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## Social Interaction and Character Education in Islamic Schools

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Abstract	Article Info
<p>This study aims to analyze how social interactions between students and non-students at Madrasah Tsanawiyah (MTs) Pondok Pesantren Mazro'atul Ulum Citiis contribute to the formation of moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral behavior based on the character education theory formulated by Thomas Lickona. This research uses a qualitative approach. The findings show that inclusive and diverse interactions create learning dynamics that support the development of these three dimensions of character education. The holistic curriculum that integrates religious values and general education plays a vital role in shaping students' morals and strengthening their behavior in daily life. The results of this study provide insights into traditional Islamic educational strategies for facing the challenges of modernization while maintaining religious values.</p>	<p><b>Article History</b></p> <p>Submitted / Received: 07-03-2025 First Revised: 01-04-2025 Accepted: 19-04-2025 First Available online: 24-06-2025 Publication Date: 25-06-2025</p> <hr/> <p><b>Keywords:</b> Social Interaction, Character Education, Curriculum</p>

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## Introduction

Islamic boarding schools, or pondok pesantren, are Indonesia's traditional Islamic educational institutions that significantly spread religious knowledge. Over time, pesantren has undergone various transformations, particularly in responding to societal demands for formal education with an integrated curriculum combining religious and general sciences (Mansyuri, Patricia, Karimah, & Sari, 2023). One example of this transformation is the establishment of *Madrasah Tsanawiyah* (MTs) within pesantren, which bridges religion-based education with the demands of modern formal education (Tantowi, 2022).

The changes occurring in pondok pesantren are driven by the internalization of religious values and the increasingly complex demands of society (Fajri & Ilmi, 2024). Parents, alumni, and the surrounding community significantly influence educational policies in pesantren, particularly in addressing the challenges of globalization and modernization (Hidayati & Humam, 2021). Today's society expects educational institutions to produce graduates who not only possess a deep understanding of religious knowledge but are also capable of competing in the modern world (Fardinal, Ali, & US, 2022).

Character education is a crucial element in shaping a young generation that excels not only intellectually but also embodies noble personality traits, high ethical values, and the ability to contribute positively to society. In this context, schools strategically play a platform for teaching moral, social, and religious values. *Madrasah Tsanawiyah* (MTs), a junior secondary educational institution under the Ministry of Religious Affairs, integrates general education with religious education (Yuniarti, Khodijah, & Suryana, 2022). At *Pondok Pesantren Mazro'atul Ulum Citiis*, the presence of MTs holds great significance as it bridges the religion-based educational traditions of *pesantren* and the demands of the modern era that require formal education.

The *Madrasah Tsanawiyah* at *Pondok Pesantren Mazro'atul Ulum Citiis* is one of the institutions adapting to social changes and modernization by implementing a curriculum that integrates religious and general education. In this context, the theory of social constructivism is relevant as a foundation for understanding the existence of Islamic educational institutions (Minarti, 2013). This theory emphasizes that knowledge is acquired through individual experiences and shaped through community social interactions.

Furthermore, implementing character education in Madrasah Tsanawiyah strengthens its role in shaping a young generation with excellent character. According to Lickona (1992), character education encompasses three main dimensions: moral knowing, feeling, and behavior. These three dimensions can be integrated through a curriculum that harmonizes religious values and general education. Thus, the MTs at *Pondok Pesantren Mazro'atul Ulum Citiis* become a learning space that not only imparts knowledge but also shapes students' character through social interactions that support the internalization of noble values.

Nevertheless, adaptation to modernization poses challenges for pesantren to maintain their traditional identity. *Pesantren* must integrate Islamic values into modern education without compromising the essence of religious education itself (Muid, Arifin, & Karim, 2024). *Pesantren* also plays a critical role in strengthening character education. With an approach rooted in Islamic values, pesantren can shape students' character to be honest, disciplined, responsible, and morally upright. This character education serves as an essential foundation for producing a generation that is not only intellectually intelligent but also possesses high moral integrity in facing the challenges of modernization.

This study is significant as it provides insights into how traditional Islamic educational institutions can endure and remain relevant amid rapid social changes. *Pondok Pesantren Mazro'atul Ulum Citiis* is an example of an institution that accommodates resident Santri and accepts students from non-Santri communities. This creates a unique social dynamic in the teaching and learning processes at *Madrasah Tsanawiyah* (MTs).

