

## Implementation of the *Khidmah* Program in Strengthening the Social Character of Islamic Boarding School Students

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### ARTICLE INFO

#### *Keywords:*

Community service,  
social character,  
Pesantren education,  
Islamic Boarding School,  
character education.

#### *Article history:*

Received 2025-05-14

Revised 2025-10-12

Accepted 2025-11-17

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### ABSTRACT

This study examines the implementation of a pesantren community service program and its role in shaping students' social character at Pondok Pesantren Abdul Hadi Diwek Jombang. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, the research explores how community service (*khidmah*) functions as a practical strategy for character education in Islamic boarding schools. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation involving pesantren leaders, madrasah administrators, and students participating in the community service program. The data were analysed using an interactive qualitative analysis model, while data credibility was ensured through triangulation of sources and methods. The findings indicate that the community service program is systematically implemented through educational activities and pesantren services, such as teaching at Madrasah Diniyah and managing the pesantren cooperative. These activities contribute significantly to the formation of students' social character, including responsibility, social care, cooperation, tolerance, and service ethics. Direct involvement in real social roles enables students to internalize Islamic values through continuous practice rather than normative instruction alone. Leadership exemplified by the pesantren leader and a strong communal culture are identified as key supporting factors in the program's effectiveness. This study contributes to the discourse on pesantren-based character education by positioning community service as a structured and applicable pedagogical approach for developing students' social character. However, this research is limited to a single pesantren context, suggesting the need for future comparative and longitudinal studies.

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## INTRODUCTION

Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) are Islamic educational institutions that play a strategic role in comprehensively shaping the personality and character of students, encompassing spiritual, moral, and social aspects (Arif et al., 2023; Auliyah et al., 2025; Hasan, 2021). As the oldest Islamic educational institution in Indonesia, *pesantren* are not only oriented towards the transfer of religious knowledge, but also towards the formation of morals and the internalization of social values in everyday life (Bruinessen, 1995; Dhofier, 2011). The *pesantren* education system emphasizes a balance between mastery of knowledge, the practice of Islamic teachings, and character development through the practice of living together in a religious community (Arif et al., 2024; Hamdanah et al., 2025; Helmy et al., 2021; Ma'arif et al., 2025).

One of the distinctive traditions of Islamic boarding schools that plays a crucial role in shaping the character of students is the community service (*khidmah*) program (Cahyanto et al., 2025; Hasan, 2021; Miftahuddin et al., 2024). Community service in Islamic boarding schools is defined as a form of practicing the values of sincerity, responsibility, and social service carried out by students as part of the educational process (Hasan & Azizah, 2022; Hasan et al., 2023). Through the community service program, students are trained to implement the knowledge gained in Islamic boarding schools into real-world practice, both in education, social services, and institutional management (Fahriany & Wahyuningsih, 2025; Ismail et al., 2024). This process makes community service an effective means of shaping students' social character, such as caring, cooperation, and social empathy (Fathoni et al., 2024; Husna et al., 2025; Mufrihah et al., 2025).

In the context of character education, social character formation is a crucial aspect that must be developed systematically (Arizona et al., 2025; Budiyo et al., 2024). Social character relates to an individual's ability to interact harmoniously with their social environment, including attitudes of responsibility, tolerance, mutual assistance, and concern for others (Sutisna & Khorri, 2024). Social character education has become increasingly relevant amidst the challenges of modernity, marked by increasing individualism, declining social awareness, and weakening values of togetherness among the younger generation (Sintasari et al., 2025).

Numerous studies have shown that Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) have significant potential in shaping the character of students through culture, the exemplary behavior of religious leaders (*kiai*), and programmed activities (Humaidi et al., 2024; Mumtaz et al., 2024; Rofiq, 2025; Taisir et al., 2025). However, empirical studies specifically examining the implementation of community service programs as an instrument for shaping students' social character are still relatively limited. Some studies emphasize the role of Islamic boarding schools in general or the end results of community service programs, without in-depth descriptions of the implementation process, implementation dynamics, and supporting and inhibiting factors (Kegler et al., 2010; Ratih, 2025).

