

## Implementation of Character Education in Strengthening Indonesia *Santri*'s National Spirit

Sahabuddin<sup>\*, a,1</sup>, Marwan Sileuw<sup>b,2</sup>, Talabudin Umkabu<sup>c,3</sup>

<sup>a,b,c</sup> Postgraduate, Fatahul Muluk State Institute of Islamic Studies Papua, Indonesia

<sup>1</sup> pasca2320@gmail.com\*

### Abstract

Character education is important in strengthening the national spirit (nationalism) of *Santri* in pesantren. However, studies that discuss character education only focus on the conceptual level or understanding. Hence, the form of application and implications of character education in increasing the spirit of nationalism among Indonesian *Santri* tend to be neglected. By focusing on the form and implications of the implementation of character education among Indonesian *Santri*, this study chose to use a descriptive qualitative approach based on observation, documentation, and interviews with coaches and *Santri*. The findings in this study successfully revealed that character education implemented by training students to use the Indonesian language properly, familiarizing students with Indonesian products, and involving students in reflection and appreciation activities on the struggle of heroes not only succeeded in increasing the spirit of nationalism or nationalism but also fostered empathy for differences and improved the academic competence of students. This study recommends future research to explore the effectiveness of Indonesian character education strategies in enhancing the spirit of nationalism and implementing the program in formal and non-formal education environments.

**Keywords:** Character Education, Islamic Boarding School, National spirit

## I. INTRODUCTION

The spirit of nationalism among *Santri* is experiencing a severe decline. This context is in line with the results of a survey conducted by Populix in 2023, which reported that 65% of Indonesians felt that the spirit of nationalism of *Santri* had decreased significantly [1]. In facing this problem, implementing character education in pesantren is very important for students. As an Islamic educational institution, pesantren is vital in reviving the spirit of nationalism among students [2]. By applying a holistic character education approach, Islamic Boarding Schools can strengthen national identity and instill national values in the character of *Santri* or students [3]. Thus, character education in Islamic Boarding Schools is a critical element in enhancing the spirit of nationalism, and it is an important context to be explored in depth.

Character education is a learning process that aims to shape values, attitudes, and behaviors in accordance with society's prevailing norms [4]. Character education focuses on academic achievement and non-academic aspects involving values such as honesty, responsibility, cooperation, caring, and justice [5]. This context is essential because character education aims to form individuals who are not only intellectually intelligent but also have a strong moral foundation and integrity in facing various challenges in everyday life. In line with that, Character education is an effort to educate individuals to make wise decisions and practice them in everyday life [7]. One form of implementation of character education in Islamic Boarding Schools is through self-development activities in the form of habituation to produce character values that become the basic principles of individual morals in action [6].

Character education provides a positive impetus in shaping national spirit. In this context, the national spirit is the drive and love for the homeland that contributes positively to the

sustainability of a country [7]. National spirit reflects a sense of ownership of the country's future, including the urge to go beyond personal interests for common interests and welfare [8]. Hasanah, in her study, also said that national spirit is a way of thinking and acting that puts the interests of the nation and state above self-interest [9]. National spirit includes loyalty, concern, pride in identity, history, and culture, as well as the responsibility to involve oneself in efforts to maintain unity and harmony amid differences [10]-[13]. Some of the national spirit is shown through using domestic products and implementing education that combines the values of nationalism with religion [12]-[15].

*Pesantren*, or Islamic Boarding School, is a traditional Islamic educational institution in Indonesia that has a crucial role in shaping the students' character, spirituality, and Islamic values [14]. However, Islamic Boarding Schools are not only limited to the realm of religion but also integrate skills and curriculum from formal education [15]. Quoting from Putro, Islamic Boarding Schools are a form of fusion and modification of education that forms good religious morals and empowers students to contribute positively to society and the state [16]. In this context, Islamic Boarding Schools have become a space to develop national culture and values by incorporating elements of in-depth character education [17]. The ultimate goal is to create students who are spiritually intelligent, academically characterized and skilled [18]. Thus, Islamic Boarding Schools are places of religious learning and institutions that play an important role in shaping individuals who are described as competitive and committed to national values.

