



Character development of student independence at al-falah abu lam u modern islamic boarding school, aceh

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Abstract

The increasing polarization between normative textual interpretations and lived religious practices in contemporary Muslim societies underscores the urgent need for integrative analytical approaches that bridge doctrine and social reality. This study offers a novel sociological reinterpretation of hadith on grave visitation by examining its transformation from a normative legal discourse into a dynamic and institutionalized social practice. Employing a qualitative library-based design within the frameworks of the Sociology of Hadith and Living Hadith, the study analyzes canonical hadith texts, classical commentaries, and contemporary scholarly literature. The findings demonstrate that the shift from prohibition to recommendation of grave visitation reflects a deliberate form of prophetic social engineering aimed at restructuring emotional behavior and redefining collective attitudes toward death. Furthermore, the study reveals that hadith establishes a system of theological and spatial regulation that preserves monotheistic boundaries while enabling controlled engagement with burial spaces. Grave visitation is reinterpreted as an existential practice that fosters internalized moral awareness and ethical self-regulation. In contemporary contexts, particularly in Indonesia, the practice evolves into a Living Hadith manifested in communal rituals that reinforce social cohesion, collective memory, and cultural continuity, while also revealing tensions arising from the interaction between textual authority and local cultural dynamics. This study advances the theoretical development of the Sociology of Hadith by conceptualizing hadith as a mechanism of internalized social regulation and moral governance. Ultimately, it positions grave visitation as a multidimensional and socially embedded institution, offering a new conceptual lens for understanding the role of prophetic traditions in shaping religious practice within the global discourse on religion and society.

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INTRODUCTION

Character education has emerged as a central priority in contemporary educational discourse, particularly in response to the growing demand for individuals who possess not only intellectual competence but also strong personal and social responsibility. Among the various dimensions of character, independence plays a critical role in enabling learners to regulate their behavior, make autonomous decisions, and adapt to complex social environments (Gupta et al., 2024; Mohebbi, 2025). In the twenty-first century, independence is increasingly viewed as a foundational competence that supports lifelong learning and resilience in rapidly changing contexts (González-Pérez & Ramírez-Montoya, 2022; Rahimi & Oh, 2024). Despite its importance, the implementation of independence-oriented character education often remains fragmented and lacks systematic integration into daily educational practices (Kalalo et al., 2025; Morlan & Byrne, 2024). This gap becomes more pronounced in residential educational settings, where students are expected to transition from dependence to autonomy within a relatively short period. Consequently, examining

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how independence is cultivated within structured environments is both theoretically significant and practically necessary.

In Indonesia, Islamic boarding schools, commonly referred to as pesantren, represent a distinctive model of residential education that integrates academic learning with moral and spiritual development. These institutions operate through a continuous 24-hour system, allowing for intensive supervision, habituation, and value internalization processes (Manulung et al., 2025; Susanto et al., 2025). At Al-Falah Abu Lam U Modern Islamic Boarding School, for instance, students are required to follow structured daily routines encompassing religious practices, academic activities, and communal responsibilities. However, empirical observations indicate that new students, particularly at the junior secondary level, often face substantial challenges during the initial adaptation phase. Many students experience homesickness, emotional dependence on their families, difficulties in managing time, and limited readiness to engage in self-directed activities. These conditions suggest that independence is not automatically formed through institutional structures but requires a deliberate and systematic developmental process.

The urgency of this issue is further amplified by the broader educational demand for learners who are capable of self-regulation and adaptive functioning. Independence is not merely an individual attribute but a multidimensional construct that encompasses emotional, behavioral, and value-based autonomy (Jang, 2026; Yang et al., 2025). In boarding school contexts, these dimensions are expected to develop through continuous interaction between institutional systems and individual experiences. Nevertheless, the presence of structured routines alone does not guarantee successful internalization of independence values, as students' personal backgrounds, psychological readiness, and social dynamics may significantly influence the process. Without a comprehensive understanding of how these factors interact, character education programs risk becoming procedural rather than transformative. Therefore, there is a critical need to explore the mechanisms through which independence is effectively developed in real educational settings.