Based on these research gaps, this study is crucial. This research focuses on the implementation of community service programs at the Abdul Hadi Diwek Islamic Boarding School in Jombang. This study examines the planning, implementation, and evaluation processes of the community service program, as well as its contribution to shaping the social character of the students. Furthermore, this study also identifies factors that support and hinder the implementation of community service programs within the Islamic boarding school within the context of character development.

The purpose of this study is to describe the implementation of the community service program at the Abdul Hadi Diwek Islamic Boarding School in Jombang, analyze the social character of the students formed through the program, and reveal the supporting and inhibiting factors of its implementation. Theoretically, this study is expected to enrich the study of Islamic education, particularly in the development of Islamic boarding school-based character education. Practically, the results of this study are expected to serve as a reference for Islamic boarding school managers in designing and optimizing community service programs oriented towards the formation of the social character of students.

## METHODS

This study employed a qualitative approach with a descriptive qualitative design. This approach was chosen because the study aimed to deeply understand the implementation process of Islamic boarding school community service programs and the development of the students' social character within a natural context, without any treatment or manipulation of the research subjects. Qualitative research allows researchers to gain a comprehensive understanding of social phenomena from the perspectives of participants directly involved in the activities being studied (Creswell, 2015).

The research was conducted at the Abdul Hadi Diwek Islamic Boarding School in Jombang, East Java, considering that the school has a structured community service program that is mandatory for students who have completed their Madrasah Aliyah education. The research subjects included the caretakers of the Islamic boarding school, the principal of the Madrasah Diniyah, and the community service students directly involved in the community service program in the fields of education and management of the Islamic boarding school cooperative. Subjects were selected using purposive sampling, selecting informants based on their involvement and understanding of the research focus, ensuring relevant and in-depth data (Creswell & Poth, 2016).

Data collection was conducted through in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation. Interviews were used to gather information related to the planning, implementation, and evaluation of the community service program and its impact on the development of the students' social character. Observations were conducted to directly observe the activities of the community service students in carrying out their duties, both in teaching and providing Islamic boarding school services. Documentation was used as supporting data in the form of Islamic boarding school profiles, activity schedules, and archives related to the implementation of the community service program. The use of several data collection techniques was intended to obtain data that complemented and strengthened the research findings (Miles et al., 2014, 2019).

Data analysis was conducted interactively, referring to the Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña model, which encompasses data collection, data condensation, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. The analysis process took place simultaneously from data collection through the final stages of the study. The data obtained were selected, focused, and simplified in accordance with the research objectives, then presented in descriptive narrative form, making it easier for researchers to draw meaning and conclusions that were reflective and contextual. Data validity was maintained through source and method triangulation techniques. Source triangulation was conducted by comparing information obtained from various informants, while method triangulation was conducted by comparing data from interviews, observations, and documentation. This technique was used to increase data credibility and

ensure that research findings accurately represent field conditions and can be scientifically justified (Moleong, 2021).

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### Findings

The research results show that the community service program at the Abdul Hadi Diwek Islamic Boarding School in Jombang is a planned program and an integral part of the Islamic boarding school's education system. This program is mandatory for students who have completed their Madrasah Aliyah (Islamic Senior High School) and final diniyah (Islamic Junior High School) education as a form of practical knowledge and social character development. This was emphasized by the boarding school's caretaker, who stated:

*"The purpose of this community service is to foster leadership and social awareness in students. Students who have graduated from MA are required to serve for one year as practice in community life," (Interview, June 17, 2025).*

This statement demonstrates that community service is framed as a practical character-building process rather than merely an administrative obligation. This finding is reinforced by an interview with the principal of Madrasah Diniyah, who explained that the appointment of students for community service is done selectively, taking into account their academic and mental readiness. He stated:

*"The students appointed for community service are those who have graduated from MA and completed the Ulya Islamic religious class. The goal is for them to apply their knowledge and serve as role models for their juniors," (Interview, June 18, 2025).*

The researchers' observations indicate that before undertaking community service assignments, students receive direct guidance from the Islamic boarding school's supervisors and administrators regarding ethics, responsibility, and etiquette in carrying out their responsibilities. Documentation, including activity schedules and minutes of management meetings, demonstrates that students actively participate in community service planning, particularly at the Madrasah Diniyah.