Implementing character education in Islamic Boarding Schools to strengthen the national spirit of the *Santri* is a critical context to explain. However, studies that discuss character education in Islamic Boarding Schools so far only focus on three things. First, studies that focus on conceptualizing character [19]-[21]. Second, studies focus on character education's values [22]-[24]. Third, studies focus on character education adaptation in Islamic Boarding School culture [25]-[27]. Studies that discuss character education in Islamic Boarding Schools only focus on the context of conceptualization, values, and adaptation of character education in Islamic Boarding School culture. Therefore, studies on how character education in pesantren strengthens the spirit of nationality have not been conducted comprehensively.

Strengthening the spirit of nationalism through character education in Islamic Boarding Schools is essential in forming a generation of students who are not only based on Islamic values but also committed to state development. Through character education, *Santri* is taught about a country's cultural and historical diversity and empowered to understand and internalize national values, such as patriotism, a sense of unity, and love for the country. By implementing character education, Islamic Boarding Schools not only enrich the spiritual dimension of *Santri* but also form individuals ready to contribute positively to the country's progress. However, studies that discuss strengthening the spirit of nationalism through character education in Islamic Boarding Schools have not been conducted comprehensively. Therefore, the purpose of this study is not only to respond to the shortcomings of previous studies but also to explain the application of character education in increasing the spirit of nationality among students.

Implementing character education in Islamic Boarding Schools is important in increasing the spirit of nationalism among *Santri*. In his study, Sukari said that character education, especially among students, will be an important subject because, in addition to developing Islamic education, it also forms a generation of Muslims with quality and integrity [28]. Tarnisih and Mastinih also said that implementing character education in Islamic Boarding Schools will significantly contribute to the student's moral and spiritual well-being [29]. Thus, it is vital to implement character education in Islamic Boarding Schools. To explain this context, this study focuses on the questions. First, how is the effective implementation of character education in Islamic Boarding Schools? Second, what are the implications of character education for students? In line with that, this study is based on the argument that applying character education

in Islamic Boarding Schools by implementing good Indonesian language and using domestic products is a practical approach to increasing the spirit of nationalism.

## II. METHOD

This study uses a qualitative-descriptive approach. The qualitative approach was used in this study with the intention that phenomena regarding implementing character education in Islamic Boarding Schools can be explained holistically, contextually, and systematically. In the qualitative approach, the data used contains information and has meaning beyond what is seen or heard [30]-[31]. The data in this study were obtained from primary and secondary sources. Primary sources in this study were obtained from observations and interviews with coaches and students at Al Munawwaroh Islamic Boarding School and Hidayatullah Islamic Boarding School in Merauke, Indonesia. At the same time, secondary sources are obtained from books and scientific articles relevant to the issues being discussed in this study.

Data collection techniques were carried out through interviews and observation. Interviews were conducted to obtain information relevant to the research. Similarly, observation is a process in which researchers extract information by making detailed observations of the research subject [32]. It is done in addition to obtaining data on the application of character education and data on the impact of the application of character education on students. After the data were collected, data analysis was carried out by Miles and Huberman, which involved reducing data and sorting out the main things that focused on research questions [33]—furthermore, data presentation or display in the form of interview quotes. In the last part, conclusion drawing or verification is carried out as part of the process of answering the questions that have been formulated [34].

## III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Character education implemented by all elements of the Islamic Boarding School not only forms good morals but also increases the national spirit or nationalism of the students. In this context, character education that has been implemented by Al Munawwaroh Merauke Islamic Boarding School and Hidayatullah Merauke Islamic Boarding School has not only increased the spirit of nationalism but also increased the empathy and academic competence of the students. The forms and implications of implementing character education at Al Munawwaroh Islamic Boarding School and Hidayatullah Merauke Islamic Boarding School are reflected below.

