

A Cultural-Spiritual Muadalah Curriculum Model Based on Local Wisdom for Strengthening Students' Character in Islamic Boarding Schools

Yayan Herdiana ¹, Tedi Priatna ¹, Qiqi Yuliati Zaqiah ¹, Bambang Syamsul Arifin ¹

¹ Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung, Indonesia



Herdianayayan70@gmail.com*

ABSTRACT

The implementation of the muadalah curriculum in Islamic boarding schools faces the challenge of preserving the traditions of Islamic scholarship while responding to the demands of contemporary education and the integration of local wisdom. Although numerous studies have examined pesantren curricula, research that integrates curriculum implementation, local wisdom, and students' character development within the muadalah education system remains limited. This study aims to analyze the implementation of a local wisdom-based muadalah curriculum in strengthening students' religious character and discipline and to formulate a conceptual synthesis of its implementation. This study employed a qualitative multi-site research design at Miftahul Huda Islamic Boarding School in Manonjaya, Tasikmalaya, and Al-Ikhlash Islamic Boarding School in Kuningan. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis, and were analyzed using within-site and cross-site analysis. The findings indicate that curriculum implementation is realized through the integration of Islamic spirituality, pesantren traditions, local wisdom values, and a living curriculum approach, which is manifested in intracurricular, cocurricular, extracurricular, habituation, and role-modeling activities within a twenty-four-hour educational ecosystem. This integrated implementation effectively strengthens students' religious character and discipline through a continuous process of value internalization. Based on the cross-site synthesis, this study formulates the Cultural-Spiritual Muadalah Curriculum Model Based on Local Wisdom, which explains the systematic relationship among Islamic spirituality, local wisdom, curriculum implementation, the living curriculum, and students' character development. This conceptual model contributes to the advancement of curriculum implementation studies in Islamic boarding school education by positioning pesantren culture as the primary mechanism for value internalization and character formation.

Keywords: Muadalah Curriculum; Local Wisdom; Islamic Boarding School; Living Curriculum; Character Education.

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INTRODUCTION

. Social change driven by globalization, digital transformation, artificial intelligence (AI), and technological disruption has significantly reshaped contemporary education. Educational institutions are no longer expected merely to produce graduates with strong academic competencies but also individuals who demonstrate integrity, responsibility, adaptability, and strong moral character in responding to increasingly complex global challenges. UNESCO (2021) and the OECD (2023) emphasize that twenty-first-century education should integrate character development as a fundamental component of learners' competencies. Research on school-based social and emotional learning (SEL) also demonstrates the importance of

integrating students' social-emotional competencies with broader educational outcomes (Ağırkan & Ergene, 2022; Cipriano et al., 2023). Accordingly, the curriculum should be understood not only as a formal academic document but also as a vehicle for value transformation that connects knowledge, skills, culture, and identity in fostering holistic human development (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020; Priestley et al., 2021).

From the perspective of Islamic education, character formation (*tarbiyah al-akhlāq*) constitutes the primary objective of educational practice. Character is not regarded as a by-product of learning but rather as the central orientation that underpins all educational activities. Within the Indonesian context, Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) have long been recognized for their ability to cultivate students' character through the integration of religious learning, daily habituation, the exemplary leadership of *kyai*, institutional culture, and a twenty-four-hour residential educational environment. Recent studies indicate that successful character education in *pesantren* is shaped not only by the formal curriculum but also by the hidden curriculum, organizational culture, social interaction, and the leadership of *kyai*, all of which facilitate the continuous internalization of Islamic values (Fawaid, 2022; Rahman et al., 2023). This understanding is consistent with broader research showing that school culture, adult-student relationships, and systematic social-emotional learning contribute to students' behavioral and socio-emotional development (Cipriano et al., 2023; Iachini et al., 2023).

The enactment of Law No. 18 of 2019 on *Pesantren* has further strengthened the position of *pesantren* within Indonesia's national education system. The regulation formally recognizes the distinctive characteristics of *pesantren* education, including the implementation of the *muadalah* curriculum as an equivalent educational pathway while preserving the intellectual traditions of Islamic boarding schools. This policy represents a paradigm shift from a standardized national curriculum toward greater recognition of educational diversity. Consequently, *pesantren* are provided with greater autonomy to maintain their academic identity, religious traditions, and cultural values while remaining an integral part of the national education system (Republik Indonesia, 2019; UNESCO, 2021). Research on curriculum implementation further indicates that educational policies are enacted through institutional and professional contexts rather than transferred directly from policy documents into educational practice (Priestley et al., 2021; Rich, 2021).

Despite this recognition, the implementation of the *muadalah* curriculum continues to face considerable challenges. On the one hand, the national education system requires measurable learning outcomes, quality assurance, and institutional accountability. On the other hand, *pesantren* curricula are historically developed based on the scholarly authority of *kyai*, institutional traditions, community expectations, and locally inherited cultural values. These differing paradigms frequently create tensions between formal administrative requirements and the cultural foundations that characterize *pesantren* education. Research on curriculum enactment highlights how institutional conditions, educators' professional agency, and local contexts shape the interpretation and implementation of curricular expectations (Chaaban et al., 2021; Priestley et al., 2021; Rich, 2021). Research on educational policy implementation also emphasizes the importance of stakeholder engagement and locally responsive strategies in translating policy objectives into institutional practices (Iachini et al., 2023). Consequently, a more comprehensive understanding is required of how Islamic spiritual values and local wisdom are integrated throughout curriculum implementation without compromising either educational quality or the distinctive identity of *pesantren*.