The coexistence of these two groups, *santri* and non-*santri*, presents intriguing challenges and opportunities to explore. The interaction between *Santri* and non-Santri can enrich the construction of religious and social knowledge among students. Furthermore, the diverse social backgrounds of students open opportunities for inclusive learning and diverse perspectives. This study focuses on how *Pondok Pesantren Mazro'atul Ulum Citiis* integrates the educational needs of both groups while strengthening social relationships between the *pesantren* and the local community.

In the context of modernization, this research is crucial to understanding how *Pesantren* addresses the challenges of harmonizing traditional religion-based teaching methods with the needs of non-*santri* students, who are more accustomed to general educational approaches. This study is also relevant for exploring

*pesantren* strategies in maintaining Islamic values while staying relevant to modern educational demands.

Character education is another essential element of this research, given the significant role *pesantren* play in shaping generations with noble character. Referring to the concepts of moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral behavior, this study aims to understand how social interactions in the MTs internalize these character values.

By employing the theory of social constructivism, this study will explore how interactions among *santri*, non-*santri*, teachers, and the *pesantren* community shape teaching and learning patterns that provide knowledge and strengthen students' character. The findings of this study are expected to offer practical recommendations for developing traditional Islamic education, particularly in designing educational programs that are inclusive, adaptive, and rooted in religious values.

The objectives of this study are as follows: 1) To analyze how social interactions between *santri* and non-*santri* during the teaching and learning process at MTs *Pondok Pesantren Mazro'atul Ulum Citiis* contribute to the formation of moral knowing (moral knowledge) among students, particularly regarding religious and social values; 2) To examine the extent to which the diverse social backgrounds of *santri* and non-*santri* create learning dynamics that support the development of moral feeling (moral sensitivity) through inclusive and empathetic student interactions; 3) To analyze how *Pondok Pesantren Mazro'atul Ulum Citiis* integrates the educational needs of *santri* and non-*santri* to create a harmonious learning environment while strengthening students' moral behavior in daily life, both within the *pesantren* and in the local community.

## Literature Review

Character education is one of the essential aspects of shaping a generation that is not only intellectually intelligent but also possesses good morals and ethics. In this context, Thomas Lickona offers a comprehensive concept of character education, encompassing three main dimensions: moral knowing, feeling, and behavior. These three dimensions are interconnected and essential for creating individuals who can understand, internalize, and implement moral values in their daily lives. According to Lickona (1992), character education includes three mutually supportive dimensions: moral knowing, feeling, and behavior.

### *Moral Knowing*

This dimension refers to an individual's ability to understand moral values. Moral knowing encompasses various aspects, such as awareness of ethical principles, critical thinking about values, perspective-taking, and morally based decision-making.

### *Moral Feeling*

Moral feeling involves the emotional aspect that drives someone to appreciate moral values. This includes empathy, conscience, moral confidence, a love for goodness, and intrinsic motivations to act ethically.

### *Moral Behavior*

This dimension involves concrete actions that reflect moral values. Moral behavior includes the competence to act ethically, the habit of acting according to ethical principles, and the commitment to embody these values daily.

Lickona emphasizes that these three dimensions must be integrated into character education. An individual with good character understands and appreciates moral values and consistently demonstrates them in actions.

Character education and social constructivism play complementary roles in shaping individuals who are moral, ethical, and capable of adapting to their social environment. These two theories can be used holistically to understand and develop Islamic education, focusing on transferring knowledge and forming identity and moral behavior through social interaction.

Character education involves three main dimensions: moral knowledge, feeling, and behavior. The integration of these dimensions is crucial for forming well-rounded individuals. In Islamic teaching, these dimensions can be connected to social constructivism, which emphasizes that knowledge and meaning are socially constructed through individual interactions and societal experiences.

Social constructivism is a theory that stresses that knowledge and meaning are socially constructed through interaction and individual experiences in society. Knowledge is not merely the result of independent individual experiences but is also shaped by the culture, values, and norms prevailing in the social environment. This theory is influenced by philosophers such as Vygotsky (2003), who argued that social reality is a construct formed through dialogue, communication, and collective actions.

Social constructivism offers the perspective that Islamic education not only functions as a means of transferring knowledge (the transfer of religious sciences) but also serves as a tool for shaping social and cultural identities influenced by the social environment in which the institution operates (Afifuddin & Ishak, 2022). Several key points need to be emphasized when discussing the existence of Islamic educational institutions in the context of social constructivism:

### *Formation of Social Identity*

Social identity formation in Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) involves the interaction between religious values, social context, and the aspirations of the Muslim middle class. The *pesantren* environment serves as a platform where social, political, and spiritual values are produced and reproduced, creating a community that facilitates the formation of students' identities (Sakir & Syam, 2024).

