International Journal of Education, Vocational and Social Science
https://e-journal.citakonsulindo.or.id/index.php/IJEVSS
E-ISSN : 2963 4954
IJEVSS

The Implementation of the Hidden Curriculum in Character Building of Santri: A Case Study at Pondok Pesantren Darul Falah

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the implementation of the hidden curriculum in shaping the character of santri at Pondok Pesantren Darul Falah. The phenomenon examined is based on the importance of character education, which is not only formal in nature but is also formed through implicit everyday practices. This research uses a qualitative approach with a case study design, which allows for an in-depth exploration of the process of value internalization within the pesantren context. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and documentation, involving caregivers, pesantren administrators, as well as selected male and female students using purposive and snowball sampling techniques. The findings show that the implementation of the hidden curriculum occurs through three main themes, namely daily routines that shape habits, the role-modeling of caregivers as behavioral exemplars, and the pesantren culture as a collective value system. These three aspects play a significant role in shaping students' character, such as discipline, responsibility, independence, and manners (adab). These findings confirm that the hidden curriculum is an essential element in effective and sustainable

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character education. This study contributes to enriching theoretical discussions on the hidden curriculum within the context of Islamic boarding school education and provides practical implications for education managers in designing more contextual character-building strategies. Future research is recommended to develop systematic evaluation instruments to measure the effectiveness of the hidden curriculum more objectively.

Keywords: hidden curriculum, character education, Islamic boarding school (pesantren)

INTRODUCTION

Character education has become a global issue that receives increasing attention in modern education systems, especially amid various moral and social crises affecting younger generations. The phenomenon of moral decline, such as low discipline, lack of responsibility, and the rise of individualistic behavior, indicates that formal education has not fully succeeded in shaping students' character in a holistic manner.

In a global context, many studies highlight the importance of educational approaches that go beyond cognitive aspects and also address affective and moral dimensions through continuous value internalization. One approach considered effective is the hidden curriculum, which refers to unwritten values transmitted through social interaction, culture, and the learning environment. The hidden curriculum functions as an implicit mechanism that shapes attitudes and behavior through repeated daily experiences (Latif et al., 2024). Therefore, this approach is relevant in addressing the challenges of character education in the contemporary era.

In the national context, character education has also become a priority in Indonesia's education policy, particularly through strengthening values such as religiosity, nationalism, integrity, independence, and mutual cooperation. However, the implementation of character education in formal schools often remains normative and does not sufficiently address the practical dimensions of students' daily lives.

In contrast, Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) have a distinct advantage in integrating character education through a 24-hour living system that enables more intensive value internalization. Research shows that pesantren are effective in shaping students' character through a combination of formal curriculum and hidden curriculum embedded in everyday life (Lasmanah & Mukarom, 2026). The pesantren environment, which is rich in religious values, discipline, and a sense of togetherness, allows the process of character formation to occur naturally and continuously.

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The hidden curriculum in Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) encompasses various aspects such as routine habituation, role modeling by caregivers, institutional culture, and social interaction among students. Values such as discipline, responsibility, independence, and proper conduct are not always taught explicitly, but are instilled through daily practices, including congregational prayers, learning activities, and dormitory life.

Empirical studies indicate that habituation and role modeling are the main factors in the successful internalization of these values (Husna & Hamid, 2025). In addition, the hidden curriculum plays a significant role in shaping students' religious and social character through continuous interaction within the pesantren environment (Fitria & Khalimah, 2024). This shows that character education in pesantren is not merely instructional, but also cultural and contextual.

Preliminary findings from a field study at Darul Falah Islamic Boarding School indicate that the implementation of the hidden curriculum operates systematically through daily routines, role modeling by caregivers, and the overall pesantren culture. Interviews with caregivers and students reveal that values such as discipline, responsibility, and proper conduct are more often instilled through direct practice rather than formal instruction.

Students learn through observation and imitation of the behavior of ustaz and ustazah, making role modeling a dominant factor in character formation. In addition, dormitory life serves as the primary space for value internalization, where students learn to live independently, collaborate with others, and respect prevailing social norms. However, there is still no structured evaluation system in place to objectively measure the effectiveness of hidden curriculum implementation.

