disciplinary systems that primarily regulate external behavior, these institutional practices encourage students to repeatedly perform religious and social activities until positive behaviors gradually become part of their personal character. The institutionalization of obligatory tahajjud prayer, participation in community environmental service, and proactive counseling demonstrates that moral values are reinforced through repeated behavioral experiences rather than through verbal instruction alone. This finding is consistent with Lickona's assertion that genuine character development culminates in moral action, where ethical understanding and emotional commitment are translated into observable prosocial behavior. Nevertheless, the present study expands this theoretical perspective by illustrating that moral action within pesantren is simultaneously directed toward strengthening students' spiritual relationship with God and their social responsibility toward fellow human beings. Consequently, religious habituation functions as a dual educational mechanism that cultivates both individual piety and collective social harmony, thereby reducing opportunities for aggressive behavior within communal living environments.

These findings are broadly aligned with recent studies highlighting that sustainable behavioral transformation depends on institutional culture and continuous moral practice. D'Agostino (2024) and Wolff et al. (2025) argued that bullying prevention programs become more effective when schools develop positive social climates rather than relying solely on reactive disciplinary interventions. Similarly, Said et al. (2025) emphasized that religious values become socially meaningful only when integrated into everyday educational practices, while Widodo (2026) described pesantren as moral communities where character is formed through continuous interaction between institutional culture, religious habituation, and collective responsibility. The present study confirms these perspectives but also advances the literature by demonstrating that worship, social engagement, and counseling should not be interpreted as independent educational activities. Instead, these components collectively establish a coherent system of religious character transformation that strengthens self-regulation, empathy, and social responsibility while simultaneously preventing bullying. This integrated understanding represents an important conceptual contribution because it positions religious habituation not merely as spiritual discipline but as a preventive educational strategy that connects moral cognition, emotional development, and ethical behavior within a unified institutional framework. Through this perspective, the study contributes to the global discourse on value-based education by demonstrating that sustainable bullying prevention in faith-based educational institutions emerges from the systematic integration of religious values, institutional culture, and character education rather than from disciplinary control alone.

The final stage of the transformation of religious character development is reflected in the implementation of educational and restorative sanctions, which function not merely as disciplinary measures but as instruments for reinforcing moral action and strengthening students' moral responsibility. The findings indicate that sanctions at Pondok Pesantren Nurul Jadid are designed to encourage reflection, repentance, and behavioral improvement through religious practices, counseling, and continuous supervision rather than through punitive punishment alone. This restorative orientation demonstrates that bullying prevention is understood as a developmental educational process rather than simply a legalistic response to misconduct. From Lickona's perspective, moral action is sustained when individuals repeatedly practice ethical behavior until it becomes an integral part of their character. The present findings therefore illustrate that educational sanctions provide opportunities for students to reconnect moral understanding and emotional awareness with concrete behavioral change through structured religious activities. Consequently, sanctions become mechanisms for restoring social relationships and reinforcing intrinsic moral commitment instead of generating temporary compliance motivated by fear of punishment.

These findings support previous studies arguing that punitive approaches alone rarely produce sustainable behavioral transformation because they often emphasize external control rather than internal moral development. Contemporary research has suggested that educational institutions achieve more effective bullying prevention when disciplinary policies are integrated with character education, counseling, and reflective learning processes (Dai & Wu, 2025; Haugh, 2021). Likewise, Sarwadi and Raihan (2025) emphasized that Islamic educational institutions should integrate spiritual guidance, emotional development, and institutional support into comprehensive student development systems. The present study reinforces these arguments while extending them through empirical evidence from the pesantren context, where restorative sanctions are embedded within broader religious character development programs. Instead of separating discipline from education, Pondok Pesantren Nurul Jadid integrates sanctions with Qur'anic recitation, worship, counseling, mentoring, and behavioral monitoring, thereby transforming disciplinary intervention into an opportunity for moral reconstruction. This integrated approach expands current discussions by demonstrating that restorative educational sanctions can simultaneously strengthen self-regulation, empathy, accountability, and social harmony, all of which are fundamental components of sustainable bullying prevention within communal educational environments.

Taken together, the four dimensions identified in this study—the Santri Trilogy, the wali asuh mentoring system, structured religious habituation, and restorative educational sanctions—form a coherent framework that extends Thomas Lickona's theory beyond its original formulation. While Lickona conceptualizes character education as an interaction among moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action, the present findings demonstrate that these dimensions become substantially

more effective when institutionalized through a value-based educational ecosystem that continuously reinforces moral development across cognitive, emotional, behavioral, and organizational levels. This integrated model illustrates that character education is not a sequence of isolated educational activities but a dynamic process in which institutional culture functions as the primary medium for sustaining moral transformation. Religious values are therefore translated into daily routines, mentoring relationships, counseling practices, communal worship, and restorative interventions that collectively shape students' social behavior. Such an interpretation addresses the theoretical gap identified in the introduction, namely the limited explanation of how religious values, institutional culture, and mentoring systems interact systematically to prevent bullying within Islamic boarding schools. Rather than positioning bullying prevention as an independent intervention, the study conceptualizes it as an emergent outcome of an integrated religious character development system that permeates every aspect of students' educational experiences.