The moral dimension of character education aligns with the social constructivist view of identity formation through interaction. In Islamic educational institutions like *Pesantren*, religious values are integrated with social contexts to shape students into religious and globally aware individuals. This process creates a community that supports learning social, political, and spiritual values while strengthening social networks (Rahman, 2023).

Islamic educational institutions play a pivotal role in shaping individuals' social identity through religious and cultural education. In social constructivism, identity is not static but is formed through social interaction. Institutions such as *pesantren*, *madrasahs*, or Islamic-based schools serve as arenas where students develop their religious identity through interactions with teachers, peers, and the broader community. In this context, Islamic educational institutions act as social agents that instill Islamic values relevant to society.

### *The Influence of Social Environment on Curriculum and Educational Methods*

The social environment significantly influences education, encompassing three main components: family, school, and community. The family serves as a primary factor in shaping children's attitudes and behaviors, where parental support and upbringing methods significantly affect the development of their personality and learning motivation. The school environment also plays a vital role through interactions with teachers and peers, which can enhance the quality of education. Furthermore, active community participation in supporting education creates conducive learning conditions (Pakaya, Posumah, & Dengo, 2021).

The influence of the social environment on curriculum and educational methods is substantial, encompassing factors such as culture, economy, politics, and social interaction (Wahyuni et al., 2024). Curricula are often tailored to align with society's values and cultural norms, as seen in Islamic education at *pesantren*, which emphasizes religious teachings and morality. Favorable economic conditions provide greater access to educational resources, affecting the use of technology in learning. Additionally, government policies and political circumstances play a role in determining curricula, such as emphasizing character education and patriotism. Social interactions among teachers, students, and parents encourage more interactive and participatory teaching methods, enabling the social environment to shape an education that is relevant and aligned with societal needs (Sabil & Diantoro, 2021).

Cultural values and societal norms influence the curriculum in Islamic educational institutions. Social constructivist theory views the curriculum as a dynamic entity that evolves alongside social changes. In character education, a relevant curriculum can integrate aspects of moral knowledge to impart values aligned with societal needs (Makalao, Asy'ari, Supardi, & Badrudin, 2024).

### *Interaction and Internalization of Knowledge*

The interaction process at Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) involves close relationships between students (*santri*) and teachers (*ustadz*), established through intensive communication both in the classroom and during daily activities. The *ustadz* acts as an instructor, mentor, and role model for the students, providing guidance and motivation in learning religion. This interaction adheres to established norms and ethics, such as mutual respect and polite communication. Additionally, students participate in social activities within the community, which helps shape their character and personality according to Islamic values (Fauziyah, Susanto, Rochgiyanti, & Syaharuddin, 2022).

Interaction and knowledge internalization in *pesantren* involves transforming knowledge from explicit to tacit through direct experience and collaborative learning. In character education, moral behavior emphasizes applying moral values in daily life. This aligns with social constructivism, where learning occurs through interaction between teachers, students, and the broader community. The internalization of religious values in Islamic educational institutions through discussions, practice, and immersive daily activities (Gunawan & Kurniawan, 2020).

In social constructivism, knowledge is not passively received but is constructed through social interaction. In Islamic educational institutions, religious learning occurs through interactions among students, teachers, sacred texts, and social practices. Teachers or *ulama* act as facilitators who teach religious knowledge and help students understand how this knowledge relates to their daily lives and social realities.

### *Contribution to Socio-Cultural Construction*

Islamic educational institutions significantly contribute to socio-cultural construction by integrating religious values into the educational process (Alhamuddin & Nugraha, 2024). Their goal is not only to develop academic knowledge but also to shape the character and morality of students. Through curricula that include religious teachings, these institutions play a role in cultural transmission, building social identity, and promoting tolerance and cooperation. This approach fosters individuals who are not only intellectually capable but also socially conscious (Jurumiah & Saruji, 2020).

Islamic educational institutions also act as active agents in shaping and preserving Islamic culture within a community. Education is about transmitting religious knowledge and safeguarding Islam's cultural, linguistic, and traditional heritage. In this context, Islamic education becomes essential in balancing social change and preserving Islamic identity.

Character education through moral feelings and behavior contributes to creating a culture supporting moral values (Widayati, 2023). Islamic educational institutions play a vital role in balancing and preserving Islamic culture with adaptation to social changes, making them active agents in socio-cultural construction.