Although various studies have examined the role of the hidden curriculum in pesantren education, most of them still focus on conceptual aspects or provide general descriptive accounts, with limited exploration of subjective experiences, value internalization processes, and the dynamics of social interaction at the micro level. In addition, studies that specifically investigate the implementation of the hidden curriculum within a particular pesantren using a case study approach remain scarce.

In fact, a qualitative case study approach enables researchers to gain a deeper, more contextual, and holistic understanding of the phenomenon. Therefore, a research gap exists, particularly regarding how the hidden curriculum is concretely implemented in the daily life of a pesantren and how this process contributes to shaping students' character.

Theoretically, this study is grounded in the concept of the hidden curriculum, which emphasizes that education occurs not only through the formal curriculum but also through values,

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norms, and unwritten practices within the educational environment. This perspective aligns with the social constructivist approach, which views knowledge and values as being shaped through social interaction and lived experience.

In the context of pesantren, a structured environment grounded in religious values serves as the primary medium for the construction of students' character. Therefore, this study employs a qualitative approach to explore the meanings, experiences, and processes of value internalization that take place in the daily lives of students.

Based on the above discussion, this study aims to analyze the implementation of the hidden curriculum in shaping the character of students at Darul Falah Islamic Boarding School. The focus of the study includes the forms of hidden curriculum implementation, the process of value internalization, and the factors influencing its effectiveness.

This research is expected to provide a theoretical contribution to the development of character education studies based on the hidden curriculum, as well as practical contributions for education practitioners, particularly pesantren administrators, in designing more effective and sustainable character-building strategies.

RESEACH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach using a case study design. This approach is selected because the research aims to gain an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon of hidden curriculum implementation within a specific context, namely Darul Falah Islamic Boarding School. A case study allows the researcher to comprehensively explore processes, meanings, and social dynamics within a bounded system, making it suitable for examining contextual and complex educational practices (Yin, 2021).

Furthermore, this approach is relevant for capturing the subjective experiences of informants regarding the internalization of character values, which are not always explicitly visible in the formal curriculum (Stake, 2020).

This study was conducted at Darul Falah Islamic Boarding School, which was purposively selected due to its dormitory-based education system that enables the intensive practice of the hidden curriculum. The research took place over a field observation period that involved gradual data collection through interviews, observations, and documentation.

The selection of this site was based on the consideration that pesantren represent educational institutions with unique characteristics in shaping values through social interaction and institutional culture. Therefore, this location is considered representative for an in-depth

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examination of the research focus.

The research subjects consist of various parties directly involved in the educational process at the pesantren, including caregivers (ustaz and ustazah), pesantren administrators, as well as male and female students. Informants were selected using purposive sampling, based on specific criteria relevant to the research objectives, such as experience in student mentoring and active involvement in daily pesantren life.

In addition, snowball sampling was employed to identify additional informants based on recommendations from initial participants. This approach allows the researcher to obtain richer and more in-depth data from multiple, complementary perspectives (Palinkas et al., 2020).

Data collection in this study was carried out through several main methods, namely semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and documentation. Semi-structured interviews were used to explore the experiences, perceptions, and views of informants regarding the implementation of the hidden curriculum in shaping students' character.

Participant observation was conducted to directly examine students' daily activities, social interactions, and habitual practices that reflect character values. Meanwhile, documentation was used to complement the data through archives, activity records, and relevant institutional documents. The use of these multiple techniques aims to obtain comprehensive data and enhance the depth of analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2023).

To ensure the validity of the data, this study employed triangulation techniques, including both source triangulation and method triangulation. Source triangulation was conducted by comparing data obtained from various informants, such as caregivers and students, while method triangulation was carried out by comparing findings from interviews, observations, and documentation. In addition, member checking was applied by confirming interview results with participants to ensure the accuracy and appropriateness of the researcher's interpretations. The researcher also implemented an audit trail, which refers to systematic documentation of the entire research process to maintain data transparency and credibility (Nowell et al., 2021).