One of the distinctive strengths of *pesantren* education lies in its ability to integrate local wisdom into educational practices. Local wisdom is understood not merely as cultural heritage but as a system of values derived from the historical experiences of local communities that guides harmonious social life. The incorporation of local values into the curriculum enhances contextual learning because students acquire knowledge through cultural experiences closely connected to their everyday lives. Within *pesantren*, values such as *silih asih* (mutual compassion), *silih asah* (mutual learning), *silih asuh* (mutual care), mutual cooperation (*gotong royong*), respect for teachers, sincerity, responsibility, and discipline are continuously transmitted through institutional culture. Previous studies have demonstrated that culturally

responsive education requires educators to connect teaching practices with learners' cultural identities, social experiences, and local contexts (Denston et al., 2022; de Groot et al., 2023; Lavigne et al., 2022). Research on local wisdom-based education in Indonesia also emphasizes the contribution of culturally grounded learning to character formation and the preservation of cultural identity (Hidayat & Syafe'i, 2022; Suyitno et al., 2023). These perspectives support the importance of examining how local cultural values operate within the broader educational environment of Islamic institutions.

In recent years, research on character education in pesantren has expanded considerably. Existing studies consistently demonstrate that successful character formation is influenced not only by the formal curriculum but also by the broader learning ecosystem, which integrates exemplary leadership (*uswah hasanah*), habituation, *kyai* leadership, and the hidden curriculum (Fawaid, 2022; Rahman et al., 2023). A systematic literature review by Ma'arif and Arif (2026) identified pesantren culture as the primary mechanism for fostering students' holistic character development. Other studies further reveal that institutional norms, residential life, and continuous social interaction contribute significantly to the development of religious character, discipline, responsibility, and leadership among students. These findings are consistent with international evidence that school-based social and emotional learning can improve students' social-emotional skills and behavioral outcomes (Ağırkan & Ergene, 2022; Cipriano et al., 2023). Likewise, research on culturally responsive education indicates that educational practices are more contextually meaningful when they recognize learners' identities, community experiences, and cultural resources (Denston et al., 2022; Lavigne et al., 2022).

A review of previous studies reveals three major research gaps that underpin this study. First, although previous research has documented the success of character education in pesantren, few studies have proposed a conceptual framework explaining the relationship between local wisdom-based *muadalah* curriculum implementation and students' character development. Second, studies integrating Islamic spirituality and local wisdom as interconnected dimensions of curriculum implementation remain limited. Research on culturally responsive education has examined how culture informs pedagogical practices and teacher-student relationships, while studies of curriculum enactment have focused on educators' agency and institutional contexts (Chaaban et al., 2021; de Groot et al., 2023; Lavigne et al., 2022; Priestley et al., 2021). However, these strands of research do not by themselves explain how Islamic spirituality and local wisdom interact within the distinctive residential and religious environment of *muadalah* pesantren. Third, most previous studies have employed single-case designs, limiting the development of broader conceptual insights derived from cross-site analysis across different types of pesantren. These gaps indicate the need for a more comprehensive investigation into how *muadalah* curriculum implementation contributes to character education within Islamic boarding schools.

This study was conducted at Miftahul Huda Muadalah Islamic Boarding School in Manonjaya, Tasikmalaya, and Al-Ikhlash Muadalah Islamic Boarding School in Kuningan, representing two distinctive typologies of *muadalah* pesantren: *salafiyah* (traditional) and *'ashriyah* (modern). These institutions were selected because they have successfully preserved the traditions of Islamic boarding school education while implementing the *muadalah* curriculum in accordance with national educational policies. The findings demonstrate that curriculum implementation extends beyond classroom instruction by integrating Islamic spirituality, local wisdom, the exemplary roles of *kyai* and teachers (*asatidz*), daily habituation, institutional culture, and students' participation in social and community activities. This focus on curriculum as a context-dependent social practice is consistent with research emphasizing that curriculum enactment is shaped by institutional culture, educator agency, and the interaction between educational intentions and everyday practices (Priestley et al., 2021; Rich, 2021; Wang et al., 2021).

Based on the cross-site analysis, this study formulates a conceptual synthesis referred to as the Cultural-Spiritual Muadalah Curriculum Model Based on Local Wisdom. Rather than representing a curriculum development model, this conceptual model constitutes a theoretical

abstraction derived from empirical findings across the two research sites. The synthesis demonstrates that students' character development emerges through the integration of Islamic spirituality (*tafaqquh fi al-din*), local wisdom, formal learning, the hidden curriculum, exemplary leadership, habituation, institutional culture, and social participation within the pesantren environment. This integrative perspective resonates with research emphasizing the importance of culturally responsive educational practices and the alignment of institutional conditions with students' social-emotional development (Cipriano et al., 2023; Denston et al., 2022; de Groot et al., 2023). Accordingly, students' character is understood as the outcome of a continuous process of value internalization embedded throughout the educational ecosystem rather than solely through classroom instruction.

Based on these considerations, this study aims to analyze the implementation of a local wisdom-based muadalah curriculum in strengthening students' religious character and discipline and to formulate a conceptual synthesis of the Cultural-Spiritual Muadalah Curriculum Model Based on Local Wisdom. Theoretically, this study contributes to curriculum implementation scholarship in Islamic education by proposing a conceptual framework that explains the interrelationship among Islamic spirituality, local wisdom, and character formation within the pesantren educational ecosystem. This contribution extends discussions of curriculum enactment and culturally responsive education by bringing them into dialogue with the distinctive spiritual, cultural, and institutional dimensions of muadalah pesantren (Lavigne et al., 2022; Priestley et al., 2021; Rich, 2021). Practically, the proposed conceptual synthesis is expected to provide a valuable reference for pesantren leaders, curriculum developers, and educational policymakers seeking to optimize muadalah curriculum implementation while preserving Islamic scholarly traditions, local cultural values, and the contemporary needs of Islamic education.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach using a multi-site research design to gain an in-depth understanding of the implementation of a local wisdom-based muadalah curriculum in strengthening students' character (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 2018). The research was conducted at Miftahul Huda Muadalah Islamic Boarding School in Manonjaya, Tasikmalaya, and Al-Ikhlash Muadalah Islamic Boarding School in Kuningan, West Java, Indonesia. These sites were purposively selected because they represent two distinctive typologies of muadalah pesantren, namely *salafiyah* (traditional) and *'ashriyah* (modern), with different characteristics in implementing the muadalah curriculum. A multi-site design was adopted to facilitate a comprehensive understanding through identifying similarities, differences, and recurring patterns of curriculum implementation across the two institutions. Comparative analysis across cases enables researchers to examine how contextual conditions shape the practices and meanings observed at each site (Yin, 2018).