The relevance of this study is also situated within the broader discourse on culturally embedded education systems and their role in shaping student character. Pesantren provide a unique environment where religious values, communal living, and mentorship are deeply intertwined, creating a holistic framework for character formation (Hasanah, 2025; Sarwadi & Raihan, 2025). In such contexts, independence is not only taught explicitly but also cultivated implicitly through daily practices, social interactions, and institutional norms. However, the complexity of these processes often remains underexplored, particularly in terms of how institutional strengths and constraints influence student development. A more analytical approach is needed to uncover the structural and contextual dynamics that shape independence formation. By situating pesantren within global discussions on residential education, this study highlights its relevance beyond local contexts and contributes to a more nuanced understanding of character education systems worldwide.

A growing body of literature has examined character education and student independence from various perspectives. Studies by (Nasrin et al., 2025; Salabi, 2026) demonstrate that structured routines and disciplined environments play a significant role in fostering independence among students in Islamic boarding schools. Similarly, research in broader educational contexts emphasizes the importance of self-regulated learning, social interaction, and mentorship in shaping independent behavior (Edisherashvili et al., 2022; Ismail et al., 2024). Other scholars highlight the role of institutional culture, emotional support, and peer relationships in facilitating student adaptation and resilience (Awais et al., 2024; Wang et al., 2025). Recent studies also point to the potential of integrating soft skills training and digital technologies to enhance character education outcomes (OECD, 2023). Collectively, these findings suggest that independence is influenced by a combination of internal dispositions and external environmental factors.

However, despite these contributions, existing studies tend to emphasize outcomes rather than the dynamic processes through which independence is developed. Many investigations rely on descriptive or quantitative approaches that do not fully capture the complex interactions between institutional structures and individual experiences (Alhazmi & Kaufmann, 2022; Rana et al., 2023). Furthermore, there is a notable lack of research employing integrative analytical frameworks that systematically examine both internal and external factors in character formation. The application of strategic tools such as SWOT analysis in educational research remains limited, particularly in

understanding how strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats influence the development of independence. This indicates a critical gap in the literature, namely the absence of a process-based and strategically informed model of independence formation in residential education settings. Addressing this gap is essential for advancing both theoretical understanding and practical implementation of character education.

Based on these considerations, this study aims to analyze the process of developing student independence at Al-Falah Abu Lam U Modern Islamic Boarding School, Aceh, using a qualitative descriptive approach supported by SWOT analysis. The study seeks to identify the stages of independence formation, explore the challenges encountered by students during the adaptation process, and examine the institutional factors that influence character development. By integrating process-oriented analysis with a strategic evaluative framework, this research offers a novel contribution to the field of character education. Theoretically, it advances a more comprehensive understanding of independence as a dynamic construct shaped by the interaction between individual and institutional factors. Practically, it provides actionable insights for educators and policymakers in designing more effective mentoring and character development programs. Ultimately, this study contributes to the development of a more robust and context-sensitive model of independence formation in residential educational environments.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative descriptive design to explore the process of developing student independence within a residential Islamic boarding school context. A qualitative approach was selected because the study aims to capture participants' lived experiences, meanings, and social interactions that cannot be reduced to numerical representation (Dahal et al., 2024; Dodgson, 2023). The descriptive orientation allowed the researchers to systematically document naturally occurring phenomena and interpret how independence is constructed in everyday practices. Furthermore, this study incorporated a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) analytical framework as a strategic tool to examine both internal and external factors influencing character development (Mupfumira et al., 2024; Yu & Wang, 2022). The integration of qualitative inquiry with SWOT analysis enabled a more comprehensive and context-sensitive understanding of independence formation. This design is particularly relevant for studies aiming to connect experiential data with institutional dynamics and strategic evaluation.

The research was conducted at Al-Falah Abu Lam U Modern Islamic Boarding School, located in Aceh Besar, Indonesia, a residential institution characterized by a 24-hour integrated educational system combining religious, academic, and character education. This site was purposively selected due to its structured daily routines, intensive mentoring system, and emphasis on discipline and independence. Data collection was carried out over a three-month period, allowing prolonged engagement with participants and enabling the researchers to observe variations in student adaptation processes over time (Shekhar et al., 2025; Shi et al., 2025). The extended duration also strengthened the credibility of the findings by ensuring sufficient immersion in the research setting. Such contextual depth is essential in qualitative research to capture the complexity of social and behavioral phenomena.