### *The Influence of Globalization and Modernization*

The influence of globalization and modernization on Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) is evident in their efforts to adapt to contemporary developments (Rosyad & Syafee'I, 2023). *Pesantren* is expected to produce human resources who excel in religious aspects, skills, and knowledge relevant to modern needs. This adaptation includes changes in teaching methodologies, scheduling, and more collective management systems, enabling *pesantren* to play a proactive and dynamic role in addressing the challenges of globalization while avoiding the perception of being second-class educational institutions (Santoso, Sabri & Rahmat, 2024).



Globalization poses new challenges for Islamic educational institutions to remain relevant while upholding Islamic values (Makalao, Kepemimpinan Responsif Gender, 2024). From the perspective of social constructivism, these institutions can adapt through innovative approaches, such as integrating technology into teaching, without neglecting the core emphasis on moral knowledge, moral feelings, and moral behavior in education.

Islamic educational institutions shape students' social, cultural, and spiritual identities. Students are viewed as individuals achieving *al-insan al-Kamil*—the ideal physically, mentally, and spiritually harmonious human. This process involves social interactions within the institution, where students learn from teachers, peers, and their environment. Islamic knowledge is constructed through discussion, collaboration, and shared experiences, ensuring students acquire and practice knowledge in daily life in alignment with Islamic values. Muslim educational institutions must also adapt to social changes to ensure their education remains relevant while adhering to fundamental religious principles. These principles emphasize character and morality, teaching students to maintain integrity and apply Islamic values (Adliyah, Jaelani, & Subhan, 2024).

Character education and social constructivism provide a robust framework for understanding the role of Islamic education in shaping individuals who are not only intellectually capable but also moral and full of integrity. By integrating these two approaches, Islamic educational institutions can serve as effective learning spaces for shaping students' social, cultural, and spiritual identities while addressing modern challenges with steadfast adherence to Islamic principles.

## Method

This research employs a qualitative method with a case study approach at MTs Mazro'atul Ulum to explore specific phenomena within the context of the existence of MTs at *Pondok Pesantren Mazro'atul Ulum Citiis*.

Qualitative research focuses on exploring phenomena in a natural context, where the researcher is the primary data collection and analysis instrument. According to (Creswell & Creswell, 2018), qualitative research aims to understand the meanings individuals or groups assign to specific social problems or phenomena. This study uses the qualitative method to delve deeply into character education at MTs *Pondok Pesantren Mazro'atul Ulum Citiis* through direct interactions with students, teachers, and other related parties.

## Results

### *Social Interaction and the Formation of Moral Knowing*

The social interaction between students (*santri*) and non-students at MTs Pondok Pesantren Mazro'atul Ulum Citiis significantly contributes to forming moral knowing among the students. Students can understand and internalize religious teachings and prevailing social norms through discussions and collaborations in learning activities. This interaction allows students to learn from one another, fostering a more comprehensive understanding of moral knowledge.

### *Diversity of Social Backgrounds and Moral Feelings*

The diversity of social backgrounds among *Santri* and non-*Santri* creates a dynamic learning environment that supports the development of moral feeling through inclusive and empathetic interactions. When students from various backgrounds engage with one another, they learn to appreciate differences and develop empathy. This enhances tolerance and cooperation among students, which is essential to cultivating moral feelings.

### *Integration of Educational Needs and Moral Behavior*

Pondok Pesantren Mazro'atul Ulum Citiis integrates the educational needs of *Santri* and non-*Santri* by adapting the curriculum and teaching methods to suit the characteristics of each group. The institution creates a harmonious learning environment by providing a holistic education that includes religious and general subjects. The involvement of non-*santri* students in social and spiritual activities organized by the *pesantren* strengthens their ties with the local community. It supports the development of moral behavior by applying moral values in daily life.

## Discussion

### *Social Interaction and the Formation of Moral Knowing*

The social interaction between students (*santri*) and non-*santri* at MTs Pondok Pesantren Mazro'atul Ulum Citiis significantly contributes to forming moral knowing among students. *Santri* and non-*santri* share different experiences and perspectives in teaching and learning, enriching their understanding of religious and social values. Students can comprehend and internalize religious teachings and prevailing social norms through discussions and collaboration in learning activities. This is evident in observations that *santri* and non-*santri* interact well, despite some differences potentially arising from their differing environmental backgrounds. This

interaction creates opportunities for students to learn from one another, fostering a more comprehensive understanding of moral knowledge.

