



Pesantren Culture And Integrated Systems: Two Patterns of Reinforcing Worship Habituation in The Formation of Children's Religious Character

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Article History:

Received: February 2025

Revised: March 2025

Accepted: April 2025

Published: June 2025

Keywords:

Peer Influence, Santri
Delinquency, Generation Z,
Digital Era, Islamic Education

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Abstract:

This study explains peer dynamics, the forms and factors of Generation Z santri delinquency in the digital era, and Islamic boarding school responses from an Islamic education perspective. A qualitative multisite case study was conducted at Lubbul Labib and Al-Hamidiyah Islamic Boarding Schools in Probolinggo. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with ten informants, consisting of five santri and five administrators or religious teachers, supported by observation and documentation. Data were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña and cross-site analysis. Trustworthiness was maintained through source triangulation, member checking, peer debriefing, and negative case analysis. The findings show that peers operate as a dual social system; digital restrictions do not fully eliminate exposure and may stimulate creative violations; and the effectiveness of character formation is determined more by the institutionalization of personal-dialogical guidance than by sanction severity. These findings are synthesized into the Reflective Institutional Mediation model, which positions the boarding school as an active mediator of social and digital pressures through institutionalized personal guidance that strengthens santri internal control.

INTRODUCTION

Generation Z adolescents, who were born and raised alongside the internet, social media, and an uninterrupted flow of information, now constitute the majority of students (*santri*) in Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) across Indonesia. Ideally, *pesantren*, as Islamic educational institutions, should serve as spaces for moral development, nurturing santri into individuals characterized by strong moral values, discipline, and adherence to Islamic principles, consistent with their founding vision of serving as a moral stronghold for the Muslim community. However, empirical realities do not entirely align with these expectations. Various forms of student misconduct and delinquency, ranging from unauthorized possession of digital devices and leaving the *pesantren* premises without permission to prohibited communication with members of the opposite sex, continue to occur and pose distinct challenges for *pesantren* caregivers and administrators (Abidin, Akmansyah, & Amirudin, 2023). This gap between the ideal

How to Cite:

Alfarisi, S. M., & Hambali (2025) Pesantren Culture And Integrated Systems: Two Patterns of Reinforcing Worship Habituation in The Formation of Children's Religious Character
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of moral education and the actual behavioral patterns of santri constitutes the point of departure for the present study.

Globally, Deloitte's (2022) report on Generation Z indicates that this generation is the first in history to experience primary socialization through digital devices from an early age, resulting in patterns of social interaction, information consumption, and value formation that differ fundamentally from those of previous generations. In the Indonesian context, Hartini (2022), through a psychological review of juvenile delinquency among Generation Z, emphasizes that delinquency within this generation cannot be adequately understood using the same analytical frameworks applied to earlier generations. This is because its underlying determinants and behavioral manifestations have shifted in accordance with distinctive generational characteristics. Such a shift necessitates a multidimensional analytical framework, as adopted in the present study.

Two factors are frequently identified as particularly influential social forces shaping adolescent behavior in residential educational environments: peer influence and the pervasive reach of digital culture. Through his social learning theory, Bandura (1977) explains that adolescent behavior is largely shaped through observation and imitation of their immediate social environment. Meanwhile, Steinberg and Monahan (2007) emphasize that the need for peer acceptance increases substantially during adolescence. In many cases, this pressure may exert a stronger influence on adolescents' decisions than formal institutional rules. These conditions become increasingly complex when combined with the characteristics of Generation Z, which Twenge (2018) describes as the *iGen* generation, whose identities and social relationships have been profoundly shaped by digital technology from an early age. Turkle (2011), meanwhile, characterizes this phenomenon as a digital paradox, whereby increasingly extensive connectivity does not necessarily translate into deeper or healthier social relationships. In the pesantren context, the situation is further complicated by the fact that strict restrictions on digital access do not entirely eliminate santri's exposure to digital culture, as its influence continues to permeate their social environment through peer interactions (Mundiri & Nawiro, 2019).

