

# Inclusion of Pluralism Character Education in the Islamic Modern Boarding Schools During the Pandemic Era

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# Inclusion of Pluralism <sup>3</sup> Character Education in the Islamic Modern Boarding Schools During the Pandemic Era

## <sup>2</sup> Abstract

This study aims to investigate the challenges of developing character education based on Islamic pluralism in the curriculum of Modern Islamic Boarding Schools in the Pandemic era. The research location is the modern Islamic boarding school Gontor in East Java Province. The qualitative research design with a phenomenological approach examines five central aspects of character education development based on Islamic pluralism: religiosity, independence, integrity, mutual cooperation, and nationalism. The findings reveal that the primary challenge in developing character education is the lecturers' unequal ability to develop an effective character education curriculum. Not all lecturers have qualified competencies to integrate character values into their teaching subjects. Studies have yet to address character values in the curriculum in the learning process. Meanwhile, external challenges minimally affect the development of character education because the modern Islamic boarding school in Gontor has five aspects of character education development strongly supporting the modern *pesantren* curriculum. The readiness of the *pesantren* curriculum can form a strong character to face challenges. *Pesantren* involves aspects of knowledge and habit, continuously practiced while maintaining the health protocols recommended by the government. The expected implication is <sup>3</sup> that stakeholders consistently provide intervention and reinforcement in the long term. Thus, character education based on Nusantara Islamic Pluralism in modern Islamic boarding schools can realize the ideals of the goals of national education and benefit humanity.

*Keywords:* character education, Islamic Pluralism, curriculum, Modern Islamic Boarding School

## Introduction

Entering the modern era, education in Indonesia confronts many challenges. A shift in culture, morality, and people's behavior existed, not aligning with the *Pancasila* philosophy. It concerns educators, experts, and the government (Sutijono, 2010). In the process, teaching reform promotes lasting pedagogical change. Character formation is needed to form humans' understanding of their identity so that they can answer the challenges of today's civilization (Aningsih et al., 2022; Subaidi, 2020; Allen et al., 2018). The study states a paradigm shift in education in the 21st century, where people tend to focus more on education, stressing academic ability instead of building a solid character. The pandemic era has changed the paradigm where parents have started to worry about their children's character. Their limited knowledge of the character education values negatively influences students' attitudes and behavior (Rahim et al., 2016).

Since the beginning of the emergence of character education as a general goal of learning and character education in formal educational institutions, the government's responsibility is growing bigger (Jamilah, 2021). Mainly it is because Indonesia consists of many tribes, races, cultures, and religions besides various traditions. Character education through understanding

based on local wisdom is a severe concern for the government (Budiwibowo & Wuryantoro, 2018). The number of differences and diversity, better known as plurality, as in the motto *Bhineka Tunggal Ika*, impacts the behavior of community pluralism. Previous research explained that pluralism-based character education is a strategic step in minimizing social conflicts. Pluralism can imply action on the recognition of freedom of religion, thought, and personality maturity beneficial in building the attitudes and behavior of students (Suri & Chandra, 2021). However, some contradictory studies state that pluralism is not very helpful in solving the problems faced by the legal system in Indonesia (Fatmawati, 2021). Although there are still many pros and cons to religious pluralism, various studies have proven its positive impact on the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia (NKRI), especially for minorities (Tachie & Kariyana, 2022).

Contras have also emerged since the issuance of the fatwa of the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI) No. 7 in 2005, firmly rejecting the notion of negative pluralism from an ideological point of view (Hasyim, 2015; Nasir, 2014; Hosen, 2012; Basya, 2011). Meanwhile, the opposing groups are worried about the negative impact of religious pluralism threatening the purity of Islamic teachings from the theological aspect (Hefner, 2020). Strengthening Character Education (PPK) is a movement the Indonesian government launched through the Ministry of Education and Culture in 2016 in response to the challenges of modernity in the 21st century. It continues to develop until now by building various educational programs based on an integrated and more modern curriculum. One of the formal educational institutions contributing a lot to shaping character education is the modern Islamic boarding school.

Modern boarding schools are Islamic educational institutions in Indonesia. The inherent characteristic is education as a pedagogical learning foundation integrating science with the art of teaching to shape the nation's character (Budiarto, 2022; Ma'Arif, 2018). Many parents decide to send their children to modern Islamic boarding schools so that their children's character becomes religious. However, they still get general lessons, keep up with the times, and can socialize with the community (Saefudin, 2021). The concerns of Muslim parents about the influence of western culture have made modern *pesantren* chosen as an alternative to protect their children. The modern Islamic boarding school Gontor is one of the best in Indonesia. This Islamic boarding school is a pioneer and innovator of modern *pesantren* inspired by Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, the founder of Aligarh Muslim from the University in India, accomplishing the modernization of Islamic education. Thanks to the modern Islamic boarding school Gontor, many other *pesantren* have adopted the system implemented at the