In its implementation, the community service program is implemented through several activities, particularly in the areas of education and Islamic boarding school services. In education, students participating in the community service program serve as teachers at Islamic Boarding Schools (Madrasah Diniyah). Interviews with students participating in the community service program in teaching indicate that the task focuses not only on delivering material but also on fostering students' morals and character. One student stated:

*"When we teach, we don't just convey material, but also teach good manners. We are trained to be patient, fair, and responsible because the students look to us as role models," (Interview, June 19, 2025).*

This statement demonstrates that the community service process serves as a social learning medium that requires students to directly practice character values. The researcher's observations of Madrasah Diniyah learning activities revealed that the community service students actively assisted junior students, helping them understand the material, and

providing additional guidance outside of class hours. Documentation in the form of teaching schedules and Madrasah Diniyah activity records supported these findings.

In addition to education, community service in Islamic boarding school cooperatives is an important tool in developing the social character of students. Interviews with students participating in community service at the cooperatives indicate that service requires patience, honesty, and the ability to interact with various parties. One student stated:

*"In the cooperative, we serve many people with varying personalities. From there, we learn patience, honesty, and kindness to everyone," (Interview, June 18, 2025).*

Other community service students also emphasized that service in cooperatives trains self-control and social awareness, as stated:

*"Working at the cooperative requires extra patience, as it caters to the needs of many students and their guardians. From there, I learned to control my emotions and care more about others," (Interview, June 19, 2025).*

Observations at the Islamic boarding school cooperative show that the students working in the community service program work collaboratively, assisting each other with administrative records and services. Documentation in the form of financial reports and cooperative activity archives demonstrates the students' active involvement in the administrative management of the Islamic boarding school, reflecting a sense of social responsibility and cooperation.

The research also shows that the community service program contributes to shaping the students' social character, particularly in aspects of responsibility, mutual assistance, tolerance, and social awareness. The students in the community service program view their duties as a trust that must be fulfilled responsibly. This was expressed by one of the students who stated:

*"We view this service as a mandate from the caretaker. So, we strive to carry it out diligently because it brings honor to the Islamic boarding school," (Interview, June 19, 2025).*

The development of a spirit of mutual assistance is evident in the habits of community service students in assisting each other in completing assignments, both at the Islamic Boarding School (Madrasah Diniyah) and in the Islamic boarding school cooperative. Researchers' observations indicate a strong culture of cooperation among community service students, especially when facing tasks requiring coordination and precision. Documentation of Islamic boarding school activities shows that almost all community service activities are carried out collectively.

Aspects of tolerance and social awareness are also evident in the interactions between community service students and other students. Interviews indicate that community service students learn to understand the differences in background and character of the students they serve. One community service student stated:

*"The characters of the students are all different, so we have to adapt and not generalize. From that, I learned to appreciate differences more," (Interview, June 18, 2025).*

In addition to the positive findings, this study also identified supporting and inhibiting factors in the implementation of the community service program. The main supporting factors

were the exemplary behavior and leadership of the Islamic boarding school supervisors, who consistently provided guidance and motivation to the students. The inhibiting factors identified were time constraints and differences in students' readiness to carry out community service tasks. However, these obstacles were gradually overcome through habituation, guidance, and collaboration among the students participating in the community service program.

Overall, the results of the study show that the implementation of the community service program at the Abdul Hadi Diwek Jombang Islamic Boarding School not only runs systematically, but also plays a significant role in shaping the social character of students through direct experience, social interaction, and the habituation of Islamic values in Islamic boarding school life.

Based on the elaboration of findings described in the preceding sections, the following table presents a concise summary of the research results, encompassing five key aspects ranging from program planning to the supporting and inhibiting factors of its implementation.