The theoretical contribution of this study therefore lies in its proposal of a contextually grounded model of religious character transformation that enriches the international literature on character education and bullying prevention. Previous studies have generally examined religious education, institutional culture, counseling, mentoring, and anti-bullying initiatives as relatively independent educational domains (Kaliisa et al., 2022; Mahoney et al., 2021; Riegel, 2023; Sabir et al., 2025). In contrast, the present findings demonstrate that these educational components become substantially more effective when integrated within a unified institutional framework guided by shared religious values and continuous moral reinforcement. This perspective modifies existing theoretical discussions by positioning religious character development not only as an outcome of educational activities but also as the principal mechanism through which educational institutions cultivate empathy, social responsibility, and collective commitment to preventing interpersonal violence. Consequently, the study contributes a conceptual perspective that broadens current understanding of character education by highlighting the reciprocal relationship between institutional culture and students' moral development within residential educational settings. Such a contribution is particularly important because empirical evidence regarding the operationalization of Lickona's framework within Indonesian pesantren has remained relatively limited despite increasing scholarly interest in faith-based education.

From a practical perspective, the findings suggest that educational institutions seeking to establish sustainable anti-bullying environments should move beyond rule-based disciplinary systems toward comprehensive character development strategies that integrate religious values, mentoring, counseling, and restorative educational practices. This implication is especially relevant for Islamic boarding schools, where communal living creates intensive interpersonal interactions that require strong moral self-regulation and mutual respect. Nevertheless, the proposed framework also offers broader relevance for other value-based educational institutions because it demonstrates that bullying prevention becomes more sustainable when ethical values are embedded within institutional culture rather than delivered solely through formal instruction or disciplinary regulations. By emphasizing continuous value internalization, personalized mentoring, collective responsibility, and restorative responses to misconduct, the model provides practical guidance for educators, school leaders, counselors, and policymakers seeking to cultivate safer and more inclusive learning environments. These implications align with contemporary international discussions that advocate preventive, developmental, and relationship-centered approaches to student well-being rather than reactive punishment alone (D'Agostino, 2024; Wolff et al., 2025). Accordingly, the study illustrates that strengthening institutional culture through religious character education represents a viable strategy for promoting both individual moral growth and collective social resilience.

Finally, this study establishes its position within the global literature by demonstrating that the prevention of bullying in faith-based educational institutions should be understood as a multidimensional process of religious character transformation rather than as an isolated behavioral intervention. Existing international scholarship has increasingly recognized the importance of institutional culture, socio-emotional learning, and value-based education in fostering respectful educational communities (Lau & Shea, 2024; Jusubaidi et al., 2024). However, relatively few studies have explained how these elements are systematically integrated within the unique socio-cultural traditions of Islamic boarding schools. The present research addresses this gap by proposing an empirically grounded framework that connects religious values, mentoring systems, communal

worship, counseling, and restorative educational sanctions within a unified model of bullying prevention. This model demonstrates that sustainable behavioral transformation emerges from the continuous interaction between moral cognition, emotional development, institutional culture, and reflective educational practice rather than from disciplinary enforcement in isolation. Consequently, the study offers both conceptual and practical novelty by positioning pesantren as dynamic moral communities capable of generating contextually relevant approaches to bullying prevention while simultaneously enriching broader international discussions on character education, social responsibility, and the development of humane educational environments.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that addressing bullying in Islamic boarding schools requires a comprehensive transformation of religious character development rather than reliance on disciplinary measures alone. The findings reveal that bullying prevention becomes more sustainable when religious values are systematically internalized through an integrated educational ecosystem that combines moral instruction, continuous mentoring, religious habituation, counseling services, and restorative educational sanctions. Within the context of Pondok Pesantren Nurul Jadid, the transformation of character education extends beyond the transmission of religious knowledge by fostering empathy, self-discipline, mutual respect, and social responsibility through students' everyday interactions. Interpreted through Thomas Lickona's framework, the institutional practices effectively connect the dimensions of moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action, enabling religious values to evolve into observable prosocial behaviors that discourage bullying and strengthen harmonious relationships among students. These findings contribute to the literature by proposing a contextually grounded model of religious character development that integrates institutional culture, mentoring systems, and value-based educational practices into a coherent strategy for bullying prevention within Islamic boarding schools. From a practical perspective, the study provides evidence that sustainable anti-bullying initiatives should prioritize preventive and developmental approaches that cultivate students' intrinsic moral awareness instead of depending exclusively on punitive disciplinary systems. Although the findings are limited to a single-case context, the proposed framework offers valuable insights for educators, school leaders, and policymakers seeking to strengthen character education and establish safer, more inclusive educational environments in Islamic educational institutions and other value-based learning communities.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS STATEMENT

Moch Jauharul Maknun Al Ma'ie Conceptualization, methodology, investigation, data curation, formal analysis, visualization, and writing original draft. Jazilurrahman Supervision, validation, methodology, formal analysis, writing review and editing, and project administration. All authors contributed substantially to the interpretation of the findings, critically reviewed the manuscript, approved the final version of the manuscript, and agreed to be accountable for all aspects of the work.

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