*pesantren*. Its popularity has spread to foreign countries and has increasingly existed by establishing *Kulliyatul Mu'alamin Al-Islamiah* (KMI), equivalent to Middle School. The Darussalam Institute of Islamic Studies (ISID) called Darussalam University (UNIDA) Gontor provides education up to Strata 3 level (Zarkasyi, 2020). UNIDA Gontor was officially established with the Decree of the Minister of Education and Culture Darussalam Gontor on July 4, 2014. In development, there have been some criticisms of the modern Islamic boarding school of Gontor. *Pesantren* Gontor is considered not to require mastery of the classical yellow book (*kutub at-turats*) but instead focuses on mastering modern and light Arabic (Fatihah, 2018). UNIDA Gontor has a noble vision, namely to produce a cadre of Islamic teachers per the spirit of *Trimurti*, the founder of the Gontor Modern Islamic Boarding School, preaching through education (Nurmaydha et al., 2018).

The pandemic era has substantially modified the world of education. Many formal education institutions had to work hard to adapt; some were left behind or even failed, giving rise to many new problems and challenges. Studies mention that the challenge of character development is very religious. For example, internal challenges in the form of educational orientation still prioritize success in the cognitive aspect. Moreover, educational practices still refer to the philosophy of rationalism; teachers' abilities and character are still low.

Additionally, unsupportive school culture and culture, educational personnel, and educational software, the character values developed by the school are still weak. Thus, schools have been unable to create an effective curriculum (Jhon, 2021). In addition, external challenges include globalization, community development, changes in the social environment, and technological developments (Wua et al., 2022; Abidin et al., 2020).

Of these various challenges, no previous research has addressed in-depth the challenges of developing Nusantara Islamic Pluralism-Based Character Education in the Curriculum of Modern Islamic Boarding Schools in the Pandemic Era. It is critical to reveal the challenges faced by modern *pesantren* to outstandingly contribute to the goals of character education with Islamic pluralism and its distinctive curriculum to achieve a noble vision. Previous research explained that Islamic pluralism in the curriculum of modern *pesantren* in Indonesia is a new chapter in Islamic educational institutions combining the national education curriculum, local wisdom typical of the archipelago, and the repertoire of modern scholarship (Subaidi, 2020). Understanding religious pluralism included in the modern *pesantren* curriculum positively affects students' behavior. Those understanding the vitality of religious harmony and cultural diversity help implement them in everyday life (Hidayat & Ahmad,

2022; Purwanto et al., 2021). The perceived impact disclosed that the issue of religious conflict rarely hits the modern Islamic boarding school environment.

### **Research Question**

The formulation of the research question follows, using the background of this problem: “How are the Challenges of Developing Character Education Based on Nusantara Islamic Pluralism in the Curriculum of Modern Islamic Boarding Schools in the Pandemic Era in East Java?”

## **Literature Review**

### **Character Building**

Education is a process of learning habits, skills, and knowledge from generation to generation. Meanwhile, the character is understood as an accumulation of character, nature, and personality leading to beliefs and habits conducted daily. Thus, character education is a planned and directed learning process for the growth and development of all potential learners having good character traits, good morals, and a positive construction effect on nature and society (Lapsley, 2007). Character education is integrated into the learning curriculum, and school culture functions to develop self-potential to live a good life (Hartono et al., 2018). Previous research revealed what Ki Hajar Dewantara conveyed about character education to the extent that people can become strong by increasing the dimensions of thought (literacy), heart (ethics and spiritual), taste (aesthetics), and sports (kinesthetic). These four dimensions work together to face various challenges of a nation’s character shifting (Berkowitz & Bier, 2004).

In a formal environment, character education can shape students’ character to become individuals with a noble character, good morality and behavior, and rigid and tolerant. In this case, three known functions of character education are present. First is the function of forming and developing the potential for positive thinking, conscientiousness, good behavior, and noble character. The second is strengthening and improving to fulfill responsibilities, improve, and strengthen the role of individuals, families, educational institutions, and the community together with the government. The third is the filter function covering selecting and sorting out the national culture, filtering other national cultures not aligning with the character and culture of the nation itself (Lickona, 2006). The literature reveals five primary characteristics in character education development: religiosity, nationalism, integrity, independence, and mutual cooperation. Factors influencing these five characters are instincts,

habits, heredity, and social environment (Khaironi, 2017). The literature poses that character education needs to involve stakeholders built through routine activities and support for teacher competence. Strengthening can be built by integrating co-curricular and extracurricular activities in the formal education environment (Supratno et al., 2018).

### **Religious Pluralism Theory**

Pluralism contains at least a fundamental understanding of modern society. First, pluralism is a descriptive expression of de facto religious pluralism. The internal pluralism of religion shows a differentiation within the religion, demanding freedom from that religion in determining its boundaries. Second, pluralism also means public acknowledgment of the existence of a particular religion, followed by state or public recognition. Religious pluralism in this context rejects free-market liberalism and the religion-free market because religion has limits on social acceptance. Third, pluralism is a value similar to the demands of multiculturalism (Anam, 2019). Pluralism becomes an imperative considered reasonable and guarantees individual freedom where religious freedom is derived (Beckford, 2003). Pluralism tries to find commitment among particularities that will later become morals creating conditions for a pattern of people living side by side in the existing diversity (Grant, 1973). The study states that if someone understands the existence of pluralism, then this attitude can create a calm, peaceful social environment, help each other, and think ahead. From the economic aspect, it can take advantage of plurality as a source of income or the like (Chaves & Gorski, 2001).

