

Teacher's Ridha In The Ethics Of Santri Khidmah: A Hermeneutic Phenomenological Study On Pesantren's Cultural Resistance To "Santri Slavery" Narratives In Digital Public Spaces

Idi Warsah^{1*}, Ruly Morganna², Berliani Aslam Alkiromah Warsah³, Bizikrika Hably Hudaya Warsah⁴

¹Islamic Education Department, Institut Agama Islam Negeri Curup, Curup, Indonesia

²English Education Department, Institut Agama Islam Negeri Curup, Curup, Indonesia

³Communication Science Department, Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Kalijaga, Yogyakarta, Indonesia

⁴English Literature, Universitas Negeri Semarang, Semarang, Indonesia

*Corresponding Author. E-mail: idiwarsah@iaincurup.ac.id

Abstract: The issue of "santri slavery" that has circulated widely on social media has distorted the meaning of pesantren education by framing the teacher-student relationship through a paradigm of power rather than spirituality. This narration obscures the moral values underlying the traditional Islamic educational system and has generated public misunderstanding of the practice of devotion (khidmah). This study phenomenologically examines the concept of teacher's ridha as both the moral foundation of Islamic educational ethics and a form of cultural resistance against accusations of exploitation in modern public discourse. Employing a qualitative approach with a hermeneutic phenomenological design, the research was conducted in three traditional pesantren in East Java, involving 10 active students (santri), 4 teachers (ustaz), and 3 alumni as the participants. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and focus group discussions (FGD), and analyzed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). The findings reveal that teacher's ridha serves as a value structure that governs the teacher-student relationship within a framework of compassion and moral responsibility rather than hierarchical domination. The practice of khidmah is understood as a form of experiential learning that cultivates sincerity, patience, and spiritual character formation. At the same time, the value of teacher's ridha functions as a moral and symbolic mechanism of resistance to exploitation narratives by redefining devotion as an expression of inner freedom. Furthermore, pesantren have begun utilizing digital media to disseminate alternative narratives grounded in spirituality and adab (ethical conduct). Theoretically, teacher's ridha is not merely an ethical value but also an epistemological mechanism in the formation of moral subjects, offering an alternative

framework to secular paradigms by integrating spiritual legitimacy, exemplary conduct, and lived sincerity. Thus, teacher's *ridha* operates as an authentic symbol of liberating Islamic education and as a form of cultural capital that enables *pesantren* to sustain their moral integrity amid the pressures of modernity.

Keywords: Teacher's *ridha*, Islamic Educational Ethics, *Santri Khidmah*, Hermeneutic Phenomenology, Cultural Resistance, *Pesantren*.

Introduction

In recent years, various public debates have emerged concerning educational practices in Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*), particularly regarding allegations of "student slavery" that have gained attention across social media and online news platforms.¹ This issue reflects the anxiety of modern society toward traditional educational systems, which are often perceived as maintaining asymmetrical power relations between teachers and students. In several narratives, *pesantren* are portrayed as closed institutions with hierarchical structures that enable both physical and psychological exploitation of students (*santri*).² However, such generalizations do not fully represent the cultural reality of *pesantren*. From an internal perspective, the activities of *santri*, often viewed externally as forms of "forced labor", are actually regarded as integral components of moral and spiritual education, as well as the cultivation of *adab* (ethical conduct).³ Within the *pesantren* value system, behaviors such as serving teachers, cleaning the environment, or assisting the *kyai's* needs are not symbols of oppression, but manifestations of the pursuit of a teacher's *ridha* (approval) as a source of divine blessing (*barakah*) in learning.⁴ Consequently, accusations of slavery directed at *pesantren* stem primarily from epistemological differences in understanding the function of traditional Islamic education. This gap in interpretation generates two opposing perspectives: an external interpretation that views such practices as exploitative, and an internal one that sees them as sacred acts of

¹ Syauqi Multazam, "Mengkaji Isu Feodalisme Di Pesantren - Mahad Aly Lirboyo," *Mahad Aly Lirboyo - Mengakar Dalam Tradisi Berkembang Dengan Inovasi*, July 7, 2025, <https://mahadalylirboyo.ac.id/mengkaji-isu-feodalisme-pesantren/>.

² Muhammad Gufron Nawawi and Habibi Al Amin, "Optimalisasi Perlindungan Hak Anak Melalui Lembaga Pesantren Anak (Studi Kasus Pondok Pesantren Miftahul Muhtadiin Nganjuk)," *Al Maqashidi: Jurnal Hukum Islam Nusantara* 8, no. 1 (2025): 181–97, <https://doi.org/10.32665/almaqashidi.v8i1.5013>.

³ Idi Warsah et al., "The Integration of Islamic Values in Cognitive Development," *FOKUS Jurnal Kajian Keislaman Dan Kemasyarakatan* 9, no. 2 (2024): 212–26.

⁴ Khotim Hanifudin Najib et al., "'Serve and Ngalap Berkah': Motivation to Be An Islamic Boarding School Teacher," *12 Waiheru* 10, no. 2 (2024): 115–25, <https://doi.org/10.70872/12waiheru.v10i2.181>.

devotion that nurture discipline and spiritual sincerity.

Furthermore, this issue illustrates a clash of values between modern and traditional paradigms in understanding moral education in Indonesia. On one hand, modern society tends to interpret all forms of obedience to authority as signs of inequality; on the other, *pesantren* tradition places reverence toward teachers as the key to spiritual success.⁵ This tension demonstrates that the debate surrounding “student slavery” is not merely a social issue but also an ideological and epistemological one, centered on how humans conceptualize freedom, discipline, and obedience. To move beyond polarized public discourse and surface the lived meanings behind these practices, a phenomenological inquiry is essential, one that privileges the conscious experiences of *santri* and teachers in interpreting devotion through the lens of teacher's *ridha*. This study seeks to understand how acts of devotion and obedience are interpreted by *pesantren* members as processes of self-formation rather than domination. By positioning *santri* not as passive subjects of subordination but as active learners pursuing *barakah*, this research aims to challenge public misconceptions that have stereotypically framed *pesantren* as exploitative spaces.

The debate over “student slavery” reflects a clash between educational paradigms: a secular-liberal model privileging individual freedom and a religious-communal model emphasizing devotion, discipline, and respect for moral authority.⁶ Critical education theory holds that power in educational spaces is not inherently oppressive;⁷ it can function to cultivate ethical awareness in emancipatory ways.⁸ In *pesantren*, the teacher–student bond is structured by *ta'dhim* (reverence), casting the teacher as moral exemplar and spiritual guide. Acts of service by *santri* thus signify the internalization of sincerity and moral responsibility, rather than alienation. Within Islamic thought,

⁵ Sulaiman Ismail et al., “Fostering Emotional and Moral Development in Islamic Boarding Schools: The Impact of Talaqqi and Halaqa Traditions,” *Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 10, no. 1 (2024): 13–24, <https://doi.org/10.15575/jpi.v0i0.35124>.

⁶ Farah Ahmed, “Authority, Autonomy and Selfhood in Islamic Education – Theorising Shakhshiyah Islamiyah as a Dialogical Muslim-Self,” *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 53, no. 14 (2021): 1520–34, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131857.2020.1863212>.

⁷ Muhamad Uyun and Idi Warsah, “Prospective Teachers’ Intercultural Sensitivity alongside the Contextual Factors as the Affective Domain to Realize Multicultural Education,” *International Journal of Instruction* 15, no. 4 (2022).

⁸ Dianne Mulcahy and Leanne Higham, “Beyond Conventional Critique in Education: Embracing the Affirmative,” *Critical Studies in Education*, Routledge, 2024, 1–18, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17508487.2024.2371850>.

teacher's ridha reframes the human-knowledge relation, suggesting that educational success rests not only on intellect but also on spiritual blessing and inner sincerity.⁹ Under this logic, obedience and service are expressions of spiritual consciousness that treat the teacher as a conduit of divine values. External critiques often overlook these metaphysical and ethical premises, importing secular assumptions about freedom and rights that misfit religious educational contexts.

This phenomenon can also be analyzed through Foucault's theory of power relations, which posits that power is not merely repressive but also productive in shaping subjects who possess self-discipline and awareness.¹⁰ In *pesantren*, the authority of teachers functions not as domination but as a moral habituation system that molds *santri's* character and spirituality, enabling them to cultivate self-control. The teacher's *ridha* symbolizes the transformation of power into moral energy that generates ethical and social awareness. This aligns with Kohlberg's moral education theory, which argues that morality does not emerge from unrestricted freedom but through the internalization of universal values fostered by habituation and exemplary conduct.¹¹ Accordingly, *santri's* devotion should be understood as a pedagogical and spiritual process that shapes religious personality, rather than a hierarchical structure of oppression. Through such theoretical lenses, the issue of "student slavery" can be reframed not as an objective reality but as a contested discourse that neglects the spiritual and value-laden foundations of *pesantren* education, the foundations that this study seeks to illuminate through interpretive phenomenological inquiry.

As for the analysis of research gap, it is worth noticing that although the *pesantren* system has been extensively studied in Islamic education scholarship, most research remains focused on structural, managerial, or institutional aspects,¹² rather than the experiential and

⁹ Fikatul Hikmah and Syabuddin Gade, "Konsep Kesuksesan Belajar (Analisis Pandangan Imam Asy-Syafi'i)," *Tadabbur: Jurnal Peradaban Islam* 7, no. 1 (2025): 41–50.