### A. *Implementation of Character Education in Islamic Boarding Schools*

Islamic Boarding Schools al Munawwaroh and Hidayatullah Merauke are not only educational spaces that produce intelligent and insightful students but also educational spaces for developing the character of the national spirit and love for the student's country. In this context, producing graduates who can meet the community's social needs and the nation's progress is the goal of implementing character education at al Munawwaroh Islamic Boarding School and Hidayatullah Merauke Islamic Boarding School. To achieve these goals, al Munawwaroh Islamic Boarding School and Hidayatullah Merauke Islamic Boarding School implement several effective strategies that focus on strengthening character education, such as implementing scout activities, love for domestic products and respect for the services of heroes. As shown in figure 1.



Figure 1. Documentation of Character Education in Strengthening National Spirit

Figure 1 shows the strengthening of the national spirit at Al Munawwaroh Islamic Boarding School and Hidayatullah Islamic Boarding School in Merauke by implementing character education. Character education through the habituation of patriotic activities, the use of domestic products, and the commemoration of national days continuously increases the spirit of nationalism, so that it not only builds academic abilities but can also build high nationalism among *Santri* [35]. This context is applied by all elements of Al Munawwaroh Merauke Islamic Boarding School and Hidayatullah Merauke Islamic Boarding School to strengthen the national spirit. With a more vital national spirit, students become accustomed to and able to make a real contribution to the country's development in education, social empowerment, economy, and political action [36]–[38]. In other words, the spirit of nationality instilled in *Santri* becomes a valuable asset that encourages them to play a role in holistic national development. The spirit of nationality strengthened by character education in Islamic Boarding Schools can also be seen through the students' narratives below.

“The Islamic Boarding School’s recommendation to use good Indonesian language encourages us to get used to it, and it has become our obligation to use good Bahasa Indonesia. Language is our way of showing that we are Indonesian.” (Interview with an al Munawwaroh Islamic Boarding School student, 2023).

“We have long been told to use the Indonesian language in communicating with friends. We are also happy to be able to speak Bahasa Indonesia, which is the one we love.” (Interview with Hidayatullah Islamic Boarding School student, 2023).

The two students’ narratives show that character education to strengthen the national spirit is carried out by emphasizing that students should use good Indonesian language in communication. In line with this, character education carried out by advocating the use of Bahasa Indonesia in communication is an important part of character building [39]–[40]. The students are encouraged to communicate and express themselves effectively in Bahasa Indonesia by paying attention to correct grammar, being polite, and being under applicable linguistic norms. In addition, in religious learning and daily activities, students are taught to use Indonesian properly as a form of respect for national and cultural values. In addition to the recommendation from the Islamic Boarding School to use good Bahasa Indonesia, the application of character education in al Munawwaroh Islamic Boarding School and Hidayatullah Merauke Islamic Boarding School is also carried out by cultivating students to use domestic products as the students’ narration below.

“We participate in every carnival activity with traditional clothing of the archipelago, and in class, we also learn culinary workshops with regional specialties. What is clear is that we like

Indonesian products. Likewise, with dance, we learn Merauke colossal dance, which scouting coaches train in.” (Interview with students of Pondok Pesantren al Munnawaroh, 2023).

“We follow the government’s recommendation to use batik as school clothes to foster a love for local Indonesian products, as well as *ustadz/ustadzah* using it on Wednesdays and Thursdays.” (Interview with Hidayatullah Boarding School students, 2023).

The students’ narratives show that character education strengthens the spirit of nationality in al Munnawaroh Islamic Boarding School and Hidayatullah Merauke Islamic Boarding School by cultivating students to use domestic products and love Indonesian culture. In Islamic Boarding Schools, activities such as wearing traditional clothes, enjoying local cuisine, and celebrating traditional traditions enrich students’ learning experiences about cultural diversity in Indonesia. With these experiences, character building creates awareness about Indonesian culture and plays an active role in preserving the culture through concrete actions taken by the students [41]. The students are also introduced to local arts and culture to deepen their pride in the nation’s cultural heritage. In addition to cultivating domestic products and introducing Indonesian culture, character education in pesantren is also carried out by carrying out routine ceremonial activities to appreciate the services of heroes, as the narratives of the students below.