**Table 1.** Implementation of the Service Program in Shaping Students' Social Character at PP. Abdul Hadi Diwek Jombang

Aspect	Findings	Data Sources
Program Planning	The service program is mandatory for graduates of MA and Ulya diniyah; students are selectively assigned based on academic and mental readiness; they receive guidance on ethics and responsibility before duty	Interviews with Headmaster & Head of Madrasah Diniyah, Observation, Documentation
Service in Education	Students serve as teachers at Madrasah Diniyah, delivering subject matter while nurturing the character and morals of junior students, both during and outside class hours	Interviews with Service Students, Observation, Teaching Schedule Documentation
Service in Cooperative	Students serve the needs of fellow students and their guardians; the role builds patience, honesty, emotional self-control, and collaborative work in administrative tasks	Interviews with Service Students, Observation, Financial Report Documentation
Social Character Formation	The program fosters four social character values: responsibility (sense of trust/amanah), mutual cooperation (collective work), tolerance (respecting differences), and social care	Interviews with Service Students, Observation, Documentation
Supporting & Inhibiting Factors	Supporting: consistent guidance and role modeling by the pesantren headmaster. Inhibiting: limited time and varying student readiness; overcome through habituation and mentoring	Interviews, Observation

Source: Primary Research Data, 2025

**Discussion:**

The research results show that the community service program at the Abdul Hadi Diwek Islamic Boarding School in Jombang serves as an applicable and contextual character education instrument. This finding reinforces the view that Islamic boarding schools serve not only as institutions for transmitting religious knowledge but also as effective social spaces in shaping the character of students through direct experience. From an Islamic educational perspective, the process of character formation cannot be achieved solely through normative teaching but must be realized through ongoing, real-world practice. The Islamic boarding school community service program is a relevant medium for this purpose because it integrates spiritual, social, and moral values within a single educational process.

Theoretically, devotion (*khidmah*) in the Islamic boarding school tradition has profound educational significance. *Khidmah* is understood as a form of internalizing the values of sincerity, responsibility, and devotion to others as a manifestation of devotion to God (Wahyudin et al., 2025). The findings of this study align with the view of (Abdillah & Maskuri, 2022), who asserts that student devotion is an experience-based character education process that fosters social awareness and independence. In this context, the obligation of devotion for students graduating from MA at the Abdul Hadi Islamic Boarding School is not merely structural, but also a pedagogical strategy to shape students' personalities into socially and spiritually mature individuals.

The implementation of community service programs in education, particularly through teaching activities at Islamic boarding schools (*Madrasah Diniyah*), demonstrates that the social character of students (*santri*) is formed through concrete social roles. These students serve not only as transmitters of knowledge but also as role models for junior students. This finding reinforces social learning theory, which states that individual character and behavior are largely shaped through observation, imitation, and social interaction with significant figures (Dollard & Miller, 2013; Rosenthal & Zimmerman, 2014). In the context of Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*), students (*santri*) become significant figures for junior students, so that the sense of responsibility, patience, and social awareness displayed by these students are indirectly transmitted to other students (Astuti & Winarti, 2026; Hastasari et al., 2022).

The formation of social character through the teaching role is also relevant to the concept of character education, which emphasizes a balance between cognitive, affective, and psychomotor skills (Fatah et al., 2025; Najib et al., 2026). The findings of this study indicate that students in community service programs learn to manage emotions, develop empathy, and build ethical communication during the teaching process. This aligns with (Kamaruddin, 2012) view that social character is not formed through lectures or doctrine alone, but rather through consistent social habits and experiences. Therefore, community service in education serves as a social laboratory for students in developing social and moral competencies.

Beyond education, community service in Islamic boarding school cooperatives demonstrates another dimension of student social character development. Research findings indicate that cooperative service and management activities require students to be honest, disciplined, and responsible, while also being able to interact with various parties with diverse backgrounds and personalities. From a character education perspective, this type of public service experience holds high educational value because it trains students to prioritize the interests of others and control their own egos. This aligns with (Wray-Lake & Syvertsen, 2011)

view, which emphasizes that social character develops through individual involvement in social activities that demand cooperation, empathy, and collective responsibility.