¹⁰ Johanna Oksala, "Neoliberal Subjectivation: Between Foucault and Marx," *Critical Inquiry* 49, no. 4 (2023): 581–604, <https://doi.org/10.1086/725022>.

¹¹ Javier Pérez Guerrero, "Learning How to Decide: A Theory on Moral Development Inspired by the Ethics of Leonardo Polo," *Ethics and Education* 17, no. 3 (2022): 324–43, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17449642.2022.2102284>.

¹² Eman I Ahmed, "Systematic Review of Research on Educational Leadership and Management in Muslim Societies," *Educational Management Administration & Leadership* 51, no. 1 (2023): 52–74, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1741143220973658>; Claire-Marie Hefner, "Morality, Religious Authority, and the Digital Edge," *American Ethnologist* 49, no. 3 (2022): 359–73, <https://doi.org/10.1111/amet.13088>; Imran

spiritual meanings shared by *santri* and teachers. Previous studies often highlight issues of violence or authoritarianism without considering the religious values that govern the teacher–student relationship.¹³ As a result, existing academic literature tends to reflect external biases and overlooks the epistemology of *pesantren*, which is grounded in the concepts of *barakah* and *teacher's ridha*. Furthermore, there is a scarcity of phenomenological research exploring the lived experiences of *santri* in understanding devotion to their teachers as a spiritual process. This gap reveals an academic need for interpretive and reflective studies on *santri* life within the *pesantren* value system. Addressing this gap, the present study transitions from public controversy to scientific inquiry by asking: how do the ethical practices and value structures of *santri's* devotion, grounded in the concept of teacher's *ridha*, shape moral and spiritual relationships within the *pesantren* education system? And in the context of public discourse, how does the concept of teacher's *ridha* function as a form of resistance against narratives of exploitation and “student slavery” in mainstream media?

These two questions are designed to explain both the internal (personal) and external (social) dimensions of the phenomenon, the personal meaning for *santri* and the social meaning in the public sphere. In this way, the research not only describes practices but also interprets the ethical values underlying them. By bridging the chasm between public misinterpretation and internal lived reality, this study contributes to three domains: theoretically, by expanding Islamic educational ethics through the epistemological role of teacher's *ridha*; practically, by offering insights into dialogical *pesantren* pedagogy; and socially, by challenging stigmatizing narratives with participant-grounded counter-

Mogra, “Maktab Education: A Community Imperative and the Making of Muslim Ambassadors,” *British Journal of Religious Education* 46, no. 2 (2024): 180–94, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01416200.2023.2278129>; Supriyono et al., “Critical Islamic Educational Leadership: Investigating How Islamic Pedagogic Models Shape Leadership Practices,” *British Journal of Religious Education*, Routledge, 2025, 1–18, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01416200.2025.2542225>.

¹³ Christopher M. Federico et al., “Individual and Contextual Moderators of the Relationship between Authoritarianism and Religiosity,” *British Journal of Social Psychology* 60, no. 4 (2021): 1436–63, <https://doi.org/10.1111/bjso.12463>; Wijaya Teguh Mulya et al., “On Being a Religiously Tolerant Muslim: Discursive Contestations among Pre-Service Teachers in Contemporary Indonesia,” *British Journal of Religious Education* 44, no. 1 (2021): 66–79, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01416200.2021.1917338>; Muh Subair et al., “Multilingualism, Technology, and Religious Moderation in Indonesian Islamic Boarding Schools,” *International Journal of Language Education* 8, no. 3 (2024), <https://doi.org/10.26858/ijole.v8i3.66498>.

discourses.

Literature Review

The Concept of Teacher's *ridha* in Islamic Educational Tradition

In classical Islamic education, teacher's *ridha* (teacher's approval) is central to the spiritual bond between teacher and student. It signifies the teacher's sincere consent, believed to channel the blessing of knowledge (*barakah al-'ilm*).¹⁴ Scholars like Ibn al-Jauzi, Al-Ghazali, and KH Hasyim Asy'ari emphasize that true learning depends more on *adab* (proper conduct) and purity of intention than on intellect.¹⁵ The teacher thus serves as a moral and spiritual guide rather than a mere transmitter of information. The relationship is ethical and spiritual, grounded in reverence and mutual awareness.¹⁶ Teacher's *ridha* extends beyond obedience, reflecting students' recognition of the teacher's moral legitimacy in seeking knowledge. In the *pesantren* tradition, it shapes character, ethics, and spirituality, as knowledge without a teacher's blessing lacks spiritual efficacy.¹⁷ Through respectful service (*khidmah*), *santri* develop inner sincerity within a spiritual hierarchy that models virtue rather than authority. Ultimately, teacher's *ridha* embodies a value system integrating knowledge, ethics, and spirituality in Islamic education.

The Ethics of *Santri* Devotion

In the *pesantren* tradition, *Khidmah*, serving teachers, assisting in communal tasks, and maintaining order, embodies the ethics of *santri* devotion and functions as character education cultivating humility, discipline, and spiritual sincerity.¹⁸ Through this practice, *santri*

¹⁴ Anisa Rahmawati, "Makna Cinta Rindu Dan Ridho Perspektif Al-Ghazali Dalam Kitab *Ihya Ulumuddin*" (PhD Thesis, UIN Fatmawati Sukarno Bengkulu, 2022), <http://repository.iainbengkulu.ac.id/9987/>.

¹⁵ Miftachul Ulum and Abdul Mun'im, "Etika Pendidikan Dalam Perspektif Imam Ghazali," *Journal of Islamic Education* 2, no. 1 (2024): 45–51, <https://doi.org/10.61231/jie.v2i1.263>.

¹⁶ Evi Muafiah et al., "Gendered *Pesantren* in Contemporary Indonesia: Female Agency, Institution, and Everyday Lives," *QIJS (Qudus International Journal of Islamic Studies)* 12, no. 1 (2024): 39–74, <https://doi.org/10.21043/qijis.v12i1.19859>.

¹⁷ Harikumar Pallathadka et al., "The Study of Islamic Teachings in Education: With an Emphasis on Behavioural Gentleness," *HTS Theologiese Studies* 79, no. 1 (2023): 7, <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v79i1.8193>.

¹⁸ Muhamad Arifin Siregar and Winarno Winarno, "Penanaman Karakter Mandiri Dan Tanggung Jawab Melalui Program Pengabdian Santri Di *Pesantren Islam Al Irsyad Tenganan Kabupaten Semarang*," *Jurnal Asy-Syukriyyah* 25, no. 1 (2024): 107–27,

integrate work and worship, seeking the teacher's blessing rather than material gain. As part of *tazkiyah al-nafs* (self-purification), *khidmah* nurtures moral awareness and subdues ego through sincere service.¹⁹ Empirical studies show that daily acts of service foster responsibility, empathy, and social solidarity,²⁰ while teachers' example reinforces learning by imitation.²¹ Thus, *khidmah* represents an active process of moral and spiritual formation, realizing a holistic education that unites cognitive, affective, and ethical growth.

Narratives of Exploitation and Social Misinterpretation

Social media has reshaped public judgments of religious practice, including pesantren life, by becoming a contested arena of meaning where diverse groups seek discursive legitimacy²² and where networked diffusion accelerates opinion while inviting distortion through weak cultural context;²³ the viral "student slavery" trope exemplifies a modern bias that reads reverence and discipline as oppression, generating moral panic amid secular-individualist frames.²⁴ Existing pesantren studies emphasize institutions, history, and curricular reform while sidelining spiritual experience and *teacher's ridha*,²⁵ and analyses of *khidmah* often

<https://doi.org/10.36769/asy.v25i1.478>.

¹⁹ Idi Warsah, "Religious Educators: A Psychological Study of Qur'anic Verses Regarding al-Rahmah," *Al Quds* 4, no. 2 (2020): 275–98, <https://doi.org/10.29240/alquds.v4i2.1762>.

²⁰ Muhammad Ramdan Awabin and Asriana Kibtiyah, "Hones the Character of Discipline and Responsibility of Students Through Ro'an Activities at the Walisongo Putra Islamic Boarding School," *Ta dib Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 12, no. 1 (2023): 233–40, <https://doi.org/10.29313/tjpi.v12i1.9026>; Masngudah Masngudah, "Kontribusi Tradisi Khidmah Dalam Pengembangan Soft Skills Santri Di Pptq Baitul Abidin Darussalam Wonosobo" (PhD Thesis, Universitas Islam Sultan Agung Semarang, 2024), <https://repository.unissula.ac.id/37639/>.

²¹ Muhammad Taisir et al., "Integrating Khidmah and Tarbiyah: A Service-Learning Model in Indonesia's Islamic Boarding School Education," *Al-Hayat: Journal of Islamic Education* 9, no. 2 (2025): 347–68.

²² Hefner, "Morality, Religious Authority, and the Digital Edge."

²³ Mireia Fernández-Ardèvol and Ramon Ribera-Fumaz, "The Network Society Today," *American Behavioral Scientist* 67, no. 7 (2023): 839–46, <https://doi.org/10.1177/00027642221092800>.