The participants consisted of *kyai* (Islamic boarding school leaders), principals, vice principals for curriculum affairs, *asatidz* (teachers), and students who were selected through purposive sampling based on their knowledge, experience, and direct involvement in the implementation of the muadalah curriculum. Additional participants were identified through snowball sampling until data saturation was achieved. The adequacy of qualitative samples is appropriately assessed in relation to the study's objectives, participant characteristics, and the depth and diversity of information obtained rather than by sample size alone (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022). Data were collected through participant observation, in-depth interviews, and document analysis of curriculum documents, instructional plans, institutional regulations, and various educational activities within the pesantren. Combining different data sources and collection methods supports a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under investigation (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 2018). In qualitative inquiry, the researcher served as the primary research instrument (human instrument) responsible for collecting, analyzing, and interpreting the data (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Data analysis followed the interactive model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), consisting of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification.

The analysis began with within-site analysis to explore the characteristics of curriculum implementation at each *pesantren*, followed by cross-site analysis through systematic comparison of categories, themes, and patterns across the two sites (Yin, 2018). The trustworthiness of the findings was ensured through source, method, and time triangulation, member checking, and peer debriefing. These strategies are consistent with established approaches to strengthening credibility, dependability, and transparency in qualitative research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Nowell et al., 2017). The cross-site analysis ultimately led to the formulation of a conceptual synthesis of the Cultural-Spiritual Muadalah Curriculum Model Based on Local Wisdom. In this study, the proposed model is understood as a theoretical abstraction derived from empirical findings across multiple sites rather than as a curriculum development model or the product of Research and Development (R&D).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. Implementation of the Local Wisdom-Based Muadalah Curriculum in Islamic Boarding Schools

The implementation of the *muadalah* curriculum at Miftahul Huda Muadalah Islamic Boarding School in Manonjaya, Tasikmalaya, and Al-Ikhlash Muadalah Islamic Boarding School in Kuningan begins with an integrative curriculum planning process. In both institutions, the curriculum is regarded not merely as an academic document but as a value system that guides educational activities. Curriculum planning integrates the traditions of Islamic scholarship (*tafaqquh fi al-dīn*), community needs, government policies concerning the *muadalah* education system, and the socio-cultural characteristics of the local community. Miftahul Huda preserves the tradition of studying *kitab kuning* (classical Islamic texts), while Al-Ikhlash integrates the *dirāsah Islāmiyyah* system with the *mu'allimīn* educational approach. Despite these institutional differences, both *pesantren* position the curriculum as an instrument for strengthening students' religious character and discipline through the integration of Islamic values and local cultural traditions.

A fundamental characteristic of curriculum planning in both *pesantren* is the integration of local wisdom into educational activities. At Miftahul Huda, Sundanese cultural values such as *silih asah* (mutual learning), *silih asih* (mutual compassion), *silih asuh* (mutual care), *gotong royong* (mutual cooperation), the use of the Sundanese language, and respect for teachers are embedded throughout educational activities. In contrast, Al-Ikhlash emphasizes sincerity (*ikhlas*), simplicity, independence, responsibility, and *ukhuwah* (Islamic brotherhood) as institutional values that shape students' daily lives. These values are not taught solely as separate curricular subjects but are practiced through the culture and daily activities of the *pesantren*.

Curriculum implementation in both *pesantren* extends beyond the preparation of curriculum documents and is realized through students' everyday educational experiences. The twenty-four-hour residential environment forms an integral part of the educational process. Intracurricular learning is complemented by cocurricular and extracurricular activities, including classical Islamic text studies, deliberative discussions (*musyawarah*), community service, Islamic arts, student organizations, and various social engagement programs. Learning therefore takes place continuously through activities that connect formal instruction with students' daily lives. The institutional culture of the *pesantren* is also embedded in these learning experiences and becomes part of the students' educational environment.

The development of students' religious character and discipline is realized through habituation and exemplary leadership (*uswah hasanah*). At Miftahul Huda, value internalization occurs through congregational prayers, the study of classical Islamic texts, mutual cooperation, the contextual use of the Sundanese language, and social interactions emphasizing respect for the *kyai*, teachers, and fellow students. Meanwhile, Al-Ikhlash cultivates character through structured daily discipline, the use of Arabic and English in designated settings, adherence to institutional regulations, and role modeling provided by teachers and dormitory supervisors (*musyirif*).

The two *pesantren* demonstrate distinctive approaches to *muadalah* curriculum implementation. Miftahul Huda places greater emphasis on a spirituality-centered educational approach rooted in the tradition of *tafaqquh fī al-dīn* and integrated with Sundanese cultural values. Al-Ikhlash emphasizes a culture-based educational approach through the integration of Islamic sciences, general education, and institutional culture. Although their approaches differ, both institutions implement religious values and discipline through the broader educational culture of the *pesantren*.

The cross-site findings indicate that the local wisdom-based *muadalah* curriculum is implemented through the integration of spiritual, cultural, and pedagogical dimensions. The implementation connects formal curriculum, institutional culture, Islamic scholarly traditions, local wisdom, and students' everyday educational experiences. These components operate within the residential *pesantren* environment through formal learning, habituation, exemplary leadership, social interaction, and community activities.