Previous studies have addressed these issues, but generally from fragmented perspectives. Herlambang, Rini, and Ariyanto (2023), for example, examine the relationship between juvenile delinquency, peer conformity, and self-identity. However, their study focuses on adolescents attending mainstream schools rather than santri living within a 24-hour residential educational system. Conversely, research on santri delinquency, such as that conducted by Abidin, Akmansyah, and Amirudin (2023), has identified various forms and contributing factors of misconduct in pesantren. Nevertheless, it has not positioned peer group dynamics as the primary unit of analysis, nor has it explicitly examined the phenomenon through the analytical framework of Islamic religious education. The present study seeks to address this research gap by investigating how peer group dynamics interact with digital culture in shaping delinquent behavior among Generation Z santri, while simultaneously interpreting this phenomenon through the perspective of Islamic religious education. Accordingly, delinquency is examined not merely as a sociological issue but also as a challenge to moral development, which constitutes a central objective of pesantren education itself.

This study focuses on two research sites deliberately selected because of their distinct institutional characteristics: Pondok Pesantren Lubbul Labib, known for its dynamic and heterogeneous social environment among santri, and Pondok Pesantren Al-Hamidiyah, which implements a comparatively conservative and structured system of student development. These contrasting characteristics are expected to provide a richer understanding of how peer group dynamics and delinquency among Generation Z santri may manifest differently across institutional contexts while remaining interpretable within a shared framework of Islamic religious education.

Based on the foregoing discussion, peer group dynamics and delinquency among Generation Z santri in the digital era constitute an important and urgent subject of investigation. This urgency stems from the substantial influence of peer groups and digital culture on the behavioral development of santri, coupled with the limited number of studies that examine this phenomenon comprehensively from the perspective of Islamic religious education. These considerations provide the rationale for the present study.

The preceding mapping of the literature further indicates that previous studies have generally examined santri delinquency, peer influence, or the effects of digital culture separately and within a single research site. No study has been identified that specifically integrates these three dimensions—peer group dynamics, Generation Z delinquency in the digital era, and the perspective of Islamic religious education—within a unified analytical framework employing a multisite case study design involving two pesantren with contrasting institutional characteristics. This research lacuna constitutes the originality of the present study. It seeks to develop a more comprehensive understanding of how peer-based social systems and the challenges posed by digital culture are interpreted and addressed by pesantren through the frameworks of moral development and Islamic religious education. By comparing the two research sites, the study also seeks to identify contextual variations as well as consistent patterns across the institutions.

This article addresses three principal research concerns: the dynamics of peer relationships in shaping santri behavior; the forms and contributing factors of delinquency among Generation Z santri in the digital era; and the responses of pesantren to these two interconnected issues from the perspective of Islamic religious education. The analysis is directed toward explaining the underlying social, digital, and institutional mechanisms rather than merely describing observable forms of misconduct.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach with an interpretive orientation to explore peer group dynamics, delinquency among Generation Z santri, and pesantren responses from the perspective of Islamic religious education. A multisite case study design was adopted at Pondok Pesantren Lubbul Labib in Maron District and Pondok Pesantren Al-Hamidiyah in Banyuanyar District, Probolinggo Regency, East Java, Indonesia. The two sites were purposively selected based on their contrasting social and institutional characteristics, enabling the study to examine how differences in pesantren environments influence peer interactions, student delinquency, and institutional responses.

The researcher served as the key instrument and participant observer, engaging in selected daily activities while maintaining analytical distance to minimize potential bias. Primary data were obtained from ten purposively selected informants, comprising five santri and five pesantren caregivers or ustaz from both institutions. Secondary data were collected from institutional documents, including regulations, records of student misconduct, and moral development programs. Data collection employed three complementary techniques: semi-structured in-depth interviews, direct observation, and documentation. Interviews explored santri experiences and institutional responses, while observations and documents provided contextual evidence to support the interpretation of participants' accounts.

Data were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2020), comprising data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. The data were categorized according to three principal research focuses: peer group dynamics, forms of santri delinquency, and pesantren responses from the perspective of Islamic religious education. Findings were first analyzed separately at each research site and subsequently compared through cross-site analysis to identify common patterns and context-specific differences. Data collection and analysis proceeded iteratively until the evidence was considered sufficient to address the research objectives.