In general, people experiencing behavioral changes due to pluralism fall into three groups; (1) affective behavior, namely everything related to attitudes, character, behavior, interests, and emotions arising from the community environment; (2) cognitive behavior, namely behavioral changes based on their mindset; (3) psychomotor behavior, namely the ability or skill of a person to do something after receiving learning in a particular field (Effendy, 2001). When associated with the concept of social conditions, pluralism offers many benefits. First, pluralism builds independence; that is, the readiness and ability of individuals to stand alone with a marked attitude of the initiative. Thus, people can show real behavior without feeling pressured, controlled, and watched by others. Second, freedom provides the ability to act without coercion, control, and power to choose one's actions in a social and cultural institution. Third, pluralism fosters mutual respect for diverse ethnicities, races, and religions. Fourth, it also nurtures an attitude of tolerance without discrimination against societal

differences. People can get the opportunity to observe cultural traditions and their perspectives according to their culture (Ibrahim, 2013).

### **Modern Islamic Boarding School**

Modern Islamic boarding schools or referred to as *khalafiyah*, *'ashriyah* or *al-haditsiyyah* are the opposite of *salaf pesantren* (*salafiyah*). Although no specific definitions and criteria for modern *pesantren* exist, they have characteristics differentiating them from *salaf pesantren* and other educational institutions; (1) learning foreign languages, especially Arabic and English, is prioritized; (2) having formal schools under the curriculum of National Education Ministry and/or MoRA (Ministry of Religious Affairs) from SD/MI, MTS/SMP, MA/SMA, and tertiary institutions; (3) learning the yellow book is only the basics; (4) not using the traditional recitation system (such as *sorogan*, *wetonan*, and *bandongan*); (5) using contemporary Arabic literature (not classics/yellow books); (6) being administratively the same as formal schools with higher financial costs than *salaf pesantren*; (7) from a scientific perspective, it is more about character education compared to mastering Islamic scientific disciplines such as interpretation, hadith science, and fiqh (Qomar, 2005). The study explains that each *pesantren* has a different learning system concerning curriculum, methods, and the books studied. The curriculum in modern *pesantren* tends to be strong in Arabic conversation. That is why Islamic boarding schools are educational institutions shaping the character of the Muslim community for the better because the curriculum follows the development of Islamic civilization (Tolib, 2015).

The Islamic cultural traditions of the Archipelago inherent in the character of modern *pesantren* are the fundamental values that are better (*al-ashlah*) and keeping the good (*al-shalih*). Previous research revealed that the cultural climate of the *pesantren* impacts the religious attitude of the *santri* (students). In essence, modern *pesantren* still adhere to the goals of the afterlife in their way not conflicting with Islamic law (Pasi et al., 2020). They become more socialist and productive and love their natural surroundings. Moral dedication and the decline in religious morals can be minimized by learning methods in modern Islamic boarding schools where the cultural climate, including socio-cultural, community, and agribusiness, supports the growth and development of children (Ihsan et al., 2021). Modern Islamic boarding schools are also known as the method of moral or character education. This moral education conveys knowledge about morals depicting good and bad things in human life in the form of physical education and spiritual education (Karnaen, 2013).

## **Methodology**

### **Research design**

The research design was qualitative with a phenomenological approach. Qualitative research design uncovers and cognizes something behind the phenomenon that is still minimal or unknown (Creswell, 2009). The goal to be achieved was to investigating the Challenges of Developing Character Education Based on Islamic Pluralism in the Modern Islamic Boarding School Curriculum in the Pandemic Era in East Java. This study sees that reality has its dynamics, constantly changing the participants' perceptions. Therefore, qualitative research uses a phenomenological approach to understand what happened according to the point of view of the person experiencing it (first-hand experience). Researchers must learn directly from educators and education staff experiencing it to find the essence of the meaning of character education based on Islamic pluralism in the curriculum of modern *pesantren*. Researchers conduct understanding through observation, semi-structured interviews of research subjects, and documentary studies. Then, the research location is the Modern Islamic Boarding School - Darussalam University (UNIDA) Gontor in Ponorogo district, East Java. The research lasted one semester, precisely in the odd semester of the 2021-2022 academic year.

### **Participants**

No standard exists regarding the number of informants in phenomenological research (Parse et al., 1985). In this study, the researcher set the number of participants to ten based on the opinion of Iii et al. (2006), stating that for phenomenological research, it is recommended to have between three to 15 participants. Participants consisted of educators and UNIDA Gontor education staff. The chosen participants were uniform, so we could get informants who had experienced the phenomenon to be studied. Hopefully, the uniform informants can produce more natural and valid data.