2. Strengthening Students' Character through the Implementation of the Muadalah Curriculum

The implementation of the local wisdom-based *muadalah* curriculum at Miftahul Huda and Al-Ikhlash demonstrates that students' character development is integrated into the overall educational process. Character formation occurs through the interaction of the formal curriculum, *pesantren* culture, educators' exemplary conduct, habituation, and students' lived experiences within the boarding school environment. Both *pesantren* integrate spiritual, social, and cultural dimensions into educational activities to strengthen students' religious character and discipline.

The strengthening of religious character is realized through the habituation of worship, the deepening of Islamic knowledge (*tafaqquh fī al-dīn*), moral development (*akhlāq*), and the cultivation of spirituality in everyday life. At Miftahul Huda, congregational prayers, the study of *kitab kuning*, *dhikr*, collective supplication, and the cultivation of proper etiquette (*adab*) toward teachers constitute important activities for internalizing religious values. At Al-Ikhlash, the process is reinforced through the *mu'allimīn* educational system, structured worship routines, the use of Arabic in academic activities, and moral guidance provided through the exemplary conduct of teachers and *musyrif*.

Students' religious character is reflected not only in their mastery of Islamic knowledge but also in their religious practices, spiritual attitudes, and ability to embody Islamic values in social life. The character formation process therefore occurs through repeated spiritual activities, daily interactions, and continuous practice within the *pesantren* environment.

In addition to religious character, the *muadalah* curriculum strengthens students' discipline as an integral component of *pesantren* life. Discipline is cultivated through structured daily routines, adherence to schedules and institutional regulations, responsibility in fulfilling assigned duties, and the development of independent living skills. At Miftahul Huda, discipline is developed through students' commitment to worship schedules, academic activities, communal service, and social responsibilities within the twenty-four-hour residential environment. Meanwhile, Al-Ikhlash implements a more structured disciplinary system through intensive supervision, designated use of Arabic and English, continuous behavioral evaluation, and consistent enforcement of institutional regulations.

The cross-site findings identify several factors that support students' religious character and discipline. First, *pesantren* culture places Islamic values at the center of educational activities. Second, the exemplary leadership of *kyai*, *asatidz* (teachers), and *musyrif* provides students with direct examples of Islamic conduct. Third, the residential environment provides continuous opportunities for social interaction and character formation. Fourth, systematic habituation enables religious values and discipline to be practiced consistently within the daily life of the *pesantren*.

The cross-site findings further indicate that students' character development results from the integration of curriculum implementation, *pesantren* culture, and local wisdom. Religious character develops through worship, *tafaqquh fī al-dīn*, and moral cultivation, while discipline develops through orderly living, responsibility, independence, and adherence to institutional

norms. The implementation of the *muadalah* curriculum thus operates within an educational environment that simultaneously maintains students' Islamic identity, develops character, and incorporates local cultural values.

3. Curriculum Evaluation as a Mechanism for Strengthening Students' Character

Curriculum evaluation in the *muadalah* programs at Miftahul Huda and Al-Ikhlash integrates academic assessment with the assessment of students' character development. Evaluation is conducted continuously through multiple assessment methods that address students' cognitive development, attitudes, religious practices, and behavioral dispositions.

In terms of academic assessment, both *pesantren* employ written examinations, oral examinations, and practical assessments of religious practices according to the characteristics of the *muadalah* curriculum. Miftahul Huda evaluates students' mastery of *kitab kuning*, including their ability to read, comprehend, and explain Islamic knowledge orally, as well as their ability to demonstrate religious practices. Al-Ikhlash combines assessments based on the *dirāsah Islāmiyyah* curriculum with written examinations, oral examinations, and practical learning assessments within the *mu'allimīn* educational system.

Beyond academic achievement, both *pesantren* evaluate students' character through systematic observation of daily behavior. The evaluation includes discipline in performing religious obligations, compliance with institutional regulations, honesty, responsibility, social interaction, and respect toward teachers and fellow students. At Miftahul Huda, character evaluation also incorporates feedback from the surrounding community to assess students' social conduct outside the boarding school environment. At Al-Ikhlash, continuous supervision by teachers, *musyrif*, and boarding school administrators enables ongoing monitoring of students' character development.

Curriculum evaluation also functions as part of the continuous improvement process. Evaluation results are used to refine instructional strategies, strengthen *pesantren* culture, and improve character development programs. Deliberative meetings (*musyawarah*), evaluation forums, and collective reflection sessions are used to identify challenges and formulate improvements. Thus, curriculum evaluation connects curriculum planning, implementation, assessment, reflection, and subsequent improvement.

The cross-site findings indicate that curriculum evaluation in the *muadalah* education system encompasses three interconnected dimensions: academic assessment, character evaluation, and continuous educational improvement. Academic assessment measures students' mastery of Islamic knowledge and related competencies, character evaluation monitors the internalization of religious values and discipline, while reflection and evaluation forums provide a basis for improving educational practices.

4. Cross-Site Synthesis of the Cultural-Spiritual Muadalah Curriculum

The cross-site analysis of *muadalah* curriculum implementation at Miftahul Huda and Al-Ikhlash reveals both distinctive and shared patterns. Miftahul Huda places greater emphasis on strengthening Islamic spirituality through *tafaqquh fi al-dīn* integrated with Sundanese cultural values. Al-Ikhlash emphasizes the integration of Islamic sciences, general education, and institutional culture. Despite these differences, both *pesantren* integrate Islamic spirituality, local wisdom, *pesantren* culture, and habitual educational practices within their curriculum implementation.