To ensure trustworthiness, the study addressed credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility was strengthened through source triangulation, methodological triangulation, negative case analysis, member checking, and peer debriefing with the academic supervisor. These procedures enabled the researcher to compare information across participants and data collection methods, examine contradictory evidence, confirm interpretations with informants, and critically review analytical decisions. Consequently, the study sought to produce findings that were empirically grounded, contextually sensitive, and analytically defensible.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Friendship patterns at Pondok Pesantren Lubbul Labib developed organically during the early stages of the santri's residence at the pesantren. Informant SL1 described the process through which closeness with roommates initially developed:

“At first, it was because we were going through the same experiences and hardships. When we were new students, we were often punished together for arriving late for congregational prayers, and we also queued together to take showers. That was how we started talking and discovered that we got along well. Usually, it was because we had the same sense of humor and often shared food parcels sent by our parents. If one of us had snacks, we would share them. We also often hung out near the clothes-drying area whenever we felt bored.” (SL1, interview, April 5, 2026)

This organically formed closeness also generated subtle forms of peer pressure. SL1 acknowledged:

“Absolutely. In the beginning, I was very diligent about attending congregational prayers and praying in the front rows. However, because my

roommates were often reluctant and chose to go back to sleep, I felt awkward going alone. I was afraid they would call me 'holier than thou' or 'rigid.' Eventually, I started following their behavior and sometimes arrived late for congregational prayers." (SL1, interview, April 5, 2026)

SL2 reinforced this account by describing how successful violations of institutional rules could receive social validation: "Honestly, when someone was caught bringing a mobile phone into the dormitory, nobody really distanced themselves from that person. In fact, many secretly queued up to borrow it for tethering or checking messages. There was even a little admiration, like, 'Wow, this guy is clever at hiding it.'" (SL2, interview, April 7, 2026)

Offering a more balanced perspective, SL3 emphasized that group solidarity did not always lead to misconduct but could also encourage collective positive behavior:

"Honestly, both happen. But sometimes solidarity feels stronger when we break the rules together. For example, when we are supposed to be asleep at night, we sometimes spread out a carpet, make coffee, and cook instant noodles in the room. If one of us gets caught, we agree to accept the punishment together. But there is also a positive side. For example, early in the morning, whoever wakes up first will pull the blankets off their friends so they do not miss the dawn congregational prayer." (SL3, interview, April 9, 2026) In contrast to the informal patterns observed at Lubbul Labib, peer group dynamics at Pondok Pesantren Al-Hamidiyah are deliberately shaped through the *Ro'is* system. PH1 explained the philosophy underlying this system:

"We have a *Ro'is* system, which means a dormitory leader. We deliberately select senior santri who possess authority and good moral character to serve as a 'father figure' in the room. Sometimes, when a santri has a problem, we do not reprimand them directly. Instead, we convey a message to the room leader or their close friend: 'Please remind this student, accompany them, and do not isolate them.' This approach is much more effective because the student does not feel as though they are being monitored by an ustaz." (PH1, interview, April 12, 2026)

SH1, who had experienced this system for four years, confirmed its effectiveness from the student's perspective: "The *Ro'is* system in my room works really well. The *Ro'is* wakes us up early for the dawn prayer, checks who has not taken a shower, and even asks whether anyone is sick. He is like a foster father in the room. I genuinely see him as a role model. Our *Ro'is* happens to be very diligent in attending congregational prayers and proficient in Qur'anic recitation. As juniors, we feel embarrassed to be lazy in front of him. It is not merely a formality." (SH1, interview, April 12, 2026)

Nevertheless, PH2 candidly acknowledged instances in which the system had failed: "It is very effective in reducing the workload of the administrators. There are many successful examples. A room that was initially dirty and whose occupants were difficult to wake for congregational prayers became disciplined after being assigned a firm and diligent *Ro'is*. However, there are also failures. These occur when the *Ro'is* colludes with the room members. For example, the members bring mobile phones, and the *Ro'is* joins them in using the phones and conceals the matter from the administrators. When that happens, we immediately remove the *Ro'is* from the position." (PH2, interview, April 13, 2026)

With this richer evidence, the initial synthesis requires refinement. The

distinction is not simply between “organic relationships and institutional management.” Rather, Al-Hamidiyah deliberately engineers informal leadership structures through the Ro’is system to channel peer group influence, although its effectiveness is not guaranteed because it depends on the integrity of the individuals assigned to these roles, as demonstrated by the negative case reported by PH2.

At Lubbul Labib, meanwhile, peer group dynamics operate bidirectionally and organically without a formally engineered institutional structure. This is illustrated by the contrast between SL2’s account of social validation for misconduct and SL3’s account of peers reminding one another to attend the dawn congregational prayer, even within the same social environment.

These findings demonstrate that peer groups are not inherently negative forces. At Lubbul Labib, the same group may validate rule violations while also encouraging its members to attend congregational prayers. At Al-Hamidiyah, the Ro’is system positions senior santri as deliberately selected social models to guide the daily habits of their roommates.