**Table 1**  
*Participant Description*

<i>Description</i>	<i>Number of participants</i>
Gender	
male	7
female	3
Age	
>30 year	2
<30 year	8
Educators and Educational Personnel	
Leader of UNIDA Gontor	1
Undergraduate study program	2
Postgraduate	4
Academic staff	2
Total	10

### **Data Collection Technique**

Data collection activities aim to obtain in-depth information about an issue or theme in research and are a process of proving information obtained through previous techniques. This study's data collection techniques included observation, interviews, and documentary studies. Direct observation and interviews were conducted to optimize the researcher's abilities concerning motives, beliefs, attention, unconscious behavior, and habits. The following summarizes the data collection procedure in this study. First is the Preparation Stage. It includes searching for information related to Character Education, Islamic Pluralism, and Modern Islamic Boarding School Curriculum from literature studies.

Furthermore, conducting a preliminary study involves using observations and looking for subjects, aligning with the research, and making an interview framework. The second stage covers the implementation of research by meeting participants when the researcher explains the intent and purpose of conducting this research. Researchers agreed on a timeframe for the confidentiality of the data obtained. Researchers conducted interviews using the framework prepared and determined previously. The third step includes writing a transcript of the recorded interview results and collecting related documents, such as the Internal Quality Assurance System (SPMI) guidelines, official government regulatory documents, and UNIDA Gontor Rector's Decree related to the higher education curriculum.

### **Research Data Analysis**

Data analysis in this study employed Phenomenological Analysis from Creswell (2009). According to Creswell, qualitative data analysis using a phenomenological approach involves six data analysis steps. The first step includes describing personal experiences regarding the phenomenon under study, namely the Challenges of Developing Character Education Based

on Islamic Pluralism in Nusantara in the Curriculum of Modern Islamic Boarding Schools in the Pandemic Era. Then, developing a list of key statements for observations and interviews pursue. The third stage is taking crucial statements and grouping them into larger units of information called "meaning units" or themes. In the fourth step, a textural description of "what" the participants experienced with the phenomenon occurs. The fifth step includes describing "how" the experience happened structurally. Writing a combined description of the phenomenon, joining textural and structural descriptions, is the subject of the sixth step. This part is the "essence" of experience and is the pinnacle aspect of the phenomenology study. Thus, the data processing stage is writing a transcript of the recorded interview results. The researcher intervenes in strong statements relevant to the research theme. The researcher breaks down the statements into meanings and groups them into themes. The researcher integrates the themes into the narrative description and makes conclusions and research suggestions. In this study, the researcher tested the validity of the data via a member check, namely a written summary. Then respondents were asked to read and justify the researcher's writing and wrong perceptions (member check). It aims to avoid bias and errors in recording data from research subjects.

### **Results and Discussion**

The findings reveal that the main challenge in developing character education based on Islamic pluralism in the UNIDA Gontor curriculum is the uneven ability of lecturers to develop an effective character education curriculum. In addition, the academic position of lecturers is far from inadequate, and implementing the *Tri Darma* of Higher Education is not optimal for some academic communities to realize the vision, mission, and goals of the *pesantren*. The qualifications of 30 doctoral lecturers out of a total of 224 permanent lecturers have merely given 13%. Based on observations and interviews, not all teachers have sufficient competence to integrate character values into their teaching subjects. Lecturers still need training and development of competence and professionalism to support character education based on the pluralism of Islam Nusantara. The lecturer's understanding of the character education concept has not been comprehensive. Character values in the curriculum have not been appropriately studied to develop the learning process. Using online learning methods has become necessary, especially in a pandemic that requires teachers and students to implement health protocols and distance learning. E-learning and the *Tamrin Lughoh* application (Arabic learning) need other features for lecture topics, online discussion rooms, and quizzes. As stated in the official document on the Internal Quality Assurance System

(SPMI) of the APT, the criteria of the leading performance indicators of the modern Islamic boarding school Gontor are targeted to improve the quality of lecturers (Fadillah, 2015). In 2019, the adequacy ratio of new lecturers and students reached 111%, and the completeness of the curriculum was 100%. Consider data 1.

- (1) “In order to achieve the educational and teaching goals that have been proclaimed, *Pesantren* Gontor develops various educational curricula. The curriculum is the result of the integration of higher education systems and Islamic boarding schools, as stated in the vision and mission. Regulations related to the determination of the Education and Teaching curriculum which have been regulated in the Gontor Statute articles 24, 25, 26, and 27. Refers to the provisions of applicable laws and regulations and the values of Islamic boarding schools. In particular, the curriculum is prepared and developed by each study program in accordance with the National Standards and the Indonesian National Qualifications Framework (KKNI) and with reference to the values of modern boarding schools. These guidelines include Presidential Regulation of the Republic of Indonesia Number 08 of 2012 concerning the Indonesian National Qualifications Framework (KKNI); Regulation of the Minister of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia No. 73 of 2013 concerning the Application of the Indonesian National Qualifications Framework (KKNI) in the field of Higher Education, article 10 paragraph 4 letter b; Minister of National Education Decree No. 232/U/2000 concerning Guidelines for Preparation of Higher Education Curriculum and Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes, Decree of the Minister of National Education No. 045/U/2002 Concerning the Core Curriculum of Higher Education Statute of the University of Darussalam Gontor Ponorogo; UNIDA Gontor Development Master Plan 2014-2040; Decree of the Chancellor of the University of Darussalam Gontor No. 675/UNIDA/R-e/IV/1437 article 19 regarding the Al-Quran Memorizing Program.”