²⁴ Haoguang Li and Songqi Han, "The Paradox of Modernity: The Creation of a Tradition of Anti-Tradition," *Sociology Compass* 19, no. 9 (2025): e70118, <https://doi.org/10.1111/soc4.70118>.

²⁵ Deden Herman et al., "Management of Islamic Education Boarding School Institution," *At Turots: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam*, 2024, 822–32; Aulia Marhamah et al., "Sejarah Dan Perkembangan Pondok Pesantren Di Indonesia," *JPNM Jurnal Pustaka Nusantara Multidisiplin* 3, no. 1 (2025), <https://doi.org/10.59945/jpnm.v3i1.221>; Jamal Thoriq and Muhammad Isa Anshory, "Pembaharuan Pendidikan Di Pondok Tahfidz Dan

stop at discipline and obedience without probing religious consciousness or lived experience.²⁶ Moreover, scholarship rarely treats *teacher's ridha* as cultural resistance to exploitative narratives, tending instead to depict pesantren as conservative social forms rather than moral entities with value-defending logics.²⁷ Addressing these conceptual and methodological gaps, this study integrates phenomenology with critical discourse analysis to show how *teacher's ridha* operates as a moral mechanism that counters stigmatizing frames, thereby advancing Islamic education scholarship and debates on the interplay of tradition, spirituality, and digital-era discourse.

Research Methods

This study employs a qualitative approach with a hermeneutic phenomenological design,²⁸ aimed at deeply exploring the *lived experiences* of *santri* (students) and teachers in interpreting the concept of *teacher's ridha* (teacher's approval) and the practices of devotion within *pesantren*. A phenomenological approach was used to capture the essence of human experience within specific socio-cultural contexts.²⁹

Pesantren Modern (PTPM) Al-Huda Cawan," *TSAQOFAH* 4, no. 1 (2024): 742–56, <https://doi.org/10.58578/tsaqofah.v4i1.2568>.

²⁶ Lisa Nur Aini and Eni Fariyatul Fahyuni, "The Role of Diniyah Madrasah Teachers in Fostering Discipline in Student Learning at Islamic Boarding Schools: Peran Guru Madrasah Diniyah Dalam Menumbuhkan Kedisiplinan Belajar Santri Di Pondok Pesantren," *Adabiyah: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 2, no. 2 (2022): 10.21070/adabiyah.v2i2.1650-10.21070/adabiyah.v2i2.1650, <https://doi.org/10.21070/adabiyah.v2i2.1650>.

²⁷ Norma Fitria, "The Leadership of the Kyai as a Conservative Instrument of the Islamic Boarding School (A Case Study at Pondok Pesantren Hidayatul Qur'an Banjarrejo)," *Nizham Journal of Islamic Studies* 13, no. 01 (2025): 100–115, <https://doi.org/10.32332/nizham.v13i01.10846>; Wakhidah Kurniawati and Muhammad Isa Anshory, "Pendidikan Pesantren Di Zaman Teknologi Antara Tradisi Dan Modernitas," *TSAQOFAH* 4, no. 1 (2024): 640–54, <https://doi.org/10.58578/tsaqofah.v4i1.2548>; Hening Puwati Parlan et al., "Problematisasi Pesantren Dan Lembaga Pendidikan Islam," *Reslaj: Religion Education Social Laa Roiba Journal* 6, no. 11 (2024): 5067–82, <https://doi.org/10.47467/reslaj.v6i11.3691>; Samino Samino and Fitri Nur Mahmudah, "Manajemen Pendidikan Karakter Santri Dalam Menjawab Tantangan Modernitas Zaman Di Era Globalisasi," *Jurnal Syntax Admiration* 4, no. 11 (2023): 2244–61, <https://doi.org/10.46799/jsa.v4i11.916>.

²⁸ Lorraine Godden and Benjamin Kutsyuruba, "Hermeneutic Phenomenology," in *Varieties of Qualitative Research Methods: Selected Contextual Perspectives*, ed. Janet Mola Okoko et al. (Springer International Publishing, 2023), https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-04394-9_36.

²⁹ Agus Anwar Pahutar et al., "Studi Islam Dengan Pendekatan Fenomenologis," *Dakwatul Islam* 8, no. 2 (2024): 156–73,

Hermeneutic phenomenology extends this by interpreting the values and symbols underlying those experiences, not merely describing them.³⁰ In this context, *teacher's ridha* is treated as a religious and moral experience encompassing both spiritual significance and unique social relations.

The study was conducted in three traditional *pesantren* located in East Java, selected purposively for their strong *santri* caregiving systems and deep-rooted traditions of *adab* (ethical conduct), which preserve classical Islamic educational values. East Java was chosen because it is widely recognized as one of the oldest centers of *pesantren* development in Indonesia, known for its diversity of teaching models that maintain spiritually grounded teacher-student relations. The three *pesantren* share similar characteristics in terms of *kitab kuning* (classical Islamic texts) instruction, dormitory-based living, and *khidmah* (service) habituation, making them representative of traditional *pesantren* educational patterns. Participants consisted of ten active *santri*, four teachers (*ustaz*), and three alumni. This composition was chosen to provide diverse perspectives on the meaning and experience of *teacher's ridha*, from current students undergoing the learning process, teachers as spiritual mentors, and alumni who have internalized these values in their post-*pesantren* lives. Participants were selected through purposive sampling, where informants are chosen based on criteria relevant to the study's objectives. The main criteria included direct involvement in *pesantren* service activities and a minimum of two years of experience in the *pesantren* education system. This approach allowed the researcher to obtain in-depth and authentic data on participants' spiritual experiences, ethics of devotion, and perceptions of *teacher's ridha* as an integral part of *santri* life.

Data collection utilized three primary techniques: in-depth semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and Focus Group Discussions (FGD). The use of these three techniques served to achieve methodological triangulation, ensuring data consistency and validity by cross-verifying information from multiple sources and collection methods.³¹ Semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore

<https://doi.org/10.46781/dakwatulislam.v8i2.1069>.

³⁰ Kamal Prasad Koirala, "Phenomenology: Application for the Exploration of the Live Experiences of Participants and Historical Text," *Pragya Darshan प्रज्ञा दर्शन* 5, no. 2 (2023): 1–4.

³¹ Ilyana Janis, "Strategies for Establishing Dependability between Two Qualitative Intrinsic Case Studies: A Reflexive Thematic Analysis," *Field Methods* 34, no. 3 (2022): 240–55, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1525822X211069636>.

participants' subjective understandings of *teacher's ridha*, their experiences of devotion, and their views on the public discourse surrounding "student exploitation." The semi-structured format allowed flexibility in probing individual experiences while maintaining focus on the study's core themes. All interviews were conducted personally, recorded with participants' consent, and transcribed verbatim for analysis. Participant observation was carried out by accompanying *santri* in their daily activities, study sessions, worship, and *khidmah* routines, allowing the researcher to directly observe how the values of *teacher's ridha* are internalized in everyday behavior and social interactions among teachers, students, and other community members. Observations were conducted openly, with the researcher acting as an *observer-participant*, engaging to a limited extent without disrupting natural activities. Focus Group Discussions (FGD) were organized to facilitate reflective dialogue among *santri* and alumni about their interpretations of *teacher's ridha* and their experiences of devotion. FGDs aimed to test the consistency of meanings, stimulate collective memory, and compare individual perceptions of the same phenomenon. By applying these three techniques in triangulation, the study enhanced data credibility and enriched the interpretive depth of the findings, as each method provided distinct yet complementary perspectives.

The data were analyzed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) as developed by Smith and Fieldsend.³² IPA focuses on two central aspects: a deep understanding of participants' subjective experiences and the researcher's interpretation of the meanings embedded within those experiences. This approach employs a double hermeneutic process, wherein the researcher seeks to understand how participants make sense of their world while simultaneously interpreting the meaning that emerges from their narratives.³³ The analysis proceeded through several cyclical and reflective stages: First, comprehensive reading of the interview transcripts to grasp the contextual and emotional nuances of each narrative; second, identification of significant statements related to spiritual experiences, moral conduct (*adab*), or acts of devotion to teachers; development of emergent themes from these significant statements, such as "*Ridha as*

³² Jonathan A. Smith and Megumi Fieldsend, *Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis*. (American Psychological Association, 2021), <https://psycnet.apa.org/record/2021-54192-008>.

³³ Daniel Gyollai, "Getting into It in the Wrong Way: Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis and the Hermeneutic Circle," *Nursing Philosophy* 21, no. 2 (2020): e12294, <https://doi.org/10.1111/nup.12294>.

Blessing," "*Khidmah as Self-Formation*," and "*The Teacher as a Mirror of Spirituality*"; and third, synthesis of superordinate themes, representing broader meaning categories that illustrate relationships among themes and describe the overall structure of *santri* experiences.

To ensure the validity and credibility of findings, several validation strategies were employed. The first is member checking, by inviting participants to review and confirm the researcher's interpretations to prevent misrepresentation of meaning. The second is peer debriefing, through discussions with colleagues or qualitative methodology experts to obtain critical feedback on the analysis process. The third is thick description, by richly detailing the *pesantren's* social, cultural, and spiritual contexts so that readers can fully grasp the authenticity and depth of the studied reality. Through this combination of analytical and validation techniques, the study aims to yield a reflective, valid, and contextually grounded interpretation of how *teacher's ridha* functions as a moral and spiritual construct within the *pesantren* education system.