The participants consisted of 22 individuals, including 10 new junior secondary-level students, 5 senior students, 6 teachers (ustadz and ustadzah), and 1 dormitory head. A purposive sampling technique was applied to select participants who were directly involved in or experienced the process of independence development (Shen et al., 2024). Inclusion criteria for new students included recent enrollment and active participation in daily boarding school routines, while senior students and teachers were selected based on their mentoring roles. The dormitory head was included as a key informant to provide institutional insights. This multi-source sampling strategy enabled triangulation of perspectives and enhanced the richness of the data. The selection process was guided by the principle of information richness rather than statistical representation, which is appropriate for qualitative inquiry.

Data were collected using semi-structured interviews, non-participant observations, and document analysis. The interview protocol was designed to explore students' experiences of adaptation, emotional independence, behavioral autonomy, and value internalization. Semi-

structured interviews were chosen because they allow flexibility while maintaining consistency across participants (Liu et al., 2025; Wu et al., 2025). Observations were conducted using structured observation sheets to record daily routines, interactions, and behavioral patterns related to independence. Documentation included photographs, institutional records, and daily schedules, which served as supplementary data sources. The use of multiple instruments ensured methodological triangulation and strengthened the validity of the findings. All instruments were developed based on established theoretical constructs of character education and independence.

To ensure trustworthiness, the study applied credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability criteria (Akbar, 2026). Content validity of the instruments was established through expert judgment involving two scholars in educational research and character education. Triangulation was conducted across data sources (students, teachers, and administrators) and data collection methods (interviews, observations, and documentation). Member checking was performed by returning preliminary interpretations to selected participants for verification (Sahakyan, 2023; Sparkes, 2024). Additionally, an audit trail was maintained to document the research process, including data collection decisions, coding procedures, and analytical interpretations. These procedures ensured that the findings were credible, consistent, and transparent.

The data collection process was conducted in sequential stages. The first stage involved obtaining institutional approval, developing research instruments, and conducting preliminary observations to understand the research context. The second stage consisted of in-depth interviews and systematic observations carried out simultaneously to capture both reported experiences and actual behaviors. The final stage involved collecting and organizing supporting documents to complement the primary data. All interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and coded for analysis. Observational notes and documents were systematically categorized to facilitate data integration. This structured procedure ensured that data collection was comprehensive and methodologically rigorous.

Data analysis followed the interactive model of Miles, (Shao et al., 2024), which includes data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing. Initially, raw data were coded using an inductive approach to identify meaningful units and recurring patterns. The coding process involved open coding, followed by axial coding to establish relationships between categories (Al-Eisawi, 2022; Riazi et al., 2023). These categories were then organized into broader themes representing stages and factors of independence development. Subsequently, the themes were analyzed using the SWOT framework to classify internal strengths and weaknesses as well as external opportunities and threats. Data display was conducted through narrative synthesis and conceptual mapping to enhance interpretability. Finally, conclusions were drawn through iterative comparison and validation across data sources, ensuring analytical rigor and consistency.

This study adhered to ethical research principles throughout its implementation. Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to data collection, ensuring voluntary participation and awareness of the research purpose. Participants' anonymity and confidentiality were protected by using pseudonyms and removing identifying information from transcripts (Heaton, 2022; Pascale et al., 2022). The researchers ensured that participants had the right to withdraw at any stage without consequence. All data were securely stored and used exclusively for academic purposes. Ethical considerations were maintained to ensure the integrity of the research and the protection of participants' rights.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The findings of this study demonstrate that the development of student independence at Al-Falah Abu Lam U Modern Islamic Boarding School occurs through a structured and progressive process embedded within daily institutional practices. Independence is not formed as an isolated outcome but emerges gradually through continuous interaction between institutional systems and students' lived experiences. The data indicate that new students initially encounter significant adjustment challenges, particularly in relation to emotional dependence, unfamiliar routines, and the demands of a highly regulated environment. Many participants reported experiencing homesickness

and difficulty managing time during the early stages of their transition, reflecting a gap between prior habits and the expectations of boarding school life. However, these challenges serve as an entry point for the systematic cultivation of independence, as students begin to engage with structured rules and routines that guide their daily activities. Over time, repeated exposure to these routines fosters behavioral consistency and reduces reliance on external support. This progression highlights that independence is constructed through a dynamic and iterative process rather than through direct instruction alone.