After the learning process is complete, the Islamic Boarding School monitors and evaluates each activity. Every week, weekly monitoring and evaluation are held. This monitoring and evaluation discuss the achievement of the RPS, the presence of lecturers, students, and the punctuality of lectures. At the end of each semester, an evaluation of study programs and faculties related to the learning process and results also occur. Students who were banned either because of *tahfidz*, AKPAM, or attendance, and UAS results, become one of the topics of evaluation discussion. In addition, an evaluation is also held regarding the performance of lecturers per attendance, the content of lecture journals, the suitability of the provision of material with the lesson plans/RPS, and the learning outcomes achieved by students. A curriculum review is conducted within a minimum of 3 years and a maximum of 5 years. It develops and updates the existing curriculum. Previous studies investigated the implementation of *Wasathiyatul Islam* in this *pesantren* curriculum. They reported that the curriculum was based on considerations of *al-khoriyah wa al-afdholiyah*, proportional, and sharia (Yasin, 2019). Apart from faculty lecturers, this review also involves internal and

external stakeholders, graduates, and graduate users. Thus, the curriculum used in learning aims to produce a graduate profile needed by the community.

Meanwhile, external challenges do not substantially impact the development of existing character education. It is because modern Islamic boarding schools have developed a curriculum through five aspects of character education based on Indonesian pluralism. The Development of Islamic Pluralism-Based Character Education in the Darussalam Gontor Islamic Boarding School (*Ponpes*) Curriculum or better known as the Gontor Modern Islamic Boarding School in the Pandemic Era, refers to the Movement for Strengthening Character Education (PPK) launched by the Ministry of Education and Culture in 2017 with five primary character values to be a priority, namely; religious values, nationalism, independence, mutual cooperation, and integrity (Manshuruddin et al., 2019). Consider data 2.

- (2) “In order to face the challenges of character development based on pluralism, which is shown in the pesantren curriculum. We focus on developing character education in five priorities, namely; religious character values that reflect faith in Allah SWT, which is manifested in attitudes and behavior; the value of a nationalist character that shows an attitude of concern and high respect for the nation itself; the value of independent character in building work ethic, fighting power, creativity, and courage; the value of the gotong royong character reflects the spirit of cooperation, good communication, and friendship; and the character values of integrity that underlie committed behavior and morality.”

*Pesantren* Gontor has its distinct curriculum refined from the combination of the curriculum of the Ministry of Education and Culture, the Ministry of Religion, and the Foundation. This combined curriculum comprises compulsory teaching and learning activities (KBM) and extracurricular activities. Notably, compulsory boarding school KBM is an activity scheduled according to the level of education.

#### **Development of Character Education from Religious Aspect**

The development of Character Education from the Religious Aspect manifests in the behavior of conducting religious teachings and beliefs and respecting differences in religions and other beliefs. In building the religious aspect, positive modern values, such as discipline, neatness, punctuality, and hard work, besides modern physical values, are considered. Based on observations, modern values from the religious aspect are notably reflected in the neat dress of the Gontor students and short hair. Amid the Covid-19 condition, learning activities are still well-scheduled because Islamic boarding schools have an adjusted and standardized curriculum. In addition, the interview also revealed that the pesantren has an additional

curriculum of the religious aspect to support students with a memorization program called the special *Tahfidz* Al Quran. This program targets at least half a juz (ten pages) in one month. Previous research has revealed that the modern Islamic boarding school in Gontor is one of the concrete pieces of evidence of how *Islamic Wasathiyah* values are developed to the best possible extent. Consider data 3.

- (3) “Santri is the guardian of the Islamic wasathiyah, which characterizes Indonesia and the life of Muslims in the world. The existence of Islamic boarding schools is very significant so that the values of Islamic wasathiyah are well maintained.”

From data 2, Islamic boarding schools also aim to realize *Islamic wasathiyah* attitudes, namely, faith and tolerance of the character and personality of students relying on monotheism as the foundation for Islamic teachings and upholding balance. It is also why previous studies suggest that many parents send their children to modern boarding schools so that their children's character becomes religious but still gets general lessons, keeps up with the times, and socialize with the community (Saefudin, 2021). According to Nurmaydha et al. (2018), UNIDA Gontor has a noble vision of producing a cadre of Islamic teachers under the *Trimurti* spirit of the founder of the Gontor Modern Islamic Boarding School, preaching through education. The cultural climate of the pesantren can support the religious attitude of the *santri*. They become more socialized and productive and engage with their natural surroundings through socio-cultural, community, and agribusiness activities to support children's growth and development (Ihsan et al., 2021). Islamic boarding school character education from the religious aspect can shape students' character, helping them become pious individuals.