Results and Discussions

This study employed Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to explore how *santri*, teachers, and alumni interpret *teacher's ridha* and *khidmah* in *pesantren* life. Data from interviews, observations, and focus group discussions were triangulated and coded using identifiers (S, G, A; INT, OBS, FGD). Thematic analysis captured the moral, spiritual, and social meanings of devotion, highlighting *teacher's ridha* as both an ethical foundation and a form of cultural resistance against exploitative narratives.

Table 1. Data Codification Summary

Data Code	Data Source	Representative Quotation	Initial Meaning (Significant Statement)	Initial Theme	Superordinate Theme
S1-INT	Santri Interview 1	"If the teacher has given their blessing, learning feels light and the heart becomes calm."	Knowledge gains its blessing through the teacher's approval	<i>Ridha</i> as a source of blessing	The value structure of <i>teacher's ridha</i>
S4-OBS	Daily Santri Observation	A <i>santri</i> voluntarily cleans the	Service performed voluntarily	Sincerity in <i>khidmah</i>	Ethics of spiritual devotion

		classroom without direct instruction			
G2- INT	Teacher Interview 2	"We don't command the <i>santri</i> ; we educate them by example."	Teacher- student relationships are educative, not exploitative	Teachers as moral exemplars	Spiritual and moral relationships
A3- FGD	Alumni FGD 3	"Many misunderstand this; <i>khidmah</i> is actually training in patience."	<i>Khidmah</i> understood as self- formation	Devotion as character development	Moral education of <i>santri</i>
S5- INT	Santri Interview 5	"People on social media say we're being ordered around, but we do it sincerely."	Resistance to public stigma of exploitation	Contradictory public narratives	Cultural resistance of <i>pesantren</i>
G1- INT	Teacher Interview 1	"A teacher's <i>ridha</i> is the <i>pesantren</i> 's fortress against slander."	<i>Teacher's</i> <i>ridha</i> as moral defense of <i>pesantren</i> values	<i>Ridha</i> as a mechanism of moral protection	Social resistance to exploitative discourse

The Value Structure and Ethical Practice of Santri Devotion Based on Teacher's *ridha* in the Pesantren Education System

Teacher's ridha holds a central place in *pesantren* education, linking spiritual depth with academic pursuit. *Santri* view it as the moral foundation of learning, where success depends not only on intellect but on the *barakah* (blessing) gained through the teacher's sincere approval. As a form of spiritual legitimacy, *teacher's ridha* guides conduct, framing obedience and respect as acts of worship and self-purification. It thus functions as an ethical system shaping the moral and educational life of the *pesantren*. One *santri* expressed this belief as follows:

"If the teacher has given their blessing, learning feels light and the heart becomes calm." (S1-INT)

This finding shows that learning success stems not only from intellect but from spiritual legitimacy grounded in the teacher's *ridha*. *Barakah* (blessing) reflects harmony between moral ties and inner serenity, where students experience balance between spiritual and cognitive growth. *Teacher's ridha* thus becomes a lived experience fostering peace and religious awareness. Field observations revealed

santri voluntarily serving teachers, such as cleaning classrooms, motivated by sincerity (*ikhlas*), not coercion. Such routines illustrate moral internalization through daily habituation, where discipline and responsibility grow naturally within the pesantren's ethical framework.

From the teachers' perspective, teacher's *ridha* is not a tool to enforce absolute obedience but an educational relationship grounded in compassion and moral exemplarity. As one teacher noted:

"We don't command the santri; we educate them by example."
(G2-INT)

This statement underscores that Pesantren teachers view themselves as moral exemplars, guiding through ethical action rather than authority. *Teacher's ridha* emerges through this reciprocal process, where teachers model *rahmah* (compassion) and *santri* respond with respect and responsibility, forming a spiritually rooted, non-hierarchical educational relationship. An alumni's reflection during an FGD reinforced this idea:

"Many misunderstand this; *khidmah* is actually training in patience." (A3-FGD)

This quote illustrates that alumni view *teacher's ridha* and *khidmah* as paths of character formation that cultivate patience, humility, and sincerity, uniting service with self-purification. The value of *teacher's ridha* endures beyond pesantren life, guiding moral conduct and sustaining a spiritually grounded educational order. It shapes teacher-student relations through mutual respect and compassion, forming an egalitarian spiritual hierarchy rooted in moral authority rather than domination. As a lived ethical system, *teacher's ridha* integrates intellect, ethics, and spirituality, positioning pesantren as a holistic space for moral and intellectual growth.

In the pesantren system, *khidmah* (service and devotion) embodies the practical expression of *teacher's ridha* in *santri* life. Interviews and observations show that through acts like assisting teachers, cleaning, and managing routines, *santri* internalize values of sincerity (*ikhlas*), humility, and responsibility with spiritual intent rather than coercion. Thus, *khidmah* functions as service-based moral learning, where simple, consistent acts become a means of ethical and spiritual formation. A santri expressed a deep understanding of this meaning of devotion, stating:

"We help our teachers not because we are told to, but because we

seek blessings. When we help sincerely, our hearts feel light.” (S1-INT)

This statement illustrates that in the pesantren system, *khidmah* (service and devotion) embodies the practical expression of *teacher’s ridha* in *santri* life. Interviews and observations show that through acts like assisting teachers, cleaning, and managing routines, *santri* internalize values of sincerity (*ikhlas*), humility, and responsibility with spiritual intent rather than coercion. Thus, *khidmah* functions as service-based moral learning, where simple, consistent acts become a means of ethical and spiritual formation. Teachers play a crucial role in this process of value internalization through exemplary conduct (*uswah*). One ustaz (teacher) stated:

“We don’t scold the students when they are careless. We show them by doing it ourselves. They will understand when they see their teacher working too.” (G2-INT)

This finding highlights a character education model based on example, where teachers act as moral exemplars rather than enforcers. Their behavior represents responsibility, sincerity, and diligence, shaping *santri* through affective and observational learning rooted in *teacher’s ridha*. This pedagogical–spiritual bond fosters mutual moral growth, while *khidmah* further strengthens the *santri* community through humility, cooperation, and service. During a Focus Group Discussion (FGD), one alumnus reflected:

“Back at the pesantren, we took turns cooking, sweeping, and maintaining cleanliness. That’s how we learned teamwork, patience, and to never be selective about work.” (A3-FGD)

This account shows that acts of devotion foster social solidarity among *santri*, built upon equality and mutual cooperation. *Khidmah* in pesantren fosters social solidarity rooted in equality, cooperation, and sincerity. It functions as experiential learning that unites cognitive, affective, and moral growth, allowing *santri* to live values like empathy, discipline, and service rather than merely study them. Through repeated acts of devotion, moral teachings become embodied habits, transforming routine into spirituality. Thus, *teacher’s ridha* is not just a concept but a lived ethical system that shapes pesantren as a holistic space for forming knowledgeable, ethical, and sincere individuals.

The teacher–*santri* relationship in pesantren differs from modern education through its spiritual depth and moral reciprocity. Though teachers hold higher intellectual and spiritual authority, the bond remains compassionate and egalitarian. *Santri* see teachers as mentors

guiding moral growth, not as authoritarian figures. Through *teacher's ridha*, both are united in *mahabbah* (love) and mutual respect, forming a spiritual-moral partnership that sustains the ethical and social harmony of the pesantren community. A santri explained this dynamic vividly:

"Teachers are like parents. They don't just teach books, they teach patience. If we make mistakes, they usually give gentle advice, not anger." (S1-INT)

This statement highlights the emotional intimacy that characterizes teacher-student interactions, marked by affection and warmth rather than fear. Teacher-*santri* relations in pesantren are defined by emotional warmth and moral guidance rather than authority. Teachers lead through counsel and example, fostering trust and voluntary obedience within a pedagogy of compassion rooted in *adab* (refined conduct).

Field observations show respectful yet relaxed interactions, where moral lessons arise naturally through conversation and shared experience. This emotional intimacy transforms learning into a spiritual encounter, shaping not only intellect but also the ethical and emotional sensibilities of *santri*. Teachers in pesantren also exercise moral guidance through exemplary behavior (*uswah*). One teacher described:

"We don't want students to fear us; they must respect us because they understand the boundaries of *adab*. Respect doesn't come from harshness, it comes from fairness." (G2-INT)

This quotation clarifies that teacher authority in pesantren is moral, not structural, grounded in fairness and integrity rather than coercion. *Teacher's ridha* acts as an internal moral compass that balances *ta'dzim* (reverence) and *rahmah* (compassion), fostering respect-based obedience. Unlike secular systems rooted in formal power, pesantren authority arises from spiritual and ethical credibility, sustaining a reciprocal bond where teachers guide and *santri* respond with reverence, service, and devotion. During a Focus Group Discussion (FGD), one alumnus reflected:

"Back when I was in the pesantren, we respected our teachers not out of fear, but because from them we received both knowledge and life guidance. It would feel wrong not to help or serve them." (A3-FGD)

This account illustrates that *santri* respect and serve teachers not as passive submission but as moral reciprocity preserving the sanctity of their bond. *Teacher's ridha* functions as a spiritual contract, teachers

offer knowledge and blessing, while *santri* return *adab*, loyalty, and service, creating moral balance and solidarity. This dynamicity nurtures discipline, politeness, and mutual respect within the pesantren learning environment. A *santri* explained:

“When studying in front of the teacher, we never talk or play around. If the teacher is pleased, learning feels easy, but if he’s upset, it’s hard to understand anything.” (S5-INT)

This statement shows that reverence for teachers in pesantren stems from a belief that learning success depends on their moral and spiritual influence. Education is seen as transmitting both knowledge and divine energy, forming lasting habits of humility, sincerity, and *adab*. Through *teacher’s ridha*, authority and freedom harmonize; teachers guide with compassion; and *santri* respond with devotion, creating a balanced moral order where intellect, ethics, and spirituality unite in a lived educational experience.