Data analysis in this study employed the interactive model developed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, which consists of three main stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. In the data reduction stage, the researcher selected, focused, and simplified the data obtained from the field. Subsequently, the data were presented in the form of descriptive narratives and thematic matrices to facilitate the understanding of patterns and relationships among categories. The final stage involved drawing conclusions, which were conducted iteratively and continuously verified throughout the research process. This approach allows data analysis to

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be carried out systematically and continuously (Miles et al., 2020).

Overall, this research methodology was designed to provide an in-depth understanding of the implementation of the hidden curriculum in shaping the character of students. By employing a case study approach, diverse data collection techniques, and systematic analysis procedures, this study is expected to produce findings that are valid, credible, and contextually grounded. Furthermore, this methodological design also allows for limited replication in similar contexts, thereby contributing to the development of qualitative research in education, particularly in the field of character education within Islamic boarding schools.

RESULT

The findings of this study indicate that the implementation of the hidden curriculum at Pondok Pesantren Darul Falah takes place systematically through daily life practices that are integrated into the pesantren's cultural system. Based on the analysis of interview data, observations, and documentation, three main themes were identified: (1) character formation through daily routines, (2) role modeling by caregivers as value exemplars, and (3) value internalization through the collective culture of the pesantren. These three themes are interrelated and form an implicit yet effective character education system in shaping students' behavior. The findings demonstrate that the hidden curriculum does not stand alone but is embedded in all aspects of pesantren life, which occur repeatedly and continuously.

This is consistent with the findings from documentation and interviews, which show that the *ustaz* and *ustazah*, as role models, act as facilitators who guide the students throughout the process.

Figure 1.1 Hidden Curriculum Practices





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E-ISSN : 2963 4954
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Figure 1.2 Hidden Curriculum Practices.



The first theme relates to character formation through daily routines. Activities such as waking up early, congregational prayers, scheduled learning sessions, and dormitory activities serve as the primary means of developing students' discipline and responsibility. One informant, Ustaz Hanifi, stated that "those values are already embedded in the students' daily life," indicating that character education is not always explicitly delivered but is formed through consistent habituation. Students also confirmed this, as expressed by Narmadani: "I have become more disciplined and used to waking up early." This indicates that routines play a crucial role in shaping habits that eventually become part of an individual's character.

The second theme is the role modeling of caregivers as behavioral exemplars. The findings show that students learn more through observing the behavior of ustaz and ustazah than through verbal instruction. Ustaz Hanifi emphasized that "students tend to imitate more than listen," indicating the importance of authority figures in the value internalization process. Ustazah Zayyina also stated that "Female students (santriwati) learn from the way we speak and behave, and they develop their mental strength and public speaking skills through a series of events organized in the boarding school," reinforcing the finding that interpersonal interaction serves as the primary medium of character learning. Thus, role modeling becomes a key factor in the successful implementation of the hidden curriculum in the pesantren.

The third theme concerns the pesantren culture as a collective value system. The pesantren environment, which emphasizes togetherness, independence, and mutual assistance, serves as a social space that supports the natural internalization of values. Ustaz Hamzan Wadi stated that "unwritten rules are actually stronger because they have become culture," indicating that socially constructed norms significantly influence students' behavior. Students such as Majma

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Al Badrain also expressed that What stands out the most is the sense of togetherness and mutual support, as well as how these activities help build our mental resilience and develop our public speaking skills, showing that social values are formed through shared life experiences. This culture is strengthened through intensive interactions in the dormitory, which serves as the center of students' daily life.

In addition, the study found that the adaptation process presents an initial challenge for new students entering the pesantren environment. Ustazah Kevin explained that female students initially experienced "culture shock" due to strict regulations, but over time they were able to adapt and understand the importance of these values. This indicates that value internalization is a gradual process influenced by experience and social interaction. An emotional approach used by caregivers also proved effective in accelerating students' adaptation and acceptance of values.