#### **Development of Character Education from the Nationalist Aspect**

Character Education Development from the Nationalist Aspect relates to the appreciation of the nation's own culture, **protecting the environment, obeying the law and discipline, and respecting cultural, ethnic, and religious diversity**. Although there are pros and cons, modern pesantren are more moderate, namely accepting nationalism as long as it is used per Islamic teachings and does not violate the Shari'a. Nationalism suggests love for the homeland, liberating the country from foreign imperialism, and strengthening the brotherhood ties among fellow compatriots. Consider data 4.

- (4) “The development of character education from the nationalist aspect teaches students about love for the homeland and fighting to defend the interests of the nation and

state. In one hadith narrated by Bukhari 7/161, it is said that when the Prophet migrated to Medina, he prayed, 'O Allah, make us love Medina as we love Mecca or more.' So even though the pesantren does not do that, it will never party, but that does not mean that it does not love its homeland. Pesantren Gontor fights for independence with the best education, namely nurturing and educating the people.”

Based on this explanation, Islamic boarding schools support the development of nationalist aspects through educational curricula to teach peace and prevent radicalism. Nationalism education is also taught through Scout extracurricular activities. It characteristically depicts the development of character education from the nationalist aspect of the modern Gontor Islamic boarding school. What is unique is that if there are children from *Kyai* Pesantren staying in Gontor, they must be placed as Scout administrators. Gontor's educational philosophy states, “A good Scout must be a good *Kyai* for the people and the nation.” The nationalist aspect can encourage attitudes to place the interests of the nation and state above the interests of themselves and their groups. *Pesantren* has extracurricular activities in social sciences, such as speeches, sermons, and *Bilal*. This activity can also support the nationalist aspect. As explained (Darda, 2018), this *pesantren* has a symbolic relationship-mutualism curriculum, and social reconstruction is prepared based on the needs of students manifested in the practice of character education, including scouts, *muhadharah*, and *muhadatsah*. Other modern *pesantren* have broadly adopted the practice of character education from this aspect of nationalism. This nationalism character education is reflected as students habitually sing the Muslim Subahil march (Permana et al., 2021).

The various life systems that have become the characteristics of Islamic boarding schools are still maintained and standardized. However, they must confront the Covid 19 pandemic, namely the *Kulliyatul Mu'allimin Al Islamiyah* system, the system of leadership, parenting, teaching, education, funding, and regeneration. These systems are very beneficial in character development from the national aspect. According to Yuwafik & Zuhriyah (2021), the role of interpersonal communication among *pesantren* leaders urges the spirit of nationalism in pesantren. Also, it supports efforts to build relationships related to joint de-radicalization across religious communities to maintain tolerance. However, during the Covid 19 pandemic, Scouting activities were still limited under the circular letter of the *pesantren* referring to government policies related to the implementation of physical distancing to break the chain of the coronavirus spread. Therefore, the Ministry of Religion allowed students to return to Islamic boarding schools by following the recommendations for health protocols as stated in the East Java Governor's Letter no.188/3344/101.1/2020, dated May 29, 2020. Nevertheless, Islamic boarding schools have remained cautious in deciding on activities that can be done

and cannot be performed for a while until the conditions are really safe and under control. During the 14-day quarantine period, students learn using online learning methods. Following the quarantine, they can directly learn according to the existing curriculum.

### **Character Education Development from Integrity Aspect**

This aspect includes an attitude of responsibility, consistency of actions and words based on the truth, respect for individual dignity, and being able to set an example. According to Gontor's official website, this purely Islamic educational institution is not affiliated with any political party or community organization, one of the principles that has been valid up-to-date. For the daily tasks and obligations of the *pesantren*, an executive body (after the death of the founders of the *Pondok*) oversees, elected by the *Waqf* Board every five years. This leader is also obliged to take care of the students per the *sunnah* of the PMDG Education Center. Islamic boarding schools have integrity that should not be violated. One includes the prohibition of carrying cellphones and gadgets. Sanctions for violating these rules are exceedingly solemn because they are considered severe violations in Islamic boarding schools. Consider data 5.

- (5) “Pesantren has a number of rules that must be obeyed by the students. One of them is the prohibition of using cell phones in Islamic boarding schools. This is a form of integrity education to be able to totally implement the rules with full sincerity, sincerity, and high patience for the common good. To have integrity, a deep understanding is required. The *pesantren* must animate, understanding alone is not enough, and one must have excellent sincerity in carrying out the tasks given. In Gontor, there are three kinds of loyalty that arise from the aspect of integrity, namely loyalty to the soul, loyalty to the system, and loyalty to the leadership. This means that every member of the boarding school must have the readiness to obey and obey the existing order.”