The cross-site findings show that the implementation of the *muadalah* curriculum is connected to students' everyday educational experiences. Islamic spiritual values and local wisdom are practiced through formal instruction, habituation, exemplary leadership, social interaction, and institutional culture. The curriculum therefore operates not only through formal classroom activities but also through the wider educational environment of the *pesantren*.

The cross-site synthesis identifies several interconnected components of the local wisdom-based *muadalah* curriculum: (1) Islamic spirituality, (2) local wisdom values, (3) *muadalah* curriculum implementation, (4) living curriculum through *pesantren* culture, (5) strengthening students' religious character and discipline, and (6) evaluation and continuous improvement. These components are interconnected within the twenty-four-hour educational environment of the two *pesantren*.

Islamic spirituality functions as the foundational dimension of educational orientation. Local wisdom provides the cultural values through which spiritual and moral principles are contextualized in students' daily lives. Curriculum implementation translates these values into intracurricular, cocurricular, and extracurricular activities, as well as habituation and exemplary leadership. The *pesantren* environment functions as a living curriculum through which students repeatedly experience and practice these values. Character development is reflected in religious practices, discipline, responsibility, independence, social interaction, and moral conduct. Evaluation and continuous improvement provide mechanisms for monitoring and strengthening the implementation of these educational processes.

Based on the cross-site findings, the Cultural–Spiritual Muadalah Curriculum represents an interconnected educational configuration in which Islamic spirituality, local wisdom, curriculum implementation, *pesantren* culture, students' lived experiences, and evaluation operate together in the process of character formation.

DISCUSSION

The novelty of this study lies in its conceptual synthesis of Islamic spirituality, local wisdom, curriculum implementation, and *pesantren* culture as interconnected dimensions of students' character development within the muadalah education system. Unlike previous studies that have primarily examined curriculum implementation, character education, and local wisdom as separate educational dimensions, this study provides a contextually grounded explanation of how these elements interact within the daily educational practices of Islamic boarding schools. This perspective is consistent with scholarship conceptualizing curriculum-making as a socially situated process shaped by institutional contexts, educational actors, and everyday practices (Priestley & Philippou, 2018; Priestley et al., 2021). Drawing on a qualitative cross-site analysis of Miftahul Huda Muadalah Islamic Boarding School in Manonjaya, Tasikmalaya, and Al-Ikhlash Muadalah Islamic Boarding School in Kuningan, the study identifies the living curriculum as a central mechanism through which spiritual and cultural values are translated into students' religious character and discipline. The importance of such context-sensitive educational practices is also reflected in research on culturally responsive teaching, which demonstrates that culturally responsive practices provide insights that cannot be fully captured by conventional understandings of effective teaching alone (Lavigne et al., 2022). This conceptual perspective contributes to curriculum scholarship by demonstrating that muadalah curriculum implementation cannot be adequately understood solely through formal curriculum structures, instructional content, or institutional regulations. Instead, its educational significance emerges through the integration of Islamic spirituality, local cultural values, exemplary leadership, habituation, and students' lived experiences within the *pesantren* environment (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020; Fullan et al., 2024; Priestley & Philippou, 2018).

The findings reveal three major patterns of muadalah curriculum implementation across the two research sites. First, curriculum implementation integrates Islamic scholarly traditions, local wisdom, and institutional educational orientations through formal and informal learning activities. Second, students' religious character and discipline are strengthened through continuous habituation, exemplary leadership, social interaction, and participation in the twenty-four-hour residential educational environment. Third, curriculum evaluation integrates academic assessment, behavioral observation, and continuous institutional reflection to support character development. Although Miftahul Huda emphasizes the tradition of *tafaqquh fi al-dīn* and Sundanese cultural values, while Al-Ikhlash adopts a more structured educational approach integrating Islamic sciences, general education, and institutional culture, both institutions demonstrate a shared pattern of integrating spiritual, cultural, and pedagogical dimensions into educational practice. These findings are consistent with broader evidence that educational environments and implementation contexts influence students' developmental outcomes; a major meta-analysis of school-based social and emotional learning interventions, for example, reported improvements in students' social-emotional skills, attitudes, behavior, peer relationships, school functioning, and academic achievement, while also identifying implementation quality and contextual differences as important factors (Cipriano et al., 2023).

Research on culturally responsive teaching likewise highlights the importance of considering cultural context alongside general instructional quality (Lavigne et al., 2022). Taken together, these findings indicate that the distinctive contribution of the muadalah curriculum lies in its capacity to connect formal educational objectives with the lived culture of Islamic boarding schools, while preserving the distinctive religious and cultural identities of each institution.

The findings are consistent with curriculum scholarship emphasizing that curriculum implementation is a socially situated process influenced by institutional culture, educational actors, and contextual conditions. Aoki (2005) conceptualizes curriculum as lived experience, highlighting the distinction between curriculum as formally planned and curriculum as experienced by learners. Similarly, Priestley, Biesta, and Robinson (2015) explain that educational agency emerges through interactions between individuals and their institutional environments. Priestley et al. (2021) further conceptualize curriculum making as a complex social practice involving multiple actors, institutional relationships, and contextual influences. These perspectives provide a theoretical basis for understanding why curriculum implementation in both pesantren extends beyond classroom instruction and formal curriculum documents. Recent research on culturally responsive teaching likewise emphasizes that educational practices need to be understood in relation to the cultural and institutional contexts in which teaching and learning occur (Lavigne et al., 2022). However, the present study contributes a distinctive contextual dimension by demonstrating how Islamic spirituality and local wisdom become integral components of curriculum enactment within a residential religious educational system. In this context, curriculum implementation is not merely a process of adapting educational content to institutional conditions but also a continuous process of transmitting religious values, cultural traditions, and moral practices through everyday educational experiences (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020; Priestley et al., 2021).