Teacher’s Ridha as Resistance to Exploitation Narratives in Social Spaces and Public Media

The data generated from interview and FGD demonstrate that both *santri* and teachers reject the “*santri* slavery” narrative circulating on social media, arguing it distorts the spiritual essence of *khidmah* and *teacher’s ridha*. They view service not as coercion but as spiritual training in sincerity and responsibility. Teachers note that public critiques ignore *niyyah* (intention) and the ethical depth of pesantren life. Thus, *teacher’s ridha* serves as both a moral compass and a corrective framework, defending pesantren’s authentic values against external misinterpretation. Interviews with several *santri* show strong resistance to depictions of *pesantren* as oppressive spaces. One *santri* stated:

“In the media, many say we’re just ordered around, but we do everything sincerely. We understand this is part of learning responsibility and seeking our teacher’s blessing.” (S5-INT)

This quotation demonstrates that *Khidmah* is viewed not as forced labor but as moral and spiritual training rooted in sincerity. *Santri* link service to *barakah* derived from the teacher’s *ridha*, reflecting a spiritual rationality distinct from material or power-based logic. What outsiders see as physical labor holds metaphysical meaning, explaining why secular critiques often misread the spiritual essence of pesantren practice. One teacher affirmed in an interview:

"We never force the students. We want them to learn responsibility through social activity. If everything is commanded, they won't grow." (G2-INT)

This indicates that *teacher's ridha* serves as moral education, not social control. Teachers view devotion as experiential pedagogy that fosters *santri* independence and emotional maturity through lived practice. Acts of service are thus seen as moral learning, not subordination, positioning the teacher-*santri* bond as spiritual mentorship rather than labor relation. FGD discussions with alumni echoed these meanings. One alumnus reflected on the public debate:

"There are so many misunderstandings today. People only see the physical work, whereas in *pesantren* it's part of inner training. If *khidmah* is called exploitation, that means they don't understand the meaning of *teacher's ridha*." (A3-FGD)

This statement underscores a fundamental divergence between internal and external interpretations of *khidmah*. Alumni highlight a core interpretive divide: outsiders, especially on social media, read *khidmah* through labor-productivity lenses, while the *pesantren* community links work, intention, and blessing via *teacher's ridha*. This epistemological gap fuels online exploitation narratives. Field observations show a reflective, value-based response, teachers counsel *adab* and patient composure, so *teacher's ridha* operates as a spiritual bulwark that preserves inner tranquility and guides conduct. As a conceptual mechanism, it joins "physical" service with moral-theological meaning and serves as a counter-frame in public discourse, enabling *pesantren* to negotiate modern paradigms while sustaining cultural resilience.

Teacher's ridha functions both as a moral framework and a form of cultural resistance to accusations of exploitation. Teachers and *santri* construct counter-narratives affirming that *khidmah* and obedience are acts of self-formation and inner freedom, not oppression. Rejecting secular notions of detached individualism, *teacher's ridha* reframes service as devotion and respect, operating simultaneously as an ethical guide within *pesantren* and a protective symbol against public misinterpretation. Interviews show that *santri* understand teacher's *ridha* as a form of spiritual freedom rather than social constraint. One participant reflected:

"When we help our teachers, it isn't out of fear or compulsion. By serving them, the heart grows calm. It feels like freedom, because we can act without self-interest." (S1-INT)

This indicates that, for santri, khidmah is not restrictive labor but a path to inner freedom through discipline and sincerity. Unlike secular views that equate freedom with autonomy, pesantren spirituality finds it in obedient devotion to the teacher. This reflects value transcendence, where the ego yields to higher consciousness, an alternative vision of freedom that counters exploitation narratives through the ethics of devotion. Teachers, for their part, emphasize that teacher's *ridha* is a moral bulwark that protects pesantren from social stigmatization. As one teacher remarked:

"A teacher's *ridha* is the pesantren's fortress against the slanders of the age. As long as santri understand *adab* and the purpose of learning, no one can accuse the pesantren of oppression." (G1-INT)

This statement carries a strong symbolic charge: *Teacher's ridha* serves as moral protection, keeping pesantren education aligned with Islamic ethics amid external scrutiny. Teachers believe sincerity and courtesy neutralize exploitation claims. Beyond theology, *teacher's ridha* acts as a cultural strategy upholding pesantren's moral integrity and resisting secular reduction of spirituality to power. This ethical resistance is expressed through lived virtue, not confrontation. Across FGD testimonies, santri and alumni alike describe khidmah as worship that fosters sincerity and patience rather than a social burden. One alumnus explained:

"People used to say we were just being ordered around, but we saw it as worship. From it we learned patience, self-restraint, and to work sincerely without expecting reward." (A3-FGD)

This underscores that devotion is framed within a spiritual register radically different from profane labour relations. Teacher's *ridha* frames khidmah as sacralized labour, work oriented to moral value rather than economic gain, so santri read service as spiritual education guided by an internal compass, not compulsion. By positioning service as worship, pesantren articulate an alternative to secular logics that equate freedom with release from authority, recasting freedom as meaningful obedience. In practice, teachers and santri explicitly link routine tasks to intention and spiritual merit, cultivating a values-led discourse that counters media reductions of devotion to mere labour and resists the "colonization of meaning". Strategically, teacher's *ridha* distinguishes ethically grounded devotion from forced labour and anchors pesantren's cultural resilience, affirming the highest freedom as sincerity in service.

In response to social media narratives of "santri slavery,"

pesantren increasingly use digital platforms to uphold moral legitimacy and clarify the meaning of *khidmah*. Field data show that younger, tech-savvy *kyai* and alumni utilize YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok to share reflective stories portraying devotion as character education rooted in *teacher's ridha*. Rather than confronting critics, this strategy educates through alternative narratives, demonstrating pesantren's ability to engage modern media while preserving spiritual authenticity—a cultural negotiation that harmonizes tradition with digital modernity. A young teacher articulated this adaptive strategy during an interview:

"We know that many misunderstand pesantren because they see it only from the outside. That's why now we make content about santri life, so people understand that *khidmah* isn't about being ordered around, it's about learning responsibility." (G2-INT)

This statement reveals that pesantren educators increasingly view digital media as a means of moral outreach and symbolic defense, using it to extend *teacher's ridha* values into the public sphere. This shift reflects a mature, non-confrontational resistance that reframes devotion as moral education rather than subordination. Alumni also contribute through reflective writings and videos portraying *khidmah* as a source of spiritual and ethical growth, reinforcing pesantren's adaptive engagement with modern discourse. FGD findings show that many alumni actively produce reflective writings and video testimonials describing *khidmah* as a source of moral and spiritual formation. One alumnus expressed:

"Those of us who studied in pesantren feel responsible for explaining that life there isn't suffering. That's where we learned *adab* and sincerity. Social media should be a space for the real story." (A3-FGD)

This reflects the function of alumni as bridges between pesantren and society, interpreting values often misunderstood by the public. Together with teachers, they uphold *teacher's ridha* as a shared moral framework that shapes a proactive, value-based public narrative of pesantren life. Field observations show social media used for *dakwah* and moral education, teachers' talks on *adab* are recorded and shared as digital testimonies countering negative portrayals. This symbolic, non-confrontational resistance extends pesantren spirituality into the digital sphere, transforming media engagement into an act of moral communication. A teacher expressed this reflective approach succinctly:

"There's no need to be angry when people misunderstand

pesantren. We just show through good actions and words. Let society judge for itself.” (G1-INT)

This statement exemplifies pesantren’s distinctive mode of ethical resistance, rooted in patience, sincerity, and *dakwah* through example. Pesantren practice ethical resistance grounded in patience, sincerity, and *adab al-hiwar*, dialogue through wisdom rather than confrontation. This approach creates a spiritual discourse that harmonizes tradition and modernity, with *teacher’s ridha* serving as moral compass and cultural capital. By engaging digital media, teachers, *santri*, and alumni present pesantren as ethical and humanistic institutions, demonstrating that traditional spirituality remains adaptive, preserving sincerity and *barakah* amid modern challenges.