In this case, the integrity aspect is non-negotiable and thus final, written, and unwritten. The Five Souls of *Pondok* summarizes what is written: sincerity, simplicity, independence, *ukhuwah Islamiyyah*, and freedom. These values are also contained in the motto and philosophy of the *pesantren*. Meanwhile, the orientation of the *pesantren* is towards the community, as a place for *thalabul ilmi* and will never party. Consider data 6.

- (6) “Totality means thinking as a whole, not sectoral, let alone halfway. Nor do you think just to look for the good, just looking for safety, *aka nunut Kamukten* or ride on honor.”



Thus, totality is the fruit of integrity to the *pesantren*. During the pandemic, these *pesantren* apply health protocols as a form of integrity to the applicable rules to show a form of exemplary. *Pesantren* health protocols include (1) prohibiting the visit of guardians of students and guests for an indefinite period of time; (2) if you receive guests, you must check the temperature with a thermometer gun, besides mild sterilization with a hand sanitizer or disinfectant; (3) banning the delivery of packages in any form from the guardian of the *santri* (if they are received, they must be sterilized); (4) prohibiting students and teachers from traveling outside the *pesantren*; (5) improving hygiene by maintaining ablution and washing hands with soap; (6) reading a prayer to avoid disease as a form of effort. According to Umar et al. (2021), it is why the modern Islamic boarding school Gontor is a tangible manifestation of the totality of life and teaches about the development of real character education, namely by implementing health protocols under Islamic values. That is why Gontor is referred to as one of the Islamic educational institutions deliberately created, formed, colored, and inspired to educate and foster students. Leaders having the integrity to make the *pesantren* achieve a noble vision, mission, and goals are one of the critical factors supporting this aspect (Busyairi, 2017). This aspect of integrity can give birth to a mental revolution that will be reflected in the character of students who can provide the maximum benefit to the community.

### **Character Education Development from Independent Aspects**

Character Education Development from the Independent Aspect refers to lifelong learners using all energy, thought, and time to realize hopes, dreams, and ideals. Character education from the independent aspect is shown by the existence of several training centers and cooperatives, also intended to facilitate the education and teaching process in Islamic boarding schools. In addition, four *pesantren* policies exist to achieve the strategic goal of *santri* independence. The first involves strengthening the function of *pesantren* in producing superior human resources, religious knowledge, skills in work, and entrepreneurship. The second is about reinforcing *pesantren* in managing business units as economic resources. The third encompasses strengthening Islamic boarding schools as community economics. Next is strengthening the role of the Ministry of Religion in realizing the *Pesantren* Independence program. Notably, this policy accentuates the values of inclusiveness, facilitation, collaboration, and transparency. To support the development of character education from an independent aspect, the Ministry of Religion has also set a roadmap or a road map for Islamic Boarding School Independence for 2021-2024. In 2022, there will be the launch of



*Pesantren*-Owned Enterprises (BUM-Pes), Santripreneurs, the Islamic Boarding School Digital Economy platform, and a replication of the independence program. Consider data 7.

- (7) “Islamic boarding schools have institutions that were formed in order to facilitate the process of education and teaching. In addition, this institution is also intended to develop the character of students to be independent and able to adapt to the community. The four institutions are; (1) Community Management and Development Training Center (PLMPM); (2) Darussalam Gontor Modern Pondok Development Section (BPPMDG); (3) *Pondok Pesantren* Cooperatives (Kopontren), namely business units owned by Pondok; (4) Santri and Community Health Center (BKSM) is a health service unit for students and the community.”

From data 4, the modern Islamic boarding school of Gontor is one of the valuable assets that can develop character education from an independent aspect in various institutional activities and social organizations. The development of the *halal* restaurant concept is one of the concrete steps taken in shaping aspects of economic independence (Nurmaydha et al., 2019). The government appreciates *pesantren* for their contribution to building the functions of *pesantren* (education, preaching, and community empowerment) as indicated by the stipulation of October 22 as *Santiri Day*. Even the President signed Presidential Decree No. 82/2021 on Funding for the Implementation of Islamic Boarding Schools, containing points regarding the *Pesantren* Endowment Fund. This *pesantren* independence policy aims to create a *pesantren* with strong and sustainable economic resources.

#### **Character Education Development from the Mutual Cooperation Aspect**

The development of character education from the *gotong-royong* (mutual cooperation) aspect is discernible from the many institutions or organizations under the leadership of the *pesantren*. These institutions encourage the emergence of aspects of *gotong royong* developed from the elementary, secondary, tertiary, and alumni levels. *Pesantren* have built at least five institutions. First is the *Kulliyatul Mu'allimin/Mu'allimat al-Islamiyah*, an educational institution at the level of Tsanawiyah and Aliyah. The second is Darussalam University (UNIDA), an Islamic boarding school institution with seven faculties at levels S1, S2, and S3. The third includes the student caregivers overseeing the Modern Pondok Student Organization (OPPM), the Front Group Coordinator (Scout), and the UNIDA Student Council (DEMA). The fourth is the *Pondok Modern* Waqf Maintenance & Expansion Foundation (YPPWPM), dealing with fundraising, maintenance, expansion, and asset development institutions. Finally, the fifth one involves the *Pondok Modern* Family Association (IKPM), the official organization of Gontor alumni. Hopefully, with these

educational institutions, students can learn to respect others, work together, be inclusive, help each other, have empathy, and have a sense of solidarity within the organization.