This finding extends Bandura’s (1977) social learning theory by demonstrating that observational learning and imitation among santri can become targets of pedagogical intervention through the selection of role models, the assignment of leadership responsibilities, and the reinforcement of group norms. However, the case of a Ro’is colluding with room members indicates that deliberate social engineering does not automatically succeed without appropriate selection, supervision, and corrective mechanisms.

From an Islamic perspective, these findings are consistent with Al-Ghazali’s emphasis on exercising caution in choosing companions and An-Nughaimshi’s view that the need for *rifqah*, or companionship, is a fundamental developmental need during adolescence. Therefore, pesantren should not merely advise santri to choose good friends. Institutions must establish structures that enable positive peer influence to become a tangible and sustained presence in the everyday lives of santri.

Digital Exposure and the Creativity of Rule Violations

SL1 described the most common forms of misconduct and the methods used to conceal them: “The most common violations involve secretly bringing mobile phones and being caught hanging out at internet cafés outside the pesantren to use their Wi-Fi. It is because we get bored and need entertainment. Nowadays, many assignments from formal school also require browsing the internet. Sometimes, it is because we miss home or ... well, miss our girlfriends or boyfriends outside, haha. I often hear stories about santri having phones. There are all sorts of methods. Some leave their phones with women who run food stalls in front of the pesantren, so they can use them during school breaks. Others take more extreme measures by bringing phones into their rooms and hiding them inside mattresses with concealed compartments or above bathroom ceilings. During inspections, the administrators do not think to look in those places.” (SL1, interview, April 5, 2026)

SL1 concluded with a critical reflection on the relationship between strict regulations and the ingenuity used to circumvent them: “In my opinion, strict restrictions actually make students more curious and better at finding loopholes.

There is a sense of pride, you know, when you manage to evade the pesantren security team. The more strictly the rules are enforced, the more sophisticated the students become in concealing their activities.” (SL1, interview, April 5, 2026) SH1 described two forms of digital exposure associated with structural loopholes rather than solely with individual misconduct: “The most common issue is mobile phones. Students usually smuggle them in through the laundry service. They hide the phones inside the folds of clean clothes.” (SH1, interview, April 12, 2026) SH3 confirmed the existence of indirect digital exposure through students who did not reside permanently at the pesantren:

“Oh, the influence is still very noticeable. Even though we cannot use mobile phones inside the pesantren, we still know the latest TikTok trends and football news. We learn about them from friends who commute rather than live here, or when we have school assignments that require us to use school computers or visit the internet café outside. Sometimes, during gaps between school lessons, we sneak a quick look at social media.” (SH3, interview, April 15, 2026)

Triangulation across informants at the two research sites confirmed the previously identified patterns while enriching the findings with a much wider range of operational methods than initially anticipated. These included laundry services, school Chromebooks, internet cafés, and opportunities arising during periods when teachers or ustaz were changing duties. Such details strengthen the credibility of the finding that institutional restrictions contain inherent structural loopholes rather than merely reflecting weaknesses in supervision that could be resolved through stricter enforcement.

Both sites demonstrate that digital restrictions never completely eliminate exposure to digital culture. The difference lies in the pathways through which exposure occurs. At Lubbul Labib, exposure more frequently involves active violations, such as concealing mobile phones or visiting internet cafés outside the pesantren. At Al-Hamidiyah, exposure also occurs through structural loopholes, including laundry services, students who do not reside permanently at the institution, and information shared by individuals from outside the pesantren.

The stricter the prohibitions become when they are not accompanied by the development of internal awareness, the greater the possibility that violating the rules will become a challenge that enhances the social status of those who succeed in doing so in the eyes of their peers.

These findings support Mundiri and Nawiro's (2019) argument that changes in santri behavior in the technological era are not determined solely by the availability of digital devices but also by the negotiation of values within the pesantren environment. Khozaini and Mundiri (2024), as well as Rozi et al. (2024), emphasize the importance of digital governance rooted in local wisdom and supported by mentoring. Accordingly, the central issue is not simply whether digital access should be permitted or prohibited, but how santri can be equipped to evaluate, regulate, and take responsibility for their use of technology on the basis of Islamic values.