A deeper analysis of the data reveals that the process of independence formation unfolds through a sequence of interconnected stages that are experienced by students as a continuous cycle rather than a linear progression. During the initial phase, students are introduced to institutional norms, schedules, and behavioral expectations, which often generate tension due to the contrast with their previous home environment. As they move forward, intensive mentoring becomes a central mechanism that bridges the gap between dependency and autonomy. Teachers, dormitory supervisors, and senior students play a significant role in guiding daily activities, not only through instruction but also through emotional support and role modeling. This mentoring process enables students to gradually acquire practical skills, such as managing personal needs, maintaining discipline, and organizing daily tasks. As these practices are repeated over time, they evolve into habitual behaviors, marking a transition toward greater self-regulation. The continuous monitoring and feedback provided by the institution further reinforce this process, ensuring that behavioral adjustments are sustained and internalized.

To clarify this developmental trajectory, the findings are summarized in Table 1, which presents the stages of independence formation along with their corresponding characteristics, student responses, and outcomes. The table illustrates how each stage contributes to the gradual transformation of students' behavior, beginning with initial awareness and culminating in the internalization of independence as a stable character trait. It can be observed that early stages are dominated by emotional and behavioral challenges, while later stages reflect increasing levels of self-regulation and initiative. The progression shown in the table confirms that independence development is cumulative, with each stage building upon the previous one. This structured pattern supports the argument that independence is best understood as a process shaped by continuous interaction between guidance and practice.

Table 1. Stages of Independence Development and Their Characteristics

Stage	Key Activities	Student Response	Outcome
Orientation	Rule introduction, schedule adaptation	Homesickness, dependency	Initial awareness
Mentoring	Guidance, supervision, role modeling	Emotional adjustment	Skill acquisition
Habituation	Daily routines, repetition	Increased discipline	Behavioral consistency
Evaluation	Monitoring, feedback	Self-awareness	Behavioral refinement
Internalization	Self-regulation, initiative	Autonomy	Character formation

The role of daily routines emerges as a dominant factor in shaping independence. The boarding school environment is characterized by a highly structured schedule that regulates students' activities from early morning until night, including religious practices, academic learning, and communal responsibilities. This routine functions as a behavioral framework that gradually conditions students to act independently. Observational data indicate that students begin to perform tasks such as waking up on time, maintaining personal hygiene, and preparing learning materials without direct supervision. Although initial responses to these routines vary, with some students experiencing fatigue or resistance, the consistency of the system ultimately promotes adaptation and stability. The repetitive nature of daily activities enables students to internalize discipline and responsibility, transforming externally imposed rules into self-driven behaviors. This finding suggests that independence is cultivated not through isolated interventions but through sustained engagement with structured environments.

The interaction between internal student conditions and external institutional factors is further examined through SWOT analysis, which provides a strategic perspective on independence

development. The results of this analysis are presented in Table 2, highlighting the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats associated with the process. The strengths identified include a well-structured institutional system, consistent disciplinary practices, and strong mentoring support, all of which create a conducive environment for character formation. At the same time, internal weaknesses are evident in students' limited emotional readiness, dependency tendencies, and difficulties in time management, particularly during the early stages of adaptation. Opportunities arise from the potential to enhance mentoring systems, expand skill development programs, and integrate supportive technologies. However, external threats such as negative peer influence, interpersonal conflict, and declining motivation pose risks that may disrupt the development process if not addressed effectively.