The findings also reinforce previous scholarship on character education that emphasizes the importance of institutional culture and holistic educational environments. Berkowitz and Bier (2005) identify comprehensive character education as involving school culture, educational relationships, and systematic value reinforcement. Lickona (2013) emphasizes that character formation requires the integration of moral understanding, moral commitment, and moral behavior, while Arthur et al. (2017) highlight the significance of virtue education and exemplary practices in educational institutions. Darling-Hammond et al. (2020) further demonstrate the importance of supportive learning environments, meaningful relationships, and integrated developmental experiences in students' holistic growth. More recent empirical evidence from a meta-analysis of 424 studies involving more than 575,000 students across 53 countries indicates that school-based social and emotional learning interventions can improve students' skills, attitudes, behaviors, peer relationships, school climate, and academic outcomes (Cipriano et al., 2023). The present findings are consistent with these perspectives because religious character and discipline in both pesantren are cultivated through repeated practices, exemplary leadership, institutional norms, and continuous social interaction. Nevertheless, the present study extends these perspectives by identifying the distinctive contribution of Islamic spiritual practices, kyai leadership, and local cultural values in sustaining character formation within the twenty-four-hour pesantren environment.

Regarding local wisdom, the findings support the argument that education becomes more contextually meaningful when institutional practices are connected to the cultural values of the surrounding community. Tilaar (2004) emphasizes the significance of cultural diversity and local identity within educational transformation, while UNESCO (2021) highlights the importance of cultural inclusion, cooperation, and collective responsibility in reimagining education. Recent research on culturally responsive teaching reinforces the importance of understanding how educators interpret and enact culturally meaningful practices within specific educational contexts (Lavigne et al., 2022). The findings from Miftahul Huda illustrate this relationship through the integration of Sundanese values such as *silih asah*, *silih asih*, *silih asuh*, and *gotong royong* into educational activities. Meanwhile, Al-Ikhlash demonstrates a different pattern through the institutionalization of sincerity, simplicity, independence, responsibility, and Islamic brotherhood. These findings suggest that local wisdom and

institutional cultural values are not merely supplementary curricular content but operate as resources for organizing educational relationships and daily practices. The contribution of this study lies in explaining how such values interact with Islamic spirituality and curriculum implementation to support character development within different pesantren contexts, extending culturally responsive education scholarship to the distinctive religious and residential setting of muadalah pesantren.

The findings concerning curriculum evaluation are also consistent with established perspectives on formative and authentic assessment. Black and Wiliam (2009) explain that formative assessment contributes to educational improvement through the continuous use of assessment information, while Gulikers et al. (2004) emphasize the importance of authentic assessment in connecting evaluation with meaningful educational practices. Andrade and Brookhart (2020) further conceptualize classroom assessment as a process of co-regulating learning, highlighting the interaction between assessment, feedback, and learners' active participation. Darling-Hammond et al. (2020) similarly underscore the importance of evaluating learning and development within supportive educational environments. In the two pesantren, academic evaluation is complemented by behavioral observation, religious practice assessment, institutional supervision, and collective reflection. This combination demonstrates that curriculum evaluation encompasses not only students' mastery of knowledge but also their application of religious and moral values in everyday life. The distinctive contribution of the present study is its identification of evaluation as an interconnected component of the living curriculum, through which academic achievement, character development, and institutional improvement are continuously related.

The similarities between the present findings and previous studies can be explained by the shared understanding that character development is influenced by the broader educational environment rather than classroom instruction alone. The integration of institutional culture, habituation, educational relationships, and exemplary leadership identified in this study corresponds with the comprehensive character education approach discussed by Berkowitz and Bier (2005), Lickona (2013), and Arthur et al. (2017). Recent studies further emphasize the contribution of supportive learning environments, social-emotional learning, and positive educational relationships to students' holistic development (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020; Cipriano et al., 2023). However, the pesantren context introduces distinctive educational conditions. Unlike conventional schools in which learning activities are generally organized around scheduled classroom instruction, pesantren provide a residential environment in which educational interactions continue throughout daily religious, academic, and social activities. This institutional characteristic enables religious values and discipline to be practiced repeatedly through worship, social responsibilities, dormitory life, and interactions with educators. Consequently, character education becomes embedded within the daily organization of institutional life rather than being confined to specific instructional activities (Fawaid, 2022; Rahman et al., 2023).

Differences between the two research sites can be understood through their institutional traditions, educational orientations, and socio-cultural contexts. Miftahul Huda emphasizes Islamic scholarly traditions, classical religious texts, and Sundanese cultural practices, whereas Al-Ikhlash places greater emphasis on structured educational routines, language development, institutional discipline, and the integration of Islamic and general education. These differences reflect the contextual character of curriculum implementation, as educational institutions interpret and enact curricular objectives according to their traditions, leadership, and organizational cultures. This explanation is consistent with Priestley et al. (2021), who emphasize the contextual and relational nature of curriculum making. Other studies similarly highlight the influence of institutional settings, professional agency, and local conditions on curriculum enactment (Priestley et al., 2015; Rich, 2021; Scanlon & Connolly, 2021). Despite these differences, both pesantren demonstrate similar patterns of character formation because Islamic spirituality, habituation, exemplary leadership, and institutional culture remain central to their educational practices. Thus, the cross-site comparison indicates that different

institutional approaches can support shared character education objectives through contextually distinctive forms of curriculum implementation (Yin, 2018).

The differences between the present study and broader character education literature also arise from the specific cultural and religious foundations of pesantren education. General character education frameworks frequently emphasize moral values, institutional relationships, and positive learning environments (Berkowitz & Bier, 2005; Lickona, 2013; Arthur et al., 2017). In contrast, the findings of this study indicate that character formation within muadalah pesantren is explicitly grounded in Islamic spirituality, religious obligations, the authority and exemplary conduct of the kyai, and culturally embedded educational traditions. Recent research on culturally responsive teaching demonstrates that educational practices are shaped by teachers' interpretations of cultural diversity and the specific contexts in which teaching occurs (Lavigne et al., 2022; de Groot et al., 2023). These characteristics do not contradict broader theories of character education but provide a more context-specific explanation of how moral values are internalized in Islamic residential educational institutions. The multi-site research design further enables the identification of shared educational patterns across two different pesantren typologies while preserving the distinctive characteristics of each institution (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 2018).