Generation Z's experience of growing up alongside the internet also makes total prohibition difficult to sustain as a standalone strategy. Twenge (2018) and Turkle (2011) help explain how the identities, relationships, and need for recognition of this generation have become closely connected to digital culture. Under conditions of restricted access in pesantren, digital devices may even

become symbols of social status. External control must therefore be accompanied by digital literacy education, logically grounded explanations, and the habituation of ethical practices so that behavioral regulation gradually becomes internalized.

Institutionalization of a Personal and Dialogical Approach

PL1 explained the hierarchical procedure for handling violations while acknowledging the predominantly punitive orientation of the institution's approach:

"The procedure works as follows: when someone is caught violating a rule, the first people to handle the case are always the security team. We assess the seriousness of the violation. For minor to moderate violations, we immediately implement the prescribed *ta'zir* punishment. If the student has reached the third warning letter, or if the violation is serious, such as drug-related misconduct or excessive romantic involvement, the case is escalated to the senior council of religious teachers and then brought to the Kiai's residence for consultation. Honestly, because we have thousands of santri here, we rely more heavily on immediate sanctions in accordance with the disciplinary handbook. This is intended to create a deterrent effect and save time. If every minor violation required an individual dialogue, the administrators would be exhausted. Dialogue is reserved for complicated cases or students with particularly serious problems." (PL1, interview, April 10, 2026)

Regarding the consistency of standard operating procedure (SOP) implementation, PL1 openly acknowledged variations among staff members:

"There is a written SOP in the handbook. But people are people, and practices sometimes differ in the field. If the ustaz handling the case is particularly strict, arriving five minutes late for congregational prayers may result in being ordered to do push-ups. If the ustaz is in a relaxed mood, the student might simply be told to recite *istighfar*. So, to a considerable extent, the response still depends on who is on duty." (PL1, interview, April 10, 2026)

In contrast, SL1's personal experience demonstrates that a dialogical approach, when implemented, can have a profound impact:

"Yes, I once received advice that really stayed with me. I was caught skipping Qur'anic study because I had fallen asleep in a storage room. An elderly ustaz called me in. He did not get angry; he simply asked very gently, 'My son, your parents work hard at home, laboring tirelessly so that you can study the Qur'an. You are here sleeping. Do you not feel sorry for your father's hard work?' I immediately burst into tears. His words really touched my heart." (SL1, interview, April 5, 2026)

SL1 concluded by explicitly comparing the effectiveness of punishment with that of a personal approach:

"A personal approach has a much greater impact. Physical punishment only makes santri regret their actions temporarily and may even create resentment or provoke them to challenge the administrators. But when someone approaches them gently and touches their hearts by reminding them of their parents, awareness comes from within. There is no coercion." (SL1, interview, April 5, 2026)

PH1 explained the combination of curricular and situational approaches to moral development:

"We use both. In the curriculum, we have dedicated lessons on moral

conduct using classical texts such as *Akhlaq Lil Banin* and *Ta'lim Muta'allim* after the Maghrib prayer. But that is the theoretical side. In practice, moral development relies more heavily on situational approaches, particularly *uswah hasanah*, or exemplary conduct demonstrated by the Kiai and ustaz. Good character is transmitted through habits, from the way we greet elders respectfully, to how we eat, and even to the etiquette of passing in front of older people.” (PH1, interview, April 12, 2026)

Regarding the procedures for handling violations, PH1 emphasized the existence of a standard clarification stage:

“It depends on the seriousness of the violation. For minor infractions, such as arriving late for congregational prayers or leaving a room untidy, the room administrators usually impose a light *ta'zir*, such as sweeping the courtyard. However, for more serious violations, such as fighting or being caught with a mobile phone, our SOP requires *tabayyun* first. The student is called to the student affairs office, where we engage in dialogue and ask about the reasons behind the behavior. Perhaps the student brought a phone because of an urgent family problem. We do not immediately rush to punish them.” (PH1, interview, April 12, 2026)

PH2 provided a quantitative estimate of the consistency of this procedure and described the associated corrective mechanism:

“Overall, I would say it is 80% consistent. Why 80%? Sometimes the security administrators are still around university age and have difficulty managing their emotions. If they are tired from guarding the premises at night and a student causes trouble by making noise in the room, they may forget to conduct *tabayyun* and immediately order the student to do push-ups. However, if a senior ustaz discovers this, the administrator who imposed the punishment without following the procedure will be reprimanded. We remind them of the SOP.” (PH2, interview, April 13, 2026)

SH1 described a personal experience of being treated according to the *tabayyun* procedure:

“Thankfully, here we are called in first and invited to participate in *tabayyun*. We are asked politely in the administrators' office, ‘Why did you bring a phone? Is there a problem at home?’ This makes us feel respected as human beings rather than treated like prisoners. It is very effective. Because they talk to us sincerely and from the heart, we develop a sense of *pekewuh* rather than fear. If we act only out of fear, we may violate the rules again when the administrators leave. But when we feel *pekewuh*, we realize for ourselves that what we did was wrong.” (SH1, interview, April 12, 2026)

SH2 recounted a particularly moving case involving *ghosob*, or the unauthorized taking or use of another person's property:

“A friend of mine was once caught taking another student's money without permission. During *tabayyun*, it turned out that the student had not received money from home for months and was hungry. Instead of immediately punishing the student, the ustaz gave them money for food, then offered advice and imposed a light punishment involving Qur'anic recitation. My friend cried uncontrollably. It was very effective in changing their behavior because the approach touched their heart. Physical punishment is rarely emphasized here. The focus is more on reflective or spiritually oriented sanctions, such as being asked to write verses of

the Qur'an. This makes us think deeply while carrying out the punishment.” (SH2, interview, April 13, 2026)

Regarding generational differences in student development, PH2 concluded with a reflection on the distinctive characteristics of Generation Z: “Generation Z students are highly critical and need logical explanations. In the past, if students were told, ‘Do not date; it is a sin,’ they would immediately lower their heads. If today's students are told the same thing, they may ask, ‘But, Ustaz, surely it is acceptable to chat if we are discussing schoolwork?’ They like to argue and ask questions. This means ustaz must be knowledgeable and well-informed. They cannot simply rely on arguments that frighten students with the threat of hell; they must explain the psychological and social consequences as well.” (PH2, interview, April 13, 2026)

The additional triangulated evidence requires a substantial revision of the earlier cross-site conclusions. The distinction is no longer adequately described as “an effective personal approach at Lubbul Labib that has not yet been institutionalized.” A more accurate interpretation is that Lubbul Labib structurally relies more heavily on a punitive and procedural model as its primary response. This is explicitly confirmed by its administrators, including PL1 and PL2. Although personal approaches can be highly effective, their use remains relatively infrequent and contingent on the individual handling the case.

By contrast, Al-Hamidiyah has institutionalized the personal approach as its default procedure, with an estimated implementation consistency of approximately 80%, according to its own administrator. It also maintains a corrective mechanism for addressing deviations from established procedures. This difference is consistent with the previously identified variation in institutional scale, approximately 400 santri at Lubbul Labib compared with 60 at Al-Hamidiyah. PL1 explicitly linked the institution's preference for punitive procedures to the need for efficiency when managing a large student population. This provides a direct, data-grounded explanation, rather than merely a researcher inference, for why institutionalizing personal approaches may be more feasible in smaller pesantren.

The comparison demonstrates that the primary difference does not lie in whether the institutions recognize the importance of personal engagement. Administrators at both pesantren understand that physical punishment and immediate sanctions often produce only temporary effects. The distinction lies in the degree of institutionalization. At Lubbul Labib, *tabayyun* and dialogue can be highly effective, but their implementation depends on the individual characteristics of the ustaz handling the case. At Al-Hamidiyah, clarification before punishment is a more consistently applied procedure, supported by corrective mechanisms when administrators fail to follow the required stages. These findings align with Ibn Miskawayh's concept of *tahdhīb al-nafs*. Compliance motivated by fear of punishment differs fundamentally from self-regulation grounded in an understanding of moral values. Personal engagement allows santri to explain the circumstances underlying their misconduct, accept consequences meaningfully, and develop a sense of moral restraint or *pekewuh* that persists even when supervision is reduced.

Within Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological framework, pesantren perform a mediating function at the mesosystem level by connecting peer pressure, digital

culture, and the relationships between students and their caregivers.

Baharun (2021) demonstrates the effectiveness of the *wali asuh* system as a form of practical mentoring for improving the quality of santri learning. The present study reinforces this finding while adding that personal closeness must be deliberately designed as a system rather than left dependent on the fortuitous presence of a particularly empathetic caregiver.

Abidin, Akmansyah, and Amirudin (2023) have mapped the forms, contributing factors, and prevention strategies associated with santri delinquency. The present study extends this work by demonstrating that the quality of delinquency prevention depends on the consistency of personal and dialogical procedures and the institution's structural capacity to implement them equitably.