Discussion

The findings of this study affirm that teacher’s *ridha* constitutes the ethical foundation of Islamic education, embodying an integration of spirituality, *adab* (proper conduct), and knowledge. Classical ideas in Islamic pedagogy, as articulated by scholars such as al-Ghazali and KH. Hasyim Asy’ari, hold that *adab* mediates the blessing of knowledge, since the spiritual legitimacy of learning is attained only through a teacher’s wholehearted consent toward the student ³⁴. In the pesantren context, this is not merely a normative principle; it shapes a living value system embedded in the daily *habitus* of *santri*. The teacher–student relationship is understood as a spiritual bond marked by asymmetry of value: teachers serve as moral sources and exemplars, while students are active recipients and practitioners of those values. In this sense, teacher’s *ridha* does not imply hierarchical subordination; rather, it functions as an ethical structure that cultivates responsibility and reverence. Interview and observational data show that *santri* experience a tangible spiritual effect, “learning feels light and the heart becomes calm”, upon receiving a teacher’s *ridha*, signaling an inner transformation within the learning process. From a hermeneutic-phenomenological perspective, this experience reflects a synthesis of cognitive and spiritual dimensions, whereby educational outcomes comprise not only knowledge but also moral clarity as a legitimate outcome of education.³⁵

³⁴ Maulidia Firdaini, *Pemikiran Pendidikan Perspektif KH Hasyim Asy’ari Dalam Kitab Adab Al Alim Wa Al Muta’allim*, Universitas Islam Malang, 2023.

³⁵ Ahmad Asrin and Faisal Musa, “Internalizing Character: A Phenomenological Study of Discipline, Independence, and Simplicity among Pesantren Students in

Accordingly, teacher's ridha can be understood as a moral system that balances authority and moral freedom. In the pesantren tradition, teachers do not exercise power coercively; they lead through *uswah* (exemplary conduct) and compassion. The hierarchy that emerges is spiritual rather than administrative, which preserves a kind of moral egalitarianism within the teacher-student relationship. These findings corroborate the view that Islamic education emphasizes a transformational approach in which interpersonal relations serve as a vehicle for character formation.³⁶ Thus, teacher's ridha operates as a systemic value that orders the pesantren's moral habitus while also offering a philosophical account of the harmony among discipline, love, and spiritual freedom in traditional Islamic education.

Khidmah, students' service to teachers and the pesantren, is best read as a concrete form of experiential learning that integrates cognitive, affective, and moral domains. Activities such as maintaining the environment, assisting teachers' work, and organizing dormitory routines are not utilitarian labor; they are pedagogical avenues that cultivate sincerity, patience, and social responsibility. In this respect, khidmah functions as moral habituation, repeated, value-laden actions that are simultaneously symbolic and spiritual.³⁷ The findings indicate that through khidmah, santri apprehend the spiritual dimension of work and render daily activities part of worship. These values shape the pesantren's collective personality around simplicity, solidarity, and selfless service.

Teacher exemplarity (*uswah hasanah*) is pivotal in reinforcing this internalization. Rather than relying on verbal commands, teachers model commendable moral behavior, and santri learn by emulation. This aligns with Islamic ethical pedagogy, which positions the teacher as a moral figure rather than a mere transmitter of information.³⁸

Mandailing Natal," *Eduprof: Islamic Education Journal* 7, no. 2 (2025): 234–52, <https://doi.org/10.47453/eduprof.v7i2.344>.

³⁶ Fera Angraini and Muhammad Guntur Alting, "Transformasi Filsafat Moral Dalam Pendidikan Islam," *Mamba'ul 'Ulum*, April 15, 2024, 24–38, <https://doi.org/10.54090/mu.384>.

³⁷ Samsudin Samsudin and Anis Tyas Kuncoro, "Tradisi Khidmah Dalam Perspektif Pendidikan Islam," *Jurnal Progress: Wahana Kreativitas Dan Intelektualitas* 10, no. 1 (2022), https://scholar.archive.org/work/55rsuksrlzeqjpjtoecemod6ozy/access/wayback/https://publikasiilmiah.unwas.ac.id/index.php/PROGRESS/article/download/6383/pdf_1.

³⁸ Samsudin and Kuncoro, "Tradisi Khidmah Dalam Perspektif Pendidikan Islam."

Theoretically, khidmah may also be categorized as sacralized labor, work sacralized by the intention of worship and thus distinct from profane, economically oriented labor.³⁹ Consequently, khidmah operates as an instrument of spiritual and social character formation that surpasses conventional instructional aims. In short, pesantren education, through service, does not only build knowledge; it cultivates an integrated self-awareness linking will, intention, and action. Khidmah thus becomes a transformative medium that nurtures civility (adab) and a robust social conscience among santri.

The study's findings directly challenge public narratives that frame pesantren education as exploitative. Discourse analysis shows that social-media framing of pesantren is often reductive, overlooking the theological context, affective bonds, and spiritual value structures underlying the traditional system.⁴⁰ Within a Critical Discourse Analysis lens, the "exploitation" narrative circulating in the public sphere can be read as a form of moral panic, arising from friction between secular-individualist paradigms and the pesantren's lived spiritual rationality.⁴¹ External critiques frequently evaluate santri's devotion through indicators of physical labor and power relations while neglecting intention (niyyah) and sincerity, the essence of these acts.

Conversely, the field data reveal a strong internal counter-frame within the pesantren community. Santri, teachers, and alumni consistently assert that khidmah is worship, not coercion; and that teacher's ridha provides the spiritual motivation that imbues every act of service with meaning. This evidences an epistemological gap, a divergence of horizons, between secular and religious ways of seeing. External audiences assess action via productivity and efficiency, whereas pesantren interpret it through blessing (barakah) and devotion. These horizons cannot be reconciled without grappling with the underlying value structures. Hence, the category of "exploitation" cannot be applied simplistically to pesantren without accounting for the community's spiritual-ethical context.⁴²

³⁹ Samsudin and Kuncoro, "Tradisi Khidmah Dalam Perspektif Pendidikan Islam."

⁴⁰ Vally Lytra, *Discourse and Religion in Educational Practice*, Cambridge University Press, 2020, <https://research.gold.ac.uk/id/eprint/26611/>.

⁴¹ Mookgo S. Kgatele and Maria Frahm-Arp, "Abuse, Power and Discourse in the Public Trial of Timothy Omotoso," *Verbum et Ecclesia* 43, no. 1 (2022): 8, Gender, <https://doi.org/10.4102/ve.v43i1.2270>.

⁴² BZ Fitri Pebriaisyah et al., "Kekerasan Seksual Di Lembaga Pendidikan Keagamaan: Relasi Kuasa Kyai Terhadap Santri Perempuan Di Pesantren," *Jurnal Harkat: Media Komunikasi Gender*, October 3, 2022, 33-42,

The proliferation of technology and the expansion of digital public space place pesantren both as objects of public discourse and as active agents in constructing counter-narratives. The findings show that teacher's ridha has evolved into a mechanism of cultural-moral resistance, a value-based strategy to resist the reduction of devotion to forced labor. This resistance proceeds ethically and symbolically rather than confrontationally. Teachers and alumni utilize social media as a venue for value-centered dakwah, producing reflective content that portrays santri life, the meaning of khidmah, and the ethics of Islamic education. Through this approach, pesantren develop an ecology of spiritual discourse in which the truths of tradition and the challenges of modernity are negotiated through a moral lexicon rather than frontal polemic.⁴³

This phenomenon demonstrates that teacher's ridha functions not only as an internal spiritual principle but also as cultural capital sustaining the pesantren's moral legitimacy amid media disruption. Socioculturally, pesantren undertake cultural negotiation, adapting to modern media without losing their axiological essence.⁴⁴ Their value-based counter-discourse evidences moral and intellectual maturity in responding to public criticism with wisdom. Thus, pesantren resistance is not an ideological rejection of modernity but an ethical dialogue aimed at preserving spirituality within accelerating processes of secularization of meaning.

Theoretically, these results enrich Islamic educational ethics by positing teacher's ridha as a moral framework integrating adab, blessing, and spiritual freedom. The concept offers a conceptual alternative to secular paradigms of liberty by presenting spiritual freedom rooted in ethical consciousness and the transcendent teacher-student relationship.⁴⁵ Methodologically, the study demonstrates the efficacy of hermeneutic phenomenology in capturing spiritual-moral experience as lived reality, and it underscores the importance of critical discourse analysis for grasping conflicts of meaning in digital public space.⁴⁶

<https://doi.org/10.15408/harkat.v18i2.26183>.

⁴³ Nashihin and Dwi Ahmad Syahrul Munir, "Analisis Produk Digital Santri Sebagai Media Dakwah Pondok Pesantren Sunan Drajat Lamongan Dalam Mensyiarkan Nilai-Nilai Keislaman," *AN-NASHIHA Journal of Broadcasting and Islamic Communication Studies* 3, no. 2 (2023): 66–72, <https://doi.org/10.55352/an-nashiha.v3i2.743>.

⁴⁴ Hefner, "Morality, Religious Authority, and the Digital Edge."

⁴⁵ Ahmed, "Authority, Autonomy and Selfhood in Islamic Education – Theorising Shakhshiyah Islamiyah as a Dialogical Muslim-Self."