The principal theoretical contribution of this study is the formulation of the Cultural-Spiritual Muadalah Curriculum Model Based on Local Wisdom as a conceptual synthesis derived from qualitative cross-site findings. The framework integrates Islamic spirituality, local wisdom, curriculum implementation, living curriculum, character development, and continuous evaluation into an interconnected educational configuration. Islamic spirituality provides the normative foundation of educational practice, while local wisdom contextualizes spiritual and moral values within the cultural experiences of the pesantren community. Curriculum implementation translates these values into intracurricular, cocurricular, extracurricular, and habituation activities. The living curriculum connects these activities with everyday educational experiences through exemplary leadership, social interaction, institutional traditions, and residential life. Character development is reflected in students' religious practices, discipline, responsibility, independence, and moral conduct, while evaluation supports continuous reflection and improvement. This integrative perspective is consistent with scholarship on curriculum enactment, holistic development, and formative assessment (Aoki, 2005; Darling-Hammond et al., 2020; Priestley et al., 2021; Andrade & Brookhart, 2020).

This conceptual synthesis extends curriculum implementation scholarship by integrating the cultural and spiritual dimensions of Islamic boarding school education into the understanding of curriculum enactment. Aoki (2005) and Priestley et al. (2021) emphasize that curriculum cannot be separated from lived experiences and institutional contexts. Research on curriculum implementation further highlights the role of institutional conditions and educational actors in translating curricular intentions into practice (Rich, 2021; Scanlon & Connolly, 2021). The present study builds upon these perspectives by illustrating how curriculum enactment in muadalah pesantren is simultaneously spiritual, cultural, pedagogical, and institutional. Likewise, the framework complements holistic character education perspectives by demonstrating that religious character and discipline are shaped through the continuous interaction of formal learning, institutional culture, habituation, and educational relationships (Arthur et al., 2017; Darling-Hammond et al., 2020; Cipriano et al., 2023). The contribution is therefore not the creation of a standardized curriculum development procedure but a theoretical abstraction explaining the relationships among key educational dimensions identified across the two research sites.

The conceptual framework further suggests that the effectiveness of muadalah curriculum implementation should be understood through the coherence of its interconnected educational components rather than through curriculum structure alone. The integration of Islamic spirituality and local wisdom provides educational direction and cultural relevance, while the living curriculum serves as the mechanism through which these values are enacted and experienced. This interpretation positions pesantren culture as a central element of

character education and offers a contextual perspective for understanding how curriculum implementation contributes to students' religious character and discipline. This emphasis on contextual coherence is consistent with curriculum scholarship that views implementation as a socially situated process (Priestley et al., 2021) and research demonstrating the importance of context and implementation quality in educational outcomes (Cipriano et al., 2023; Darling-Hammond et al., 2020). As a conceptual synthesis derived from two research sites, the framework provides an interpretive explanation of the observed educational patterns rather than a universally validated causal model.

The findings have several practical implications for the management and implementation of muadalah curricula in Islamic boarding schools. Pesantren leaders and curriculum administrators should recognize that strengthening students' character requires coherence between formal curriculum objectives, institutional culture, daily educational practices, and evaluation systems (Fullan et al., 2024; Priestley et al., 2021). Islamic spiritual values and local wisdom should therefore be reflected not only in curriculum documents but also in classroom learning, religious activities, dormitory management, student organizations, community engagement, and educators' exemplary conduct. The findings further indicate the importance of strengthening the roles of *kyai*, *asatidz*, and *musyrif* as educational figures who consistently demonstrate the values expected of students (Fawaid, 2022; Rahman et al., 2023). Curriculum evaluation should also incorporate systematic observation of students' religious practices, discipline, responsibility, and social behavior alongside conventional academic assessment, consistent with research on formative assessment and holistic student development (Andrade & Brookhart, 2020; Darling-Hammond et al., 2020).

Academically, the conceptual synthesis provides a framework for further investigation into the relationships among curriculum implementation, institutional culture, local wisdom, and character development in Islamic education. The framework may inform comparative studies examining different pesantren typologies, regional cultural contexts, and institutional educational traditions (Priestley et al., 2021; Yin, 2018). It also provides a basis for exploring the living curriculum as an analytical concept for understanding how educational values are translated into everyday institutional practices. This perspective is consistent with research emphasizing the relationship between curriculum enactment, institutional contexts, and educational actors (Rich, 2021; Scanlon & Connolly, 2021). For curriculum scholars, the findings emphasize the importance of considering spirituality, cultural identity, and residential educational experiences when examining curriculum enactment in faith-based educational institutions (Lavigne et al., 2022; UNESCO, 2021).

At the policy level, the findings suggest that efforts to strengthen the quality of muadalah education should accommodate the distinctive characteristics of pesantren rather than relying exclusively on standardized curriculum indicators. Educational policies and quality assurance mechanisms may benefit from recognizing the contributions of Islamic scholarly traditions, local wisdom, institutional autonomy, and character-based evaluation (UNESCO, 2021; Priestley et al., 2021). Within the framework of Indonesia's Law No. 18 of 2019 on Pesantren, this perspective supports the recognition of educational diversity while encouraging accountability and continuous improvement (Republik Indonesia, 2019). Curriculum guidance for muadalah institutions should therefore allow sufficient flexibility for pesantren to integrate their spiritual traditions, cultural values, and institutional educational practices into curriculum implementation while maintaining appropriate standards of educational quality.