“We are very enthusiastic about enlivening national holidays such as flag ceremonies every Monday and August 17 to commemorate Independence Day, youth oath and National Heroes’ Day held by Islamic Boarding Schools. Also, all were involved in the flag-raising ceremony during the National *Santri* Day celebration in Merauke Regency, which all Islamic Boarding Schools joined. We can feel how the heroes used to fight to liberate Indonesia.” (Interview with *Santri* of al Munawwaroh Islamic Boarding School, 2023)

“We here routinely carry out activities such as flag ceremonies every Monday and Independence Day, carry out holiday activities to commemorate national days in which there are competitions, and we are delighted with the activities scheduled by the pesantren as well as being a release for our fatigue.” (Interview with Hidayatullah Boarding School students, 2023)

These two narratives show that students’ character in their daily behavior is like the character of love for the country and the spirit of nationalism that the Islamic Boarding School coach has taught. Not only that, activities related to National Day commemoration are also active as organizers and participants. The character of love for the country and the spirit of nationalism are also among the goals of the Islamic Boarding School, namely, “Forming students who have a personality with cultural values, are environmentally friendly and have the spirit of nationalism.” Through the ceremony, the Islamic Boarding School provides a profound experience for the students about the critical meaning of patriotism, the spirit of devotion, and sacrifice. In addition, the ceremony, to commemorate the services of heroes, inspires students to become a generation that is aware of its responsibility to the country and society and is committed to building the nation [42].

From the research results obtained, character strengthening carried out by two Islamic Boarding Schools in Merauke related to the character of love for the homeland and national spirit includes Using domestic products, Using good Bahasa Indonesia, Love for the culture of the motherland, Appreciate the services of heroes by prioritizing three moral aspects of moral knowing, moral feeling and moral behavior, Moral knowing is a provision of knowledge about good things and oriented to things related to their surroundings. The moral sense is an aspect of value in students and tends to affect students’ personality in the emotional area. These two

aspects will foster moral behavior in students, reflected in their daily behavior; in other words, this moral action is the outcome of the previous two morals.

### *B. Implications of Implementing Character Education for Students*

Implementing character education in al-Munawwaroh Islamic Boarding School and Hidayatullah Islamic Boarding School has significant student implications. In this context, the character education implemented by al-Munawwaroh and Hidayatullah Islamic Boarding Schools strengthens the spirit of nationality and provides substantial academic benefits for students. Through character education, students can feel pride in their national identity and become agents of change in development [43]. It is reflected in the narrative delivered by the students below.

“In madrasah, we are given lessons on the history of independence, stories of heroes fighting to repel invaders, and we are always asked to emulate their national spirit daily. From that example, we continue to study diligently to realize the ideals of the nation’s founders and create a good generation not easily carried away by associations that damage the future of the Indonesian generation.” (Interview with *Santri* pesantren al-Munawwaroh, 2023).

“We are taught the history of the heroes. The stories of the coaches encourage us to understand the spirit of the heroes’ struggle for independence. We are more able to appreciate the services of the heroes. In addition, we are also invited to activities commemorate Heroes’ Day or National Day with apples or ceremonies, wearing attributes, and various activities such as competitions to enliven these days.” (Interview with Hidayatullah Boarding School student, 2023)

The narratives that the students have conveyed show that the character education implemented by al Munnawwaroh Islamic Boarding School and Hidayatullah Islamic Boarding School has given implications by strengthening the national spirit of the students. The deep national spirit among *Santri* is the main driver for actively contributing to building the country and society. Through character education centered on the values of nationalism, the spirit of unity, and love for the country, the *Santri* are instilled with a high sense of responsibility and reflexivity. The spirit of nationalism can strengthen togetherness and harmony in the midst of [44]. With the spirit of nationality, the *Santri* become change agents in promoting peace, tolerance, and progress for a better Indonesia. In addition, the character education implemented by al Munawwaroh Islamic Boarding School and Hidayatullah Islamic Boarding School also has implications for increasing the students’ sense of empathy. As reflected in the narrative below.