Cross-Site Analysis

The cross-site analysis reveals similarities in the substantial influence of peer groups, the permeability of digital restrictions, the limitations of punitive approaches, the critical characteristics of Generation Z, and the importance of moral education traditions. The principal difference lies in each institution's capacity to direct these social influences and institutionalize personal approaches consistently.

Analytical dimension	Lubbul Labib	Al-Hamidiyah
Peer groups	Organic and informal; positive and negative influences operate without a standardized institutional structure.	Peer influence is deliberately directed through the Ro'is system as a form of informal leadership.
Digital exposure	Active rule violations and attempts to exploit supervisory loopholes.	Structural loopholes and indirect forms of access.
Handling of misconduct	Predominantly punitive; the implementation of <i>tabayyun</i> depends on the staff member involved.	<i>Tabayyun</i> functions as the dominant procedure before sanctions are imposed.
Consistency	Uneven implementation associated with institutional scale and limited caregiver-to-student ratios.	Relatively consistent implementation, although the Ro'is system requires ongoing evaluation.
Outcomes	Personal approaches are effective but remain case-specific.	Personal approaches are more firmly institutionalized.

These differences are primarily influenced by institutional scale and the ratio of caregivers to santri. Larger pesantren face greater difficulties in distributing individualized support equitably, whereas smaller institutions generally have more opportunities to maintain close relationships between caregivers and students.

Nevertheless, a smaller institutional scale does not automatically guarantee

success, as demonstrated by the case of collusion involving a Ro'is. Structural capacity must be accompanied by systematic evaluation and institutional self-correction.

The Reflective Institutional Mediation Model

Having examined each finding individually in dialogue with relevant theories and previous studies in Subsections A, B, and C, this concluding section of Chapter V integrates these discussions into a unified conceptual model. This model constitutes the overarching theoretical contribution of the study and addresses the need for a coherent synthesis in the discussion chapter of an academic thesis, rather than a collection of disconnected theoretical discussions. At first glance, the three principal findings—peer groups as a dual social system (Finding 1), the structural limitations of digital restrictions (Finding 2), and the institutionalization of personal approaches as a determining factor (Finding 3)—appear to represent three parallel phenomena. However, the preceding theoretical discussions reveal that these findings form a coherent sequence of interconnected mechanisms rather than three unrelated observations.

The starting point of this sequence is a structural reality that no pesantren can entirely eliminate: Generation Z adolescents are inherently susceptible to two external influences because of their neurobiological development (Santrock, 2021; Steinberg, 2017) and generational characteristics (Twenge, 2018). These influences are peer pressure and the attraction of digital culture. Such vulnerabilities cannot be eliminated through institutional policies alone, as repeatedly demonstrated by Findings 1 and 2. Peer influence remains powerful even when it is left unguided, while digital restrictions remain permeable even when implemented as strictly as possible.

The principal conceptual contribution of this study lies in recognizing that, because individual-level vulnerabilities at the micro level cannot be eliminated, the most realistic and effective point of intervention is not the individual alone but the institutional level, or meso level, as demonstrated by Finding 3. Pesantren cannot fundamentally alter adolescents' psychological need for peer acceptance, nor can they completely eliminate Generation Z's attraction to the digital world. However, they can deliberately shape the direction of peer influence through systems such as Ro'is. They can also institutionalize personal approaches that cultivate internal awareness and self-regulation, providing a more sustainable complement to external control alone.

Based on this synthesis, the study proposes a conceptual model termed **Reflective Institutional Mediation** as its principal theoretical contribution to the study of pesantren education. The model can be articulated through the following propositions.

Proposition 1: Generation Z adolescents in pesantren face two inherent external pressures that cannot be eliminated: social pressure from peer groups and the attraction of digital culture. Both are rooted in broadly shared psychological and generational characteristics rather than being attributable solely to individual moral failure or inadequate institutional supervision.

Proposition 2: As total institutions in Goffman's sense, albeit oriented toward Islamic values, pesantren have two fundamental options for responding to these pressures. The first is a passive response, allowing both influences to operate

without direction while relying on external controls such as prohibitions and sanctions. The second is an active-reflective response, deliberately shaping and directing these influences through the institutionalization of personal and dialogical mechanisms.

Proposition 3: The effectiveness of an active-reflective response is determined not merely by good intentions or institutional awareness, which are evident at both research sites, but by the structural capacity to translate those intentions into consistent standard procedures. This capacity is influenced by concrete variables, including institutional scale and the caregiver-to-student ratio.

