



THE ROLE OF ISLAMIC EDUCATION IN ADVANCING SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION THROUGH CHARACTER STRENGTHENING AND COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT

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Abstract:

In the era of globalization and digitalization, society faces serious challenges in the form of moral degradation, identity crises, and weak social solidarity due to the dominance of materialistic values. In addition, many Islamic educational institutions, especially Islamic boarding schools, still lack development in the areas of economics and life skills for students, so they have not been able to play an optimal role in promoting community independence and social transformation. In fact, Islamic education should ideally function not only as a moral fortress, but also as a means of empowering the community based on spiritual and social values. This study aims to analyze the role of Islamic education in promoting social transformation through character building and community empowerment. The research was conducted at the An-Nur Malangbong Garut Foundation, an Islamic educational institution that integrates formal education, Islamic boarding school curriculum, and productive economic activities based on Islamic values. A qualitative approach was used with a case study method, through interviews, observation, and documentation. The results show that Islamic education at the An-Nur Foundation plays a strategic role in shaping the character of a transformative generation through the internalization of Islamic values, the integration of the national and pesantren curricula, and the implementation of life skills and entrepreneurship programs. Managerially, the institution applies a participatory management pattern that involves teachers, students, and the community in every stage of program planning and evaluation. This strategy not only strengthens the religious and social character of students, but also increases economic independence and community participation in religious and social activities. This study confirms that Islamic education that is managed in a participatory manner and based on community empowerment can be a driving force for sustainable social transformation in the modern era.

Keywords: *Islamic Education, Social Transformation, Character Building, Community Empowerment*

INTRODUCTION

In the era of rapid globalization and digitalization, global societies encounter complex and multidimensional social challenges. Moral degradation, rising individualism, and increasing cultural conflicts have become increasingly visible phenomena. The uncontrolled flow of information through digital media accelerates the spread of materialistic and hedonistic values, which ultimately weakens social solidarity and fosters individualistic behavior (Shobirin et al.,

2025; Saragih, 2025). This condition generates a crisis of collective identity, in which noble values such as empathy and cooperation are gradually replaced by unhealthy competition. Evidence of moral degradation is reflected in global data showing a significant rise in cases of intolerance and social violence, particularly in countries with Muslim-majority populations, where the influence of digital media and Western culture has eroded traditional Islamic values such as *ukhuwah* and tolerance (Ridho, 2024). Several global surveys indicate an increase in intolerance and social conflict across Muslim regions, especially in the Middle East and Southeast Asia, much of which is triggered by provocative digital content. UNESCO reports that social media algorithms often amplify extremist narratives and religious identity polarization (UNESCO, 2021), while findings from the Pew Research Center show a decline in tolerance levels due to exposure to biased and emotionally charged online content in Muslim societies (Pew Research Center, 2022). Values that were once the moral foundation of communities are now undermined by globalization, which introduces consumptive and secular cultures, creating an imbalance between technological progress and moral stability. As a result, the younger generation frequently experiences value disorientation, with negative digital content—such as hate speech and online extremism—becoming a primary factor exacerbating this phenomenon.

Ideally, Islamic education should function as a primary fortress for character reinforcement and the development of resilient individuals who are empathetic toward social diversity. However, it often falls short in responding to these emerging issues, leaving a significant gap in holistic education processes. The Islamic education curriculum remains largely normative and insufficiently responsive to contemporary issues such as digitalization and modern social challenges (Yanti et al., 2025). Global surveys have indicated a significant decline in youths' sense of social responsibility due to prolonged exposure to negative digital content (Laka et al., 2024), suggesting the need to revitalize Islamic education to instill values such as *tawasuth* and *ta'awun* to build more inclusive and harmonious communities (Mibtadin & Patimah, 2022).

Furthermore, widespread social and economic inequality in many Muslim-majority societies often serves as a catalyst for community disintegration. Access to basic resources, including quality education, remains limited for marginalized groups, thereby weakening social cohesion and exacerbating intergenerational poverty cycles. Formal education—including Islamic institutions—tends to prioritize cognitive aspects such as memorization and theoretical knowledge without deeply integrating spiritual values such as justice (*'adl*) and solidarity (*ta'awun*), which are essential to addressing the root causes of inequality (Anwar, 2021). Consequently, non-holistic education models fail to cultivate strong social awareness, leaving communities vulnerable to internal and external conflicts arising from economic disparities.

The role of Islamic education should therefore extend beyond moral instruction to serve as an economic and social engine that prepares Muslim generations to compete globally. *Pesantren*, as a form of traditional Islamic education, holds tremendous potential to develop educational models that not only emphasize religious knowledge but also foster entrepreneurial skills and economic independence among *santri*. Mastery of life skills and an entrepreneurial mindset becomes essential to ensure that *pesantren* graduates can navigate global challenges, contribute productively to society, and support community economic development. Such efforts not only enhance the

competitiveness of students in the modern workforce but also position pesantren as centers of community empowerment rooted in Islamic values.