“The ustadz and Ustadzah always give us an understanding of the differences that exist, both in culture, language, and customs, and we are always advised during activities to be united and not to be divided when different opinions with other people’s opinions.” (Interview with *Santri* at al-Munawwaroh Islamic Boarding School, 2023).

“We who board here have different backgrounds. There are Javanese, Madurese, Sundanese, Bugis and Papuan tribes, so the coaches equip us with an understanding to respect each other’s differences, and these differences encourage us to respect each other even though different tribes still have to respect each other.” (Interview with students at Hidayatullah Islamic Boarding School, 2023).

The students’ narratives show that the character education implemented by Al Munnawwaroh Islamic Boarding School and Hidayatullah Islamic Boarding School in Merauke has increased

the students' sense of empathy towards different ethnicities and cultures. Through character education and teaching about respecting diversity, students are encouraged to understand and appreciate ethnic and cultural differences. They can learn about diverse traditions, languages and beliefs and interact directly with people from different backgrounds. This helps strengthen brotherhood and tolerance among the students and opens their minds to understand and appreciate the diversity that exists in society at large, shaping them into more inclusive, empathetic, and globally competitive individuals. In addition to increasing the students' empathy, character education in Al Munnawaroh Islamic Boarding School and Hidayatullah Islamic Boarding School has implications for improving the students' academic competence. As reflected in the narrative below.

“We are also taught always to study, practice hard and improve our talents through extracurricular activities so that we always have achievements both in the field of lessons and interests.” (Interview with *Santri*, 2023)

“We here are applied various rules so that we are always obedient to carry out prayers, study, if you want to leave the hut, there must be permission, and also guarding cannot always be visited so that we are not crybabies and can be independent and also other disciplinary behaviors. If we violate, we will be reprimanded and given educational sanctions.” (Interview with coach, 2023).

The narratives that the students have conveyed show that the character education implemented by Al Munnawaroh Islamic Boarding School and Hidayatullah Islamic Boarding School in Merauke has increased the academic competence and independence of the students. Through learning integrated with moral values, students are trained in the religious field and given a solid foundation for developing their academic potential [45]. Education that emphasizes discipline, diligence, and responsibility helps students achieve high academic performance and fosters a sense of independence in learning and completing their assignments. They are taught to actively seek knowledge, develop independent skills, and pursue success on an ongoing basis, thus becoming individuals ready to face future challenges with confidence and academic competence.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

This study shows that implementing character education by Al Munnawaroh Islamic Boarding School and Hidayatullah Islamic Boarding School in Merauke, Indonesia has not only formed good morals but has also been proven to strengthen the spirit of nationalism among *Santri*. In this context, the implementation of character education by pesantren can be seen through proper use of the Indonesian language, authentic Indonesian products, and the commemoration of the services of heroes by carrying out ceremonies. Through the implementation of character education, the national spirit of the *Santri* is not only increasing, but also the spirit to appreciate differences and achievements through discipline has increased significantly. Therefore, the findings in this study provide an essential foundation in the context of character and citizenship building and emphasize the critical role of pesantren in shaping a young generation that is moral and eager to contribute to the country's progress.

Studies investigating character education in pesantren with a focus on improving the national spirit of *Santri* have great relevance in the Indonesian educational context. The study's findings contribute to improving the education system in pesantren, which ultimately plays an important role in shaping a younger generation with a solid moral character and commitment to the state and nation. The study recommends that future research could dig deeper in terms of

comparisons between different pesantren, involve *Santri*'s participation in nationality activities outside the pesantren, and measure the long-term impact of character education on *Santri*'s national spirit after they leave the pesantren. The results of such a study can provide a solid foundation for improving and developing character education in pesantren that is more effective in building a solid national spirit in the younger generation.

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