Proposition 4: When personal and dialogical approaches are successfully institutionalized, they facilitate a psychological transition among santri from fear-based compliance toward internalized moral awareness expressed through *pekewuh*, a culturally grounded sense of personal respect, relational restraint, and reluctance to disappoint a respected authority figure. Philosophically, this transition reflects the cultivation of *tahdhīb al-nafs* in Ibn Miskawayh's thought, while psychologically it corresponds to the strengthening of attachment to institutional authority and values in Hirschi's (1969) social control theory.

The Reflective Institutional Mediation model contributes to at least three areas of scholarship discussed throughout Chapter V.

First, in the field of adolescent social psychology, the model offers a synthesis between perspectives emphasizing social determination, such as those of Bandura and Steinberg and Monahan, and perspectives emphasizing institutional agency in directing social influences. This synthesis provides a conceptual middle ground that is rarely articulated explicitly in literature that tends to emphasize one side of the relationship.

Second, in developmental ecological theory, the model extends Bronfenbrenner's concept of the mesosystem by demonstrating that its mediating function is not simply given or automatic. Rather, it can be deliberately designed and institutionally developed, and its effectiveness depends on identifiable structural variables that can become targets of policy intervention.

Third, in Islamic education, the model provides a contemporary operationalization of the classical concepts of *tahdhīb al-nafs* (Ibn Miskawayh) and *ta'dīb* (Al-Attas). It demonstrates how philosophical principles developed centuries ago can be translated into institutional policies that can be designed, assessed in terms of implementation, and adapted for other pesantren contexts. The Reflective Institutional Mediation model emphasizes that the need for peer acceptance and the attraction of digital culture constitute inherent pressures that cannot be entirely eliminated. Passive responses based on external control tend to produce conditional compliance, which may weaken when supervision decreases.

By contrast, active-reflective responses involving positive social structuring, *tabayyun*, exemplary conduct, mentoring, and institutional evaluation encourage a transition toward internalized moral awareness.

The effectiveness of this model depends on institutional scale, the caregiver-to-student ratio, and the institution's ability to transform personal practices into consistent and standardized procedures

CONCLUSION

Based on the research findings and discussion presented in the preceding chapters, this study draws three principal conclusions, each addressing one of the research focuses established in Chapter I. First, peer dynamics within the pesantren environment operate as a social system whose influence is comparable to, and in certain respects even exceeds, that of the pesantren's formal authority. This social power may manifest in two distinct conditions: it may be allowed to develop organically without institutional guidance, as observed at PP Lubbul Labib, or it may be deliberately managed and directed through specific institutional mechanisms, as demonstrated by the Ro'is system at PP Al-Hamidiyah. This finding underscores that peers should not merely be regarded as a variable requiring supervision, but rather as a social resource that can serve as an instrument for character development when managed appropriately. Second, delinquent behavior among Generation Z santri in the digital era is a consequence of an imbalanced model of control that relies excessively on external regulation — such as prohibitions, raids, and sanctions — without adequately strengthening internal control grounded in an awareness of values. Institutional restrictions on digital access, regardless of how strictly they are enforced, can never fully eliminate santri's exposure to digital culture.

Indeed, such restrictions may encourage increasingly sophisticated forms of rule-breaking, consistent with the psychological characteristics of Generation Z, who tend to be critical and expect rational explanations for the prohibitions imposed upon them. Third, the effectiveness of santri character development is determined by the extent to which a personalized, dialogical approach has been institutionalized as a standard procedure, rather than depending solely on the severity of sanctions or the individual sensitivity of those responsible for student guidance. Cross-site comparison indicates that the degree of institutionalization of this personalized approach varies across pesantren. PP Al-Hamidiyah has institutionalized the approach through structured tabayyun procedures, whereas PP Lubbul Labib continues to rely on the individual initiative of the ustaz handling each case, although this approach has proven highly effective at the individual level. Pesantren should institutionalize a personalized, dialogical approach through clearly defined procedures, proportionate allocation of student mentoring groups, periodic evaluation of peer mentors, and the strengthening of digital literacy grounded in Islamic values. Prohibitions and sanctions remain necessary as external boundaries; however, they must be integrated with tabayyun, role modeling, mentoring, and habituation practices that foster internal self-regulation. Future research should examine this model longitudinally and across pesantren with more diverse scales, cultures, and institutional characteristics.

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