Social realities in many developing countries, particularly Indonesia, illustrate that Islamic educational institutions such as madrasah and pesantren have not fully maximized their potential as agents of local community empowerment, despite their strong grounding in religious values that support social transformation (Tantowi, 2022). Studies indicate that in Indonesia—where pesantren often function as centers of informal education—their contribution to social transformation remains limited due to insufficient integration between educational programs and community economic needs, such as Islamic entrepreneurship training or anti-poverty initiatives. This limitation stems from inadequate resources and non-adaptive curricula, causing these institutions to prioritize producing religious scholars rather than social leaders capable of addressing inequality (Hanafie Das & Halik, 2020).

This gap leads to low community participation in religious-based empowerment initiatives and increasing dependence on external assistance. Consequently, expected outcomes of social transformation—such as strengthened multicultural harmony and reduced class-based conflict—are often hindered by the absence of Islamic value-based character formation, where education fails to bridge the divide between spiritual doctrine and practical application in daily life. This condition underscores the urgency of Islamic education reform to be more inclusive and empowerment-oriented in order to create more equitable and sustainable societies. In multicultural contexts, challenges such as resistance to diversity and the influence of globalization contribute to gaps in inclusive educational approaches. Research shows that without educational interventions grounded in tolerance and *ukhuwah Islamiyah*, social conflicts tend to escalate, as evidenced by increasing intolerance across various regions. This theoretical gap highlights the need for Islamic education that goes beyond teaching doctrines to applying these values in everyday practice to stimulate sustainable social change.

Based on these phenomena, this research was conducted at Yayasan An-Nur Malangbong Garut, West Java, an Islamic educational institution known for its pesantren-based system with a strong social orientation. The selection of this site is based on its integrated formal and non-formal educational programs focused on character formation and community empowerment. This context positions Yayasan An-Nur as a representative model of Islamic education with strong potential to serve as an agent for social transformation in the digital age.

Previous studies have examined the role of Islamic education in character development, yet most remain limited to the context of formal schools and have not comprehensively addressed community empowerment. A study by Anggraeni and Haryanto highlights the factors that influence Islamic value-based character education in basic education institutions (Anggraeni & Haryanto, 2022). They found that integrating values such as honesty and responsibility enhances students' social behavior, although its scope remains within formal education. Likewise, Hayat emphasizes the role of multicultural-based Islamic education in fostering social harmony and tolerant character by integrating values such as *ta'awun* and *tawasuth* through inclusive curricula and strengthened school culture. This approach offers insights into implementing Islamic character values within multicultural contexts, though challenges remain in extending empowerment efforts beyond formal educational institutions (Hayat et al., 2025). Another study by Siti Rahayu focuses on the internalization of Islamic character

in primary madrasah education through practical methods that effectively instill values such as ta'awun and tawasuth, although broader community empowerment remains underexplored (Rahayu, 2023). Meanwhile, Faridah emphasizes the role of Qur'an-based Islamic education in addressing moral crises and shaping individual character, demonstrating the effectiveness of scriptural approaches in Islamic character formation (Faridah, 2023).

The novelty of this research lies in its holistic approach that integrates character strengthening with community empowerment in the context of social transformation in the digital era—an area still underexplored in previous studies. Unlike studies that focus primarily on individual or institutional levels, this research highlights the integration of digital technology into Islamic education to promote broader social change, such as through Islamic-value-based e-learning programs that empower marginalized communities. This innovation addresses the gap in Islamic education's adaptation to contemporary challenges such as digitalization and globalization, thereby contributing new theoretical insights to Islamic education management.

The purpose of this study is to analyze the role of Islamic education in promoting social transformation through individual character strengthening and community empowerment, emphasizing the integration of Islamic values such as tolerance, justice, and ukhuwah within contemporary contexts. Through this approach, the study aims to provide practical recommendations for Islamic educational institutions to implement effective models for achieving sustainable social change.

The central argument of this study is that Islamic education holds strong transformative potential through character formation grounded in tawhid and ethical values, which in turn empowers communities to overcome social challenges such as inequality and conflict. By integrating Qur'anic and Hadith teachings into everyday educational practices, this approach not only cultivates responsible individuals but also encourages active community participation in building inclusive and harmonious social development.

This research contributes conceptually to the development of Islamic education management, particularly in formulating integrative strategies that connect character strengthening with community empowerment in the digital age. By emphasizing the role of Islamic education in social transformation, the findings can serve as a reference for policymakers and communities in strengthening social harmony, reducing conflict, and enhancing well-being through value-based empowerment, thereby supporting sustainable national development.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach using a case study method. This approach was chosen because it allows the researcher to gain an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon of Islamic education, particularly regarding its role in promoting social transformation through character strengthening and community empowerment. The case study method is considered relevant as it provides space to explore experiences, practices, and social dynamics occurring within the educational institution.