Table 2. SWOT Analysis of Independence Development

Aspect	Findings
Strengths	Structured system, discipline, mentoring support
Weaknesses	Emotional dependency, limited self-management
Opportunities	Skill training, mentoring development, digital support
Threats	Peer influence, conflict, declining motivation

The integration of these findings leads to the formulation of a process-based conceptual model of independence development, which is presented in Figure 1. This figure is positioned at the end of the Results section to synthesize the empirical findings into a coherent framework. The model illustrates how the stages of development interact with internal and external factors, forming a continuous cycle that shapes student behavior over time. It highlights that independence is not merely an individual attribute but a product of ongoing interaction between institutional structures and personal adaptation processes. Each stage is influenced by both strengths and constraints, indicating that successful character formation depends on the alignment between guidance, environment, and individual readiness. The cyclical nature of the model emphasizes that independence development is iterative, allowing students to continuously refine their behavior through experience and reflection.

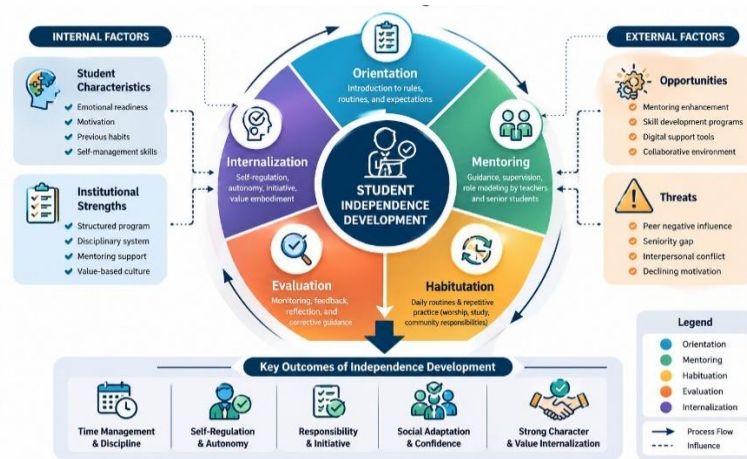


Figure 1. Process-Based Model of Student Independence Development

The figure demonstrates that independence emerges through the interaction of orientation, mentoring, habituation, evaluation, and internalization stages, which are continuously influenced by institutional strengths, individual limitations, environmental opportunities, and external challenges. This integrative model strengthens the analytical contribution of the study by moving beyond descriptive findings toward a conceptual understanding of how independence is systematically constructed within a residential education setting.

Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that student independence in the context of a residential Islamic boarding school is not an inherent individual trait but a systematically constructed outcome shaped by continuous interaction between institutional structures and student adaptation processes. This challenges conventional perspectives that frame independence primarily as a personal psychological attribute, instead positioning it as a socially mediated and context-

dependent construct. The initial dependence observed among new students, manifested through homesickness, emotional reliance, and limited self-management, should therefore be interpreted not as a deficit but as a necessary developmental condition that triggers the process of self-regulation. This interpretation aligns with the theory of self-regulated learning, which posits that autonomy develops progressively through guided practice and environmental structuring (González-Pérez & Ramírez-Montoya, 2022; Rahimi & Oh, 2024). However, this study extends prior research by demonstrating that the pesantren system intensifies this process through its 24-hour institutional design, where character formation occurs not only in formal learning spaces but across all dimensions of daily life. In doing so, the study proposes a reconceptualization of independence as an emergent property of sustained institutional engagement rather than as a static individual competence.

The orientation stage emerges as a critical phase that initiates the transformation from dependency to autonomy by exposing students to a new normative order characterized by discipline, routine, and collective expectations. While previous studies have emphasized the importance of adaptation in educational transitions (Awais et al., 2024; Wang et al., 2025), the present findings suggest that the tension experienced during this stage plays a constitutive rather than disruptive role in character formation. The emotional discomfort faced by students functions as a catalyst that compels them to renegotiate their behavioral patterns and align with institutional norms. This supports adaptive development theory, which argues that cognitive and behavioral growth often emerges from conditions of disequilibrium. Nevertheless, this study departs from earlier research by highlighting that adaptation within Islamic boarding schools is uniquely shaped by the integration of religious discipline and communal living, creating a form of structured dependency that gradually transitions into autonomy. Thus, independence in this context is not achieved through detachment from structure but through deeper engagement with it.