However, this study also found that there is no formal evaluation system to measure the effectiveness of the hidden curriculum. Ustaz Andre Joshua stated that assessment is mostly based on observational changes in students' behavior. Nevertheless, caregivers believe that the impact of the hidden curriculum can be clearly observed in students' attitudes and manners in daily life. This highlights the need to develop a more systematic evaluation instrument to measure the effectiveness of character education based on the hidden curriculum.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reinforce the concept of the hidden curriculum as an important mechanism in character formation through unspoken social and cultural experiences. From a theoretical perspective, these results are consistent with the view that the hidden curriculum functions as a means of value internalization through interaction and daily practices (Latif et al., 2024). Repeated routines have been shown to shape habits that eventually develop into character, in line with social learning theory, which emphasizes observation and imitation in the learning process. Thus, the findings strengthen the argument that character education does not only occur through formal instruction but also through contextual life experiences.

Furthermore, the role of caregivers as role models in this study aligns with the findings (Husna & Hamid, 2025), who stated that educators significantly influence the development of discipline and moral values among students. Role modeling serves as a concrete manifestation of taught values, making it easier for students to understand and imitate them in daily life. This indicates that the effectiveness of the hidden curriculum is highly dependent on the consistency of educators' behavior. In other words, effective character education requires alignment between

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the values being taught and the practices demonstrated by educators.

The pesantren culture as a collective value system is also an important finding that enriches previous studies. This result is consistent with (Fitria & Khalimah, 2024), who emphasized that a religious and collective social environment strengthens the internalization of character values. However, this study provides a novel contribution by showing that unwritten norms can be more powerful than formal rules in regulating students' behavior. This indicates that the strength of institutional culture lies not only in formal regulations but also in socially constructed consensus within the community.

On the other hand, the absence of a formal evaluation system reveals a gap between practice and measurement in the implementation of the hidden curriculum. This is consistent with (Umam et al., 2025), who stated that many educational institutions still lack adequate instruments to measure the success of character education based on the hidden curriculum. This condition represents both a challenge and an opportunity to develop a more comprehensive and contextual evaluation model. Without systematic evaluation, the effectiveness of character education programs cannot be objectively assessed.

The practical implication of this study is the importance of creating a conducive educational environment that supports value internalization through habituation, role modeling, and collective culture. Pesantren managers need to ensure consistency in value implementation and strengthen the role of caregivers as behavioral models. In addition, the development of a structured evaluation system is necessary to measure character development more systematically. Theoretically, this study contributes to enriching the hidden curriculum literature through an in-depth and contextual case study approach.

This study also opens opportunities for future research, particularly in developing instruments for evaluating the hidden curriculum and exploring variations in its implementation across different types of pesantren. Moreover, comparative studies between pesantren and formal schools may provide broader insights into the effectiveness of this approach in different educational contexts. Thus, the study of the hidden curriculum still offers wide opportunities for further development.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the implementation of the hidden curriculum at Pondok Pesantren Darul Falah plays a significant role in shaping students' character through mechanisms that are implicit, contextual, and continuous. The main findings indicate that the process of value

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internalization occurs through three key aspects: daily routines that build habits, role modeling by caregivers as behavioral exemplars, and pesantren culture as a collective value system. These three aspects are integrated within students' daily lives, thereby naturally forming character traits such as discipline, responsibility, independence, and manners (adab) without relying solely on formal instruction. Thus, the hidden curriculum is proven to be a key element in character education within the pesantren context.

From a theoretical perspective, this study reinforces the concept that character education is not only determined by the formal curriculum, but also by social interactions, institutional culture, and unstructured daily practices. The study also contributes by providing a more contextual understanding of how the hidden curriculum is implemented in pesantren settings through an in-depth case study approach. Practically, the findings emphasize the importance of consistency in caregivers' behavior, habituation of daily activities, and the creation of a conducive institutional culture as effective strategies in shaping students' character. In addition, the finding regarding the absence of a formal evaluation system highlights the need to develop more systematic instruments to assess the effectiveness of character education based on the hidden curriculum.

From a policy perspective, this study implies that educational institutions, particularly pesantren, need to integrate the hidden curriculum approach more consciously and systematically into their educational systems. This can be achieved through strengthening institutional culture, enhancing educators' capacity as role models, and developing contextual and sustainable evaluation mechanisms. For future research, it is recommended to develop evaluation models for the hidden curriculum and conduct comparative studies across different educational institutions to examine variations in implementation and effectiveness in different contexts. Therefore, this study not only provides empirical contributions but also opens opportunities for further development in the field of character education research.

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