⁴⁶ Susan Crowther and Gill Thomson, "From Description to Interpretive Leap:

Practically, the findings yield concrete recommendations for pesantren educational development and public communication. First, establish structured *khidmah* programs that emphasize spiritual reflection so *santri* grasp the value-meanings underlying acts of service. Second, implement pedagogical exemplarity training for teachers to strengthen their moral function as spiritual mentors. Third, build value-based communication strategies, offline and online, so that the meanings of *ridha* and *adab* can be conveyed more broadly to society. While this study employed methodological triangulation (interviews, observation, and FGD) to enhance credibility, potential biases, such as underreporting or social desirability, remain possible. Future research should therefore widen the scope by involving pesantren from more diverse regions and traditions to attain a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of spiritual values in Islamic education.

Conclusion

This study concludes that the concept of *teacher's ridha* constitutes the moral and spiritual foundation that affirms the *pesantren's* position as an ethical educational institution, one that shapes students' character through the discipline of *adab* (proper conduct) and inner awareness, rather than through exploitative power relations. This value lies at the heart of the entire social and pedagogical structure of the *pesantren*, where the teacher–student relationship is built upon love of knowledge, sincerity, and the pursuit of divine blessing. Within this framework, *khidmah* (service) is not oppressive physical labor, but a form of self-education that cultivates patience, humility, and moral responsibility. The findings also reveal that the “*santri slavery*” narrative circulating in social media arises from cultural misunderstanding—an outcome of applying secular paradigms to interpret the *pesantren's* spiritual practices. Accordingly, *teacher's ridha* functions as a symbol of moral resistance against the biases of modernity and as an ethical framework for Islamic education that harmonizes authority with spiritual freedom. Globally, the concept of teacher's *ridha* offers a significant contribution to the theory of Islamic ethical education in the modern era, providing an alternative paradigm that integrates spiritual blessing, moral exemplarity, and experiential learning to counter secular-individualist models of power and freedom. Its implications extend across disciplines, enriching Islamic pedagogy with a value-

centered model of teacher–student relations and offering decolonial ethics a framework for reclaiming indigenous spiritual epistemologies against hegemonic secular narratives. The study affirms that the *pesantren* is not a space of coercion but a moral sphere devoted to nurturing religiosity, humanity, and the blessing of knowledge.

Based on these findings, greater efforts are needed to enhance public literacy concerning the *pesantren*'s educational value system so that the broader society can recognize *santri*'s devotional practices as forms of moral and spiritual education, not social exploitation. Collaboration among government bodies, Islamic educational institutions, and the media is essential to build alternative narratives that portray *pesantren* as centers for character formation, social ethics, and spiritual wisdom. Furthermore, future research should employ an ethnography of communication approach to deepen understanding of the language of values, spiritual expressions, and social dynamics between teachers and students within *pesantren* life. Such an approach would elucidate how *teacher's ridha* is articulated, communicated, and transmitted through daily practice across both traditional and modern *pesantren*. Strengthening cross-disciplinary research and value-based public dissemination will enable *pesantren* to preserve their authenticity while contributing meaningfully to the development of a more humanistic, cultured, and spiritually grounded national educational discourse.

Acknowledgments

The authors would like to express their gratitude to all participants who had contributed to providing the data required during the completion of this research.

References

- Ahmed, Eman I. "Systematic Review of Research on Educational Leadership and Management in Muslim Societies." *Educational Management Administration & Leadership* 51, no. 1 (2023): 52–74. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1741143220973658>.
- Ahmed, Farah. "Authority, Autonomy and Selfhood in Islamic Education – Theorising Shakhshiyah Islamiyah as a Dialogical Muslim-Self." *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 53, no. 14 (2021): 1520–34. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131857.2020.1863212>.
- Aini, Lisa Nur, and Eni Fariyatul Fahyuni. "The Role of Diniyah Madrasah Teachers in Fostering Discipline in Student Learning at Islamic Boarding Schools: Peran Guru Madrasah Diniyah Dalam Menumbuhkan

- Kedisiplinan Belajar Santri Di Pondok Pesantren." *Adabiyah: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 2, no. 2 (2022): 10.21070/adabiyah.v2i2.1650-10.21070/adabiyah.v2i2.1650.
<https://doi.org/10.21070/adabiyah.v2i2.1650>.
- Angraini, Fera, and Muhammad Guntur Alting. "Transformasi Filsafat Moral Dalam Pendidikan Islam." *Mamba'ul 'Ulum*, April 15, 2024, 24–38.
<https://doi.org/10.54090/mu.384>.
- Asrin, Ahmad, and Faisal Musa. "Internalizing Character: A Phenomenological Study of Discipline, Independence, and Simplicity among Pesantren Students in Mandailing Natal." *Eduprof: Islamic Education Journal* 7, no. 2 (2025): 234–52. <https://doi.org/10.47453/eduprof.v7i2.344>.
- Awabin, Muhammad Ramdan, and Asriana Kibtiyah. "Hones the Character of Discipline and Responsibility of Students Through Ro'an Activities at the Walisongo Putra Islamic Boarding School." *Ta dib Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 12, no. 1 (2023): 233–40. <https://doi.org/10.29313/tjpi.v12i1.9026>.
- Crowther, Susan, and Gill Thomson. "From Description to Interpretive Leap: Using Philosophical Notions to Unpack and Surface Meaning in Hermeneutic Phenomenology Research." *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* 19 (January 2020): 1609406920969264.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406920969264>.
- Federico, Christopher M., Hui Bai, and Rafael Aguilera. "Individual and Contextual Moderators of the Relationship between Authoritarianism and Religiosity." *British Journal of Social Psychology* 60, no. 4 (2021): 1436–63. <https://doi.org/10.1111/bjso.12463>.
- Fernández-Ardèvol, Mireia, and Ramon Ribera-Fumaz. "The Network Society Today." *American Behavioral Scientist* 67, no. 7 (2023): 839–46.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/00027642221092800>.
- Firdaini, Maulidia. *Pemikiran Pendidikan Perspektif KH Hasyim Asy'ari Dalam Kitab Adab Al Alim Wa Al Muta'allim*. Universitas Islam Malang, 2023.
- Fitria, Norma. "The Leadership of the Kyai as a Conservative Instrument of the Islamic Boarding School (A Case Study at Pondok Pesantren Hidayatul Qur'an Banjarrejo)." *Nizham Journal of Islamic Studies* 13, no. 01 (2025): 100–115. <https://doi.org/10.32332/nizham.v13i01.10846>.
- Godden, Lorraine, and Benjamin Kutsyuruba. "Hermeneutic Phenomenology." In *Varieties of Qualitative Research Methods: Selected Contextual Perspectives*, edited by Janet Mola Okoko, Scott Tunison, and Keith D. Walker. Springer International Publishing, 2023.
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-04394-9_36.
- Guerrero, Javier Pérez. "Learning How to Decide: A Theory on Moral Development Inspired by the Ethics of Leonardo Polo." *Ethics and*

- Education* 17, no. 3 (2022): 324–43.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/17449642.2022.2102284>.
- Gyollai, Daniel. "Getting into It in the Wrong Way: Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis and the Hermeneutic Circle." *Nursing Philosophy* 21, no. 2 (2020): e12294.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/nup.12294>.
- Hefner, Claire-Marie. "Morality, Religious Authority, and the Digital Edge." *American Ethnologist* 49, no. 3 (2022): 359–73.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/amet.13088>.
- Herman, Deden, Maemunah Sa'diyah, and Rofi Wirawan. "Management of Islamic Education Boarding School Institution." *At Tuots: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam*, 2024, 822–32.
- Hikmah, Fikatul, and Syabuddin Gade. "Konsep Kesuksesan Belajar (Analisis Pandangan Imam Asy-Syafi'i)." *Tadabbur: Jurnal Peradaban Islam* 7, no. 1 (2025): 41–50.
- Ismail, Sulaiman, Hatta Sabri, Hasan Asari, Martinis Yamin, and Marzudi Muhammad Yunus. "Fostering Emotional and Moral Development in Islamic Boarding Schools: The Impact of Talaqqî and Halaqa Traditions." *Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 10, no. 1 (2024): 13–24.
<https://doi.org/10.15575/jpi.v0i0.35124>.
- Janis, Ilyana. "Strategies for Establishing Dependability between Two Qualitative Intrinsic Case Studies: A Reflexive Thematic Analysis." *Field Methods* 34, no. 3 (2022): 240–55.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1525822X211069636>.
- Kgatle, Mookgo S., and Maria Frahm-Arp. "Abuse, Power and Discourse in the Public Trial of Timothy Omotoso." *Verbum et Ecclesia* 43, no. 1 (2022): 8. Gender. <https://doi.org/10.4102/ve.v43i1.2270>.
- Koirala, Kamal Prasad. "Phenomenology: Application for the Exploration of the Live Experiences of Participants and Historical Text." *Pragya Darshan प्रज्ञा दर्शन* 5, no. 2 (2023): 1–4.
- Kurniawati, Wakhidah, and Muhammad Isa Anshory. "Pendidikan Pesantren Di Zaman Teknologi Antara Tradisi Dan Modernitas." *TSAQOFAH* 4, no. 1 (2024): 640–54. <https://doi.org/10.58578/tsaqofah.v4i1.2548>.
- Li, Haoguang, and Songqi Han. "The Paradox of Modernity: The Creation of a Tradition of Anti-Tradition." *Sociology Compass* 19, no. 9 (2025): e70118.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/soc4.70118>.
- Lytra, Vally. *Discourse and Religion in Educational Practice*. Cambridge University Press, 2020. <https://research.gold.ac.uk/id/eprint/26611/>.
- Marhamah, Aulia, Ismi Khairani, Nur Aini, Muhammad Alfayed, and Putri Ani