The role of mentoring constitutes a central mechanism through which institutional expectations are translated into internalized behavioral competencies. Unlike traditional instructional models that rely on directive teaching, the mentoring system in this study operates through relational dynamics involving guidance, emotional support, and role modeling. This finding reinforces social learning theory, which posits that individuals acquire behaviors through observation and interaction with significant others. Consistent with studies by Nasrin et al. (2025) and Salabi (2026), mentoring is shown to facilitate the gradual acquisition of self-management skills and emotional stability. However, this study advances the literature by demonstrating that the effectiveness of mentoring lies not merely in its presence but in its capacity to balance control and empathy. When mentoring is overly authoritative, it risks producing compliance without internalization; conversely, when it integrates emotional responsiveness, it fosters genuine autonomy. This nuanced understanding contributes to a more refined conceptualization of mentoring as a mechanism of transformative rather than procedural character development.

Habituation through structured daily routines is identified as the most influential factor in stabilizing independent behavior, confirming that character is fundamentally shaped through repeated practice rather than abstract instruction. The boarding school's tightly regulated schedule provides a consistent behavioral framework that conditions students to perform essential tasks independently over time. This finding is consistent with earlier research highlighting the role of disciplined environments in character formation (Manulung et al., 2025; Hasanah, 2025). However, the present study introduces a critical refinement by demonstrating that routine alone does not guarantee internalization. Instead, habituation becomes effective only when embedded within a system of meaning, supervision, and reflective reinforcement. Without these elements, routines may produce mechanical behavior rather than conscious self-regulation. Therefore, this study proposes that habituation should be conceptualized as a pedagogical process that integrates repetition, interpretation, and feedback, thereby transforming external discipline into internalized autonomy.

The evaluation stage further strengthens this process by enabling students to develop reflective awareness of their behavior and progress. Monitoring and feedback function not only as control mechanisms but as tools for fostering metacognitive regulation, allowing students to assess their own strengths and limitations. This aligns with contemporary theories of autonomy development, which emphasize the role of self-reflection in strengthening independent behavior (Jang, 2026; Yang et al., 2025). Nevertheless, the findings also reveal a critical tension: while

evaluation is necessary for behavioral refinement, excessive reliance on control-oriented monitoring may undermine intrinsic motivation. This observation extends previous research by highlighting the dual role of evaluation as both an enabler and a potential constraint of independence. Consequently, effective character education requires a balanced evaluative approach that combines accountability with encouragement, ensuring that students develop responsibility without becoming dependent on external validation.

The SWOT analysis provides a strategic lens through which the complexity of independence development can be more comprehensively understood. The identification of institutional strengths, such as structured systems and consistent mentoring, confirms that environmental stability is essential for character formation. At the same time, internal weaknesses, including emotional dependency and limited self-management, underscore the importance of addressing student readiness as a critical factor. This finding supports process-oriented perspectives in educational research (Alhazmi & Kaufmann, 2022; Rana et al., 2023), which argue that learning outcomes cannot be separated from contextual conditions. However, this study contributes a novel perspective by integrating SWOT analysis into character education research, demonstrating that independence development is not only a pedagogical issue but also a strategic institutional challenge. This integration allows for a more holistic understanding of how internal and external factors interact dynamically in shaping student behavior.

Furthermore, the presence of external opportunities and threats highlights that independence development is an open system influenced by broader social dynamics. Opportunities such as enhanced mentoring programs and skill-based training indicate the potential for institutional innovation, while threats such as negative peer influence and declining motivation reveal vulnerabilities that may disrupt the developmental process. This finding aligns with OECD (2023) and Gupta et al. (2024), who emphasize the importance of adaptive and context-responsive educational systems. However, this study goes further by demonstrating that traditional boarding school models must evolve to remain effective in contemporary contexts. The integration of supportive technologies, early intervention systems, and adaptive mentoring strategies becomes essential to sustain independence development in an increasingly complex social environment. This positions pesantren not as static traditional institutions, but as dynamic systems capable of continuous transformation.