The research was conducted at Yayasan An-Nur Malangbong, Garut, West Java. This institution was selected due to its unique characteristics, namely its integration of Islamic value-based educational programs with community empowerment activities such as entrepreneurship and social services. Yayasan

An-Nur Malangbong is deemed representative for examining the relationship between santri character development and social transformation within the surrounding community.

Research informants were determined based on their roles and involvement in educational processes and social activities within the institution. The informants consisted of the foundation's leader, teachers, students (santri), and community members. This composition is considered adequate to obtain rich, in-depth, and diverse data in accordance with qualitative research principles.

Data were collected through in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with all informants to explore their perspectives on the role of Islamic education in character formation and its contribution to community empowerment. Participant observation was carried out to directly observe learning activities, religious habituation practices such as congregational prayer and Qur'anic recitation, as well as social and entrepreneurial programs implemented by the foundation. Documentation was used to obtain secondary data, including curricula, activity reports, archives, and photographs that support the field findings.

The collected data were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles and Huberman as cited in Sugiyono, which consists of three stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing (Sugiyono, 2013). Data reduction was carried out by filtering and categorizing important information from interviews, observations, and documentation. Data display was presented in descriptive narrative form to help the researcher identify patterns and relationships among the findings. Conclusion drawing was conducted by identifying key themes related to the role of Islamic education in promoting social transformation. To ensure data validity, this study applied source and method triangulation by comparing the results of interviews, observations, and documentation obtained from various informants.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Role of Islamic Education in Shaping a Social-Transformation-Oriented Generation

Islamic education plays a pivotal role in shaping learners who are not only religious but also socially oriented and motivated toward social change (Yusri et al., 2024). Yayasan Pendidikan An-Nur, as an integrated Islamic educational institution overseeing Madrasah Ibtidaiyah (MI), Madrasah Tsanawiyah (MTs), Madrasah Aliyah (MA), and a higher education institution, develops a pesantren-based educational system that emphasizes the balance between religious knowledge, academic competence, and life skills. At Yayasan An-Nur Malangbong, educational practices extend beyond instilling Islamic values; they are also directed toward forming students as intelligent, ethical, and socially responsive agents of social transformation. This is manifested through various integrated aspects of learning activities and habituation within the pesantren environment.

The Head of Yayasan Pesantren An-Nur explained that the institution's vision is to produce Muslims who are *muta'faqqih fid-dîn*, independent, creative, and patriotic. This vision is realized through the integration of the national curriculum with the pesantren curriculum, enabling students not only to master religious sciences but also to excel academically and develop relevant social competencies for contemporary society. This aligns with recent findings

highlighting the importance of curriculum integration in producing high-quality graduates who are equipped to face modern challenges while maintaining a strong Islamic identity (Kusumawati, 2024; Khaidar, 2025).

The leader of the pesantren emphasized that all educational units under Yayasan An-Nur share the same objective: to develop morally upright and socially productive individuals. He noted, “The madrasahs under Yayasan An-Nur serve as a bridge between pesantren religious traditions and the demands of national education. The goal is to produce graduates who are ethical, economically independent, and actively engaged in socio-religious activities.” This statement reflects the educational philosophy upheld by Yayasan An-Nur, which asserts that education should not stop at cognitive understanding but must result in changes in attitudes and behavior. Consequently, the learning process across all levels at An-Nur maintains a balance between cognitive, affective, and psychomotor dimensions.

Teachers and kyai within the pesantren serve as *uswah hasanah* (role models), enabling students to directly observe and internalize Islamic values. They do not merely deliver theoretical knowledge; they integrate Islamic values into every subject and daily activity. In general subjects such as mathematics, economics, sociology, or Indonesian language, teachers consistently relate the content to values such as honesty, trustworthiness (*amanah*), and justice derived from Islamic teachings. Habituation practices such as praying before lessons, showing proper etiquette toward teachers, and participating in communal work are integral to the character education process. With educators serving as moral and social exemplars, learners are inspired to emulate Islamic behavior and contribute positively to society (Ukhro et al., 2025).

Furthermore, the daily life of students in the dormitory significantly strengthens their character formation. They engage in disciplined routines such as congregational prayers, Qur’anic recitation, community service, social work, and mutual assistance. One student testified, “Islam at An-Nur is not just theory; it is truly practiced. From the way we speak and socialize to the way we respect others, everything is taught through daily habits in the pesantren.” Such religious habituation effectively cultivates socially oriented character, fostering values of solidarity and social responsibility (M. N. Amin et al., 2024).

These habituation practices have a substantial impact on the character development of learners. They grow with deeply rooted values of trustworthiness, discipline, responsibility, solidarity, and social concern. These values become essential capital when students return to society—whether as learners, educators, or community leaders—and empower them to contribute actively to broader social transformation (Arizal & Husniyah, 2025).

Theoretically, the character education approach implemented at Yayasan An-Nur resonates