- Dalimunthe. "Sejarah Dan Perkembangan Pondok Pesantren Di Indonesia." *JPNM Jurnal Pustaka Nusantara Multidisiplin* 3, no. 1 (2025). <https://doi.org/10.59945/jpnm.v3i1.221>.
- Masngudah, Masngudah. "Kontribusi Tradisi Khidmah Dalam Pengembangan Soft Skills Santri Di Pptq Baitul Abidin Darussalam Wonosobo." PhD Thesis, Universitas Islam Sultan Agung Semarang, 2024. <https://repository.unissula.ac.id/37639/>.
- Mogra, Imran. "Maktab Education: A Community Imperative and the Making of Muslim Ambassadors." *British Journal of Religious Education* 46, no. 2 (2024): 180–94. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01416200.2023.2278129>.
- Muafiah, Evi, Lutfiana Dwi Mayasari, Anis Hidayatul Imtihanah, and Bustanul Yuliani. "Gendered Pesantren in Contemporary Indonesia: Female Agency, Institution, and Everyday Lives." *QIJIS (Qudus International Journal of Islamic Studies)* 12, no. 1 (2024): 39–74. <https://doi.org/10.21043/qijis.v12i1.19859>.
- Mulcahy, Dianne, and Leanne Higham. "Beyond Conventional Critique in Education: Embracing the Affirmative." *Critical Studies in Education*, Routledge, 2024, 1–18. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17508487.2024.2371850>.
- Multazam, Syauqi. "Mengkaji Isu Feodalisme Di Pesantren - Mahad Aly Lirboyoy." *Mahad Aly Lirboyoy - Mengakar Dalam Tradisi Berkembang Dengan Inovasi*, July 7, 2025. <https://mahadalylirboyoy.ac.id/mengkaji-isu-feodalisme-pesantren/>.
- Mulya, Wijaya Teguh, Anindito Aditomo, and Anne Suryani. "On Being a Religiously Tolerant Muslim: Discursive Contestations among Pre-Service Teachers in Contemporary Indonesia." *British Journal of Religious Education* 44, no. 1 (2021): 66–79. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01416200.2021.1917338>.
- Najib, Khotim Hanifudin, Muhamad Agus Mushodiq, Prabowo Adi Widayat, and Elyas Djufri. "'Serve and Ngalap Berkah': Motivation to Be An Islamic Boarding School Teacher." *12 Waiheru* 10, no. 2 (2024): 115–25. <https://doi.org/10.70872/12waiheru.v10i2.181>.
- Nashihin, and Dwi Ahmad Syahrul Munir. "Analisis Produk Digital Santri Sebagai Media Dakwah Pondok Pesantren Sunan Drajat Lamongan Dalam Mensyiarkan Nilai-Nilai Keislaman." *AN-NASHIHA Journal of Broadcasting and Islamic Communication Studies* 3, no. 2 (2023): 66–72. <https://doi.org/10.55352/an-nashiha.v3i2.743>.
- Nawawi, Muhammad Gufron, and Habibi Al Amin. "Optimalisasi Perlindungan Hak Anak Melalui Lembaga Pesantren Anak (Studi Kasus Pondok Pesantren Miftahul Muftadiin Nganjuk)." *Al Maqashidi: Jurnal Hukum Islam Nusantara* 8, no. 1 (2025): 181–97.

<https://doi.org/10.32665/almaqashidi.v8i1.5013>.

Oksala, Johanna. "Neoliberal Subjectivation: Between Foucault and Marx." *Critical Inquiry* 49, no. 4 (2023): 581–604. <https://doi.org/10.1086/725022>.

Pahutar, Agus Anwar, Dame Siregar, Khairul Firdaus, et al. "Studi Islam Dengan Pendekatan Fenomenologis." *Dakwatul Islam* 8, no. 2 (2024): 156–73. <https://doi.org/10.46781/dakwatulislam.v8i2.1069>.

Pallathadka, Harikumar, Sulieman Ibraheem Shelash Al-Hawary, Iskandar Muda, Susilo H. Surahman, Ammar Abdel Amir Al-Salami, and Zarina Nasimova. "The Study of Islamic Teachings in Education: With an Emphasis on Behavioural Gentleness." *HTS Teologiese Studies* 79, no. 1 (2023): 7. <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v79i1.8193>.

Parlan, Hening Puwati, Andriyani, and Nurmalia Lusida. "Problematika Pesantren Dan Lembaga Pendidikan Islam." *Reslaj: Religion Education Social Laa Roiba Journal* 6, no. 11 (2024): 5067–82. <https://doi.org/10.47467/reslaj.v6i11.3691>.

Pebriaisyah, BZ Fitri, Wilodati Wilodati, and Siti Komariah. "Kekerasan Seksual Di Lembaga Pendidikan Keagamaan: Relasi Kuasa Kyai Terhadap Santri Perempuan Di Pesantren." *Jurnal Harkat: Media Komunikasi Gender*, October 3, 2022, 33–42. <https://doi.org/10.15408/harkat.v18i2.26183>.

Rahmawati, Anisa. "Makna Cinta Rindu Dan Ridho Perspektif Al-Ghazali Dalam Kitab Ihya Ulumuddin." PhD Thesis, UIN Fatmawati Sukarno Bengkulu, 2022. <http://repository.iainbengkulu.ac.id/9987/>.

Samino, Samino, and Fitri Nur Mahmudah. "Manajemen Pendidikan Karakter Santri Dalam Menjawab Tantangan Modernitas Zaman Di Era Globalisasi." *Jurnal Syntax Admiration* 4, no. 11 (2023): 2244–61. <https://doi.org/10.46799/jsa.v4i11.916>.

Samsudin, Samsudin, and Anis Tyas Kuncoro. "Tradisi Khidmah Dalam Perspektif Pendidikan Islam." *Jurnal Progress: Wahana Kreativitas Dan Intelektualitas* 10, no. 1 (2022). https://scholar.archive.org/work/55rsuksrlzeqjpjtoecemod6ozy/access/wayback/https://publikasiilmiah.unwahas.ac.id/index.php/PROGRESS/article/download/6383/pdf_1.

Siregar, Muhamad Arifin, and Winarno Winarno. "Penanaman Karakter Mandiri Dan Tanggung Jawab Melalui Program Pengabdian Santri Di Pesantren Islam Al Irsyad Tenganan Kabupaten Semarang." *Jurnal Asy-Syukriyyah* 25, no. 1 (2024): 107–27. <https://doi.org/10.36769/asy.v25i1.478>.

Smith, Jonathan A., and Megumi Fieldsend. *Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis*. American Psychological Association, 2021. <https://psycnet.apa.org/record/2021-54192-008>.

- Subair, Muh, Syamsurijal Syamsurijal, Rismawidiawati Rismawidiawati, Idham Idham, Abu Muslim, and Muhammad Nur. "Multilingualism, Technology, and Religious Moderation in Indonesian Islamic Boarding Schools." *International Journal of Language Education* 8, no. 3 (2024). <https://doi.org/10.26858/ijole.v8i3.66498>.
- Supriyono, Bambang Sumintono, and Lukman Nul Hakim. "Critical Islamic Educational Leadership: Investigating How Islamic Pedagogic Models Shape Leadership Practices." *British Journal of Religious Education*, Routledge, 2025, 1–18. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01416200.2025.2542225>.
- Taisir, Muhammad, Ahmad Sanusi, and Ahmad Aprillah. "Integrating Khidmah and Tarbiyah: A Service-Learning Model in Indonesia's Islamic Boarding School Education." *Al-Hayat: Journal of Islamic Education* 9, no. 2 (2025): 347–68.
- Thoriq, Jamal, and Muhammad Isa Anshory. "Pembaharuan Pendidikan Di Pondok Tahfidz Dan Pesantren Modern (PTPM) Al-Huda Cawan." *TSAQOFAH* 4, no. 1 (2024): 742–56. <https://doi.org/10.58578/tsaqofah.v4i1.2568>.
- Ulum, Miftachul, and Abdul Mun'im. "Etika Pendidikan Dalam Perspektif Imam Ghazali." *Journal of Islamic Education* 2, no. 1 (2024): 45–51. <https://doi.org/10.61231/jie.v2i1.263>.
- Uyun, Muhamad, and Idi Warsah. "Prospective Teachers' Intercultural Sensitivity alongside the Contextual Factors as the Affective Domain to Realize Multicultural Education." *International Journal of Instruction* 15, no. 4 (2022).
- Warsah, Idi. "Religious Educators: A Psychological Study of Qur'anic Verses Regarding al-Rahmah." *Al Quds* 4, no. 2 (2020): 275–98. <https://doi.org/10.29240/alquds.v4i2.1762>.
- Warsah, Idi, Ruly Morganna, Berliani Aslam Alkiromah Warsah, and Bizikrika Hably Hudaya Warsah. "The Integration of Islamic Values in Cognitive Development." *FOKUS Jurnal Kajian Keislaman Dan Kemasyarakatan* 9, no. 2 (2024): 212–26.