The theory of Lickona (1992) and Dimerman (2009) suggests that to become a human with character requires developing moral and emotional aspects. The moral aspect consists of six things: the development of moral awareness, knowing moral values, perspective-taking, moral reasoning, decision making, and self-knowledge. Meanwhile, the emotional aspects in question include conscience, respect, justice, self-confidence, empathy for others, being able to control oneself, humility, optimism, and integrity.

The system applied by the modern *pesantren* of Gontor is not just jargon and symbols; the *pesantren* implements essential modern values and remains Islamic. The development of learning focuses on students so that they actively develop their interests and potential. Students are not required just to memorize the subject matter. However, they try to construct their knowledge and skills according to their capacity and level of thinking development. Students are invited to contribute to solving problems in the community. Students must be taught to collaborate or cooperate with people from different cultural backgrounds to create an attitude of helping and respecting others. In doing assignments, students are taught how to appreciate the abilities of others. Lecturers develop learning methods connecting students with the real world. To prepare students to become responsible citizens, Islamic boarding schools facilitate students to get involved in their social environment. Laal & Ghodsi (2012) accentuate the main principles of 21st-century learning, suggesting that instruction should be student-centered in completing assignments. They also suggest that education should be collaborative to solve problems, learning should have contests, and schools should be integrated with society, involving groups of students to work together.

Suppose you look at what has been stated in the MUI fatwa in 2005, firmly rejecting pluralism from an ideological point of view. In that case, this refusal arises due to theological concerns. However, this study underlines that the Islamic pluralism of the archipelago in question denotes Islamic pluralism in the concept of social conditions or character education based on the typical social conditions of the archipelago in the *pesantren* education curriculum allowing students to become tolerant of religion and social environment. It needs to be explained by researchers considering that the definition of religious pluralism has its pros and cons and is not a simple term to understand and has different meanings. The literature states that character education is inseparable from the issue of social and political dynamics of the Indonesian nation. Character education is used as a tool by the authorities to support the status quo of the rulers through politics (Husni, 2020).

In the end, although the issue of the weakness of the yellow book teaching hit this modern *pesantren*-based university, its morals were not as good as that of the *Salaf pesantren*, weak in *nahwu* and *sharaf*. It was considered to only focus on teaching Arabic and English. However, UNIDA Gontor could face challenges. Development of Islamic Pluralism-Based Character Education in the Curriculum of Modern Islamic Boarding Schools in the Pandemic Era includes religion, independence, integrity, mutual cooperation, and nationalism. The lack of quality lecturers has improved yearly by increasing the supporting factors as in the UNIDA Gontor Internal Quality Assurance System 2014–2024. Previous studies have revealed HR management strategies for improving the quality of UNIDA Gontor through a professionally and spiritually oriented approach (Maghfiroh & Santosa, 2020). In this context, the Indonesian government believes that preparing the younger generation through character education can result in a mighty nation. Character education is the best place to prepare agents of national change who will bring peace to a pluralist human race (Rokhman et al., 2014). Previous research has disclosed that character education often serves as a tool by the authorities to support the status quo of rulers through political paths (Husni, 2020). However, in the modern *pesantren* environment, politics fails to apply. The modern Islamic boarding school Gontor does not enter into politics, suggesting that its integrity cannot be interfered with just like that. Thus, modern Islamic boarding schools are beyond a place to transfer knowledge and teach the formation of morals, attitudes, behavior, character, and leadership. Thus, it is appropriate to reflect some of the fundamental values and character of the Indonesian nation and instill them into the entire younger generation to build a national character through Islamic boarding schools.

### Conclusion

The results of the research and discussion conclude that the challenge of developing Islamic pluralism-based character education in the modern Islamic boarding school curriculum in the pandemic era depends on the quality of the lecturers who have not been supportive. Therefore, the readiness of the *pesantren* and their all members is critical. The readiness of *pesantren* is more than qualified and modern facilities and encompasses the readiness of lecturers and students. Self-readiness can form a strong character to face challenges. Good character education must involve aspects of knowledge and habit, continuously practiced while maintaining the health protocols recommended by the government. Therefore, communities of character must consistently provide intervention and reinforcement in the long term. In the future, it is exceedingly crucial for the development of character education

to plan to learn and incorporate elements of higher-order thinking based on Islamic values by applying varied, integrated, and more modern approaches and learning models. Thus, modern Islamic boarding school education can realize the nation's ideals to become a peaceful, just, and prosperous society with a distinct national character.

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