The cooperation established among students participating in community service programs, both at Islamic boarding schools (Madrasah Diniyah) and in Islamic boarding school cooperatives, demonstrates the development of a spirit of mutual assistance and social solidarity. This finding confirms the concept of social character in Islamic education, which places the value of mutual assistance (*ta'awun*) as a fundamental principle of community life (Asrori et al., 2025; Ghafar et al., 2025; Syafira et al., 2025). Islamic boarding schools, through their community service programs, create a social environment that encourages students to develop a habit of working collectively and supporting each other (Salabi, 2026). This environment strengthens the internalization of social values, as students experience firsthand the benefits of cooperation in completing shared tasks and responsibilities.

The aspects of tolerance and social awareness emerging from the research findings also indicate that the community service program contributes to building multicultural awareness among students on a micro-scale. The interaction of students participating in the community service program with other students from different backgrounds and backgrounds trains them to be open-minded, respect differences, and avoid discriminatory behavior. This finding aligns with (Wray-Lake & Syvertsen, 2011) who stated that Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) have great potential to instill the value of tolerance through communal living and exemplary behavior. Thus, the community service program not only shapes the social character of students within the internal context of the Islamic boarding school but also prepares them for harmonious living in a pluralistic society.

From a managerial perspective, the successful implementation of the community service program at Abdul Hadi Islamic Boarding School is inextricably linked to the leadership of the school's caretakers. Research findings indicate that exemplary behavior, consistency, and direct guidance from caretakers are key factors in shaping the attitudes and behaviors of students engaged in community service (Jensen & Thomsen, 2024). This aligns with Islamic educational leadership theory, which positions the *kiai* (Islamic religious leader) as a central figure in shaping the culture of Islamic boarding schools (Nawawi, 2025). Exemplary leadership (*uswah hasanah*) has proven effective in instilling character values because students not only receive instruction but also directly witness the practice of these values in their daily lives (taklimudin et al., 2022).

However, research findings also indicate inhibiting factors in implementing the community service program, such as time constraints and differences in student readiness. These obstacles demonstrate that character development is not an instant process and requires ongoing mentoring. From a character education perspective, these obstacles can be viewed as part of the social learning process, as students are trained to adapt, manage challenges, and solve problems collectively. With proper guidance, these obstacles do not diminish the program's effectiveness but, in fact, enrich the students' learning experience.

Overall, this discussion demonstrates that the community service program at the Abdul Hadi Diwek Islamic Boarding School in Jombang serves as an integrative model of Islamic boarding school-based character education. This program combines spiritual development, social experiences, and the instillation of Islamic values within a single educational process. The findings of this study reinforce the argument that effective character education must be

based on real-life experiences and authentic social contexts. Therefore, the Islamic boarding school community service program can be positioned as a best practice in developing the social character education of students in Islamic educational institutions.

## CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the community service program at the Abdul Hadi Diwek Islamic Boarding School in Jombang is an integral part of the Islamic boarding school's educational system, effectively shaping the students' social character. Through the students' direct involvement in community service activities in the field of education and Islamic boarding school services, the values of responsibility, social concern, mutual assistance, tolerance, and service to others are truly internalized. The community service program serves not only as a means of practicing knowledge but also as a medium for social learning that equips students with the mental and social readiness to live in society.

In terms of contribution, this research provides empirical reinforcement to the study of Islamic boarding school-based character education by positioning community service programs as an applicable and contextual pedagogical strategy. The findings broaden the understanding that community service in Islamic boarding schools is not merely an institutional obligation but can be positioned as a structured and sustainable model of social character education. Practically, the results of this study can serve as a reference for Islamic boarding school administrators in designing and developing community service programs oriented towards the holistic development of student character.

However, this study has limitations, primarily because it was conducted at a single Islamic boarding school (pesantren), making the findings contextual and not broadly generalizable. Furthermore, this study did not examine the long-term impact of the community service program on the character of students after they enter the community. Therefore, further research is recommended to conduct comparative studies across Islamic boarding schools and use a longitudinal approach to obtain a more comprehensive picture of the sustainability of the community service program's impact on student character development.

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