Taken together, the findings of this study propose a process-based and cyclical model of independence development consisting of orientation, mentoring, habituation, evaluation, and internalization. This model extends existing theories of character education by emphasizing that independence is not a linear progression but a recursive process shaped by continuous interaction between institutional regulation and individual adaptation. Unlike prior studies that focus primarily on outcomes, this research provides a detailed explanation of the mechanisms through which independence is constructed and sustained. Theoretically, it contributes to the reconceptualization of independence as a socially embedded and institutionally mediated construct. Practically, it offers actionable insights for educators in designing more effective character development programs that integrate structure, mentoring, and reflective evaluation. By bridging micro-level student experiences with macro-level institutional dynamics, this study establishes a new analytical framework that strengthens the position of residential Islamic education within the global discourse on character formation.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that student independence within the context of a residential Islamic boarding school is not an innate or spontaneously acquired attribute, but a systematically cultivated outcome emerging from the continuous interaction between institutional structures and individual adaptation processes. The findings demonstrate that independence develops through a dynamic and cyclical process consisting of orientation, mentoring, habituation, evaluation, and internalization, where each stage contributes to the gradual transformation of externally regulated behavior into self-regulated autonomy. This process confirms that independence is best understood as a socially constructed and institutionally mediated phenomenon rather than a purely individual competence. By situating independence within a structured and value-based educational environment, this study highlights the central role of discipline, routine, and relational guidance in shaping sustainable character formation.

From a theoretical perspective, this study advances the discourse on character education by proposing a process-based model that reconceptualizes independence as an emergent property of sustained engagement with institutional systems. This model extends existing theories of self-regulated learning and social learning by integrating them within a residential and culturally embedded educational context, demonstrating that autonomy is not achieved through the absence of structure but through meaningful interaction with it. The study also contributes to the development of the Sociology of Education by illustrating how institutional environments function as mechanisms of internalized behavioral regulation and moral formation. In doing so, it provides a more nuanced understanding of how character is constructed through the interplay between external control and internal agency.

At the practical level, the findings offer important implications for the design and implementation of character education programs, particularly in residential educational settings. Effective independence development requires not only structured routines but also adaptive mentoring systems, reflective evaluation mechanisms, and sensitivity to students' emotional and psychological readiness. Institutions must therefore move beyond procedural discipline toward a more integrative approach that balances control with support, ensuring that behavioral compliance evolves into genuine autonomy. Additionally, the incorporation of strategic evaluation tools, such as SWOT analysis, enables institutions to identify strengths, address internal weaknesses, and anticipate external challenges in a systematic manner. This highlights that character education should be treated not only as a pedagogical endeavor but also as a strategic institutional process.

Despite its contributions, this study acknowledges that the findings are context-specific and rooted in the unique socio-cultural environment of an Islamic boarding school. The transferability of the proposed model to other educational contexts requires careful consideration of institutional characteristics, cultural values, and student backgrounds. Future research is therefore encouraged to test and refine this process-based model across different types of residential and non-residential educational institutions, as well as to explore the integration of digital and technological support systems in enhancing independence development. Longitudinal approaches may also provide deeper insights into the sustainability of independence as a character outcome over time.

In conclusion, this study offers a robust conceptual and empirical contribution by bridging the gap between theoretical discourse and practical implementation in character education. It positions independence as a multidimensional, dynamic, and socially embedded construct, while providing a comprehensive framework for understanding how it can be systematically developed within structured educational environments. By articulating the mechanisms, conditions, and strategic dimensions of independence formation, this research strengthens the foundation for future studies and contributes to the advancement of global discussions on character development and educational transformation.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS STATEMENT

Misnan conceptualized the study, designed the research framework, and led the overall writing of the manuscript. Muhibuddin contributed to the development of the theoretical framework and critically reviewed the manuscript for intellectual content. Hayati was responsible for data collection and contributed to data interpretation and analysis. Abdul Hadi conducted data analysis, including the application of the SWOT framework, and contributed to the development of the results and discussion sections. Nurbayani supported data validation, participated in the interpretation of findings, and assisted in refining the manuscript. All authors have read and approved the final version of the manuscript and agree to be accountable for all aspects of the work.

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