The findings should be interpreted in relation to the qualitative multi-site design and the specific characteristics of the two pesantren investigated. Although the cross-site analysis identifies shared patterns and contextual differences, the findings are not intended to establish statistical generalizations across all muadalah Islamic boarding schools. The conceptual synthesis is grounded in the educational practices of Miftahul Huda and Al-Ikhlash and therefore requires further examination in pesantren with different institutional characteristics, geographical locations, and socio-cultural environments. This limitation is consistent with qualitative research approaches that prioritize contextual understanding and analytical transferability rather than statistical generalization (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Creswell & Poth,

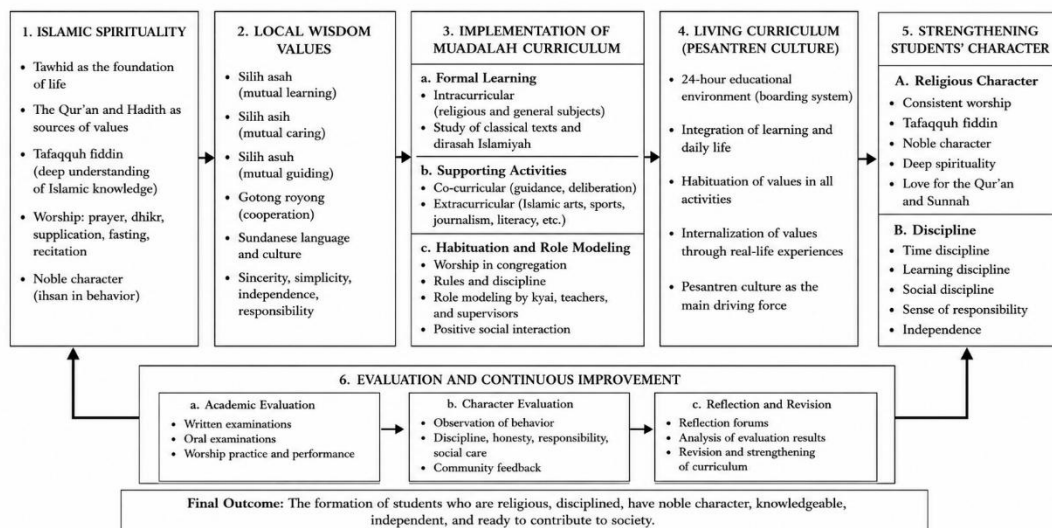
2018; Yin, 2018). Moreover, the qualitative evidence supports an interpretive understanding of curriculum implementation and character formation rather than a causal measurement of curriculum effectiveness.

Future research may examine the applicability and transferability of the proposed conceptual framework across a broader range of *muadalah* pesantren, including institutions with different curricular orientations and local cultural traditions. Longitudinal studies could investigate how students' religious character and discipline evolve through sustained participation in pesantren educational environments. Mixed-methods research may also explore relationships among curriculum implementation, institutional culture, local wisdom, and measurable indicators of character development, building on international research into social-emotional learning and student outcomes (Cipriano et al., 2023). Further studies could investigate the roles of kyai leadership, teacher agency, residential supervision, and authentic assessment in strengthening the living curriculum (Rich, 2021; Andrade & Brookhart, 2020). Such research would provide additional empirical evidence for refining the conceptual framework and assessing its relevance across diverse Islamic educational contexts.

Figure 1 presents the conceptual synthesis derived from the cross-site analysis.

CULTURAL-SPIRITUAL MUADALAH CURRICULUM MODEL BASED ON LOCAL WISDOM

(Conceptual Synthesis of Multi-Site Research Findings in Muadalah Islamic Boarding Schools)



CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the implementation of the local wisdom-based *muadalah* curriculum at Miftahul Huda Muadalah Islamic Boarding School in Manonjaya, Tasikmalaya, and Al-Ikhlash Muadalah Islamic Boarding School in Kuningan is carried out through an integrated educational approach that combines Islamic spirituality, the traditions of Islamic scholarship, local wisdom, and institutional culture. Rather than functioning merely as an academic document, the curriculum is enacted as a living curriculum that integrates intracurricular, cocurricular, and extracurricular activities, together with habituation and exemplary leadership within the twenty-four-hour *pesantren* educational environment. This integrated implementation effectively strengthens students' religious character and discipline through a continuous process of value internalization embedded in the *pesantren* educational ecosystem.

Based on the cross-site analysis, this study proposes the Cultural-Spiritual *Muadalah* Curriculum Model Based on Local Wisdom as a conceptual synthesis that explains the systemic relationships among Islamic spirituality, local wisdom, curriculum implementation, the living curriculum, and students' character development. The proposed conceptual framework demonstrates that the effectiveness of *muadalah* curriculum implementation depends not only on curriculum structure or instructional content but also on the synergy among *pesantren* culture, *kyai* leadership, habituation, and students' lived educational experiences, all of which

contribute to the holistic development of religious character and discipline. Accordingly, this study extends the scholarship on curriculum implementation by positioning *pesantren* culture as the primary mechanism for value internalization and character formation.

The findings provide both theoretical and practical implications for the advancement of *pesantren* education and character-oriented curriculum implementation. Theoretically, this study enriches curriculum implementation scholarship by integrating the perspectives of curriculum studies, character education, and local wisdom within the context of *muadalah pesantren*. Practically, the proposed conceptual synthesis may serve as a reference framework for *muadalah pesantren* and other Islamic educational institutions seeking to implement curricula that are contextually responsive, adaptive, and oriented toward strengthening students' character while preserving Islamic identity and local cultural values. Future research is encouraged to examine the applicability of this conceptual framework across diverse types of *pesantren* and different socio-cultural contexts in order to provide broader empirical evidence regarding its relevance and transferability.

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