This aligns with the interaction between Santri and non-Santri at *Madrasah Aliyah Al Asror*, where collaboration occurs effectively, particularly in the classroom context. Both groups can communicate and work together; however, some santri and non-santri tend to maintain distance and exhibit individualistic behavior, likely influenced by differences in their social and cultural environments. Santri, accustomed to the structured life in pesantren, tend to show more formal interactions, while non-santri, coming from more open and less regimented environments, display greater openness and boldness. Despite these differences, good interaction is still established in the classroom, demonstrating that collaboration and mutual understanding can be achieved even amidst varying habits and learning cultures (Amalia & Prasetyo, 2021).

### *Diversity of Social Backgrounds and Moral Feelings*

The diversity of social backgrounds among Santri and non-Santri creates a dynamic learning environment that supports the development of moral feeling through inclusive and empathetic interactions. When students from various backgrounds engage with one another, they learn to appreciate differences and develop empathy. This fosters tolerance and cooperation among students, essential to cultivating moral feelings. Additionally, this diversity enriches classroom discussions and sparks new ideas, ultimately enhancing students' ethical awareness of broader social and religious issues.

The diversity of social backgrounds among santri and non-santri at MTs enriches the learning environment. It makes students more tolerant, open-minded, and prepared to face future challenges. This inclusive and interactive learning process is a critical foundation for creating a generation capable of contributing positively to a diverse society (Fiqih, 2022).

Overall, the social diversity among students creates opportunities for deeper and more meaningful learning. By valuing differences and fostering an inclusive environment, education becomes a powerful tool for building a more tolerant and respectful society. This diversity is a challenge and a strength that enriches the learning experience and prepares students to navigate a complex and diverse world (Zulmuqim, Samad, & Tabrani, 2023).

## *Integration of Educational Needs and Moral Behavior*

*Pondok Pesantren Mazro'atul Ulum Citiis* integrates the educational needs of both Santri and non-Santri by tailoring its curriculum and teaching methods to suit the characteristics of each group. By providing a holistic education that encompasses both religious and general subjects, the institution strives to create a harmonious learning environment. Furthermore, the participation of non-santri in social and spiritual activities organized by the *pesantren* helps strengthen the relationship between the *pesantren* and the local community while supporting the development of students' moral behavior. These activities provide opportunities for students to apply ethical values in their daily lives, both within the *pesantren* and the wider community.

*Pesantren* has a long history as a center for Islamic education in Indonesia, where flexibility in teaching methods has been key to addressing students' needs. *Pesantren* have evolved from traditional religious education institutions into ones that also teach life skills and general knowledge. Azra notes that modern *pesantren* adopt more inclusive educational approaches to address the challenges of globalization, such as interactive discussions and the use of technology (Azra, 2019).

Overall, the inclusive social interaction, diverse backgrounds, and integrated education at MTs *Pondok Pesantren Mazro'atul Ulum Citiis* contribute to developing students' moral knowledge, feelings, and behavior, which are essential in shaping their character.

## **Conclusion**

This study shows that social interaction between students and non-students at MTs *Pondok Pesantren Mazro'atul Ulum Citiis* significantly contributes to forming moral knowledge (moral knowledge) among students. Through collaboration and discussion involving both groups, students can share different experiences and perspectives, enriching their understanding of religious and social values. This process enhances their knowledge and helps them internalize the applicable religious teachings and social norms.

The diversity of social backgrounds of students and non-students creates a learning dynamic that supports the development of moral feelings (moral emotions) through inclusive and empathetic interactions among students. This learning environment that values differences allows students to learn from each other, build tolerance, and develop an open attitude toward disagreements. This

forms an essential foundation for creating a generation capable of positively contributing to a diverse society.

Pondok Pesantren Mazro'atul Ulum Citiis successfully integrates the educational needs of students and non-students by tailoring the curriculum and teaching methods according to the characteristics of each student. With a holistic educational approach, this institution creates a harmonious learning environment that focuses on knowledge development and strengthens students' moral behavior in daily life. The involvement of students in social and religious activities also plays an essential role in applying the ethical values they have learned, both within the pesantren and in the local community.

Overall, inclusive social interactions, diverse backgrounds, and integrated education at MTs Pondok Pesantren Mazro'atul Ulum Citiis contribute to the development of students' moral knowledge, moral feelings, and moral behavior, which are crucial in shaping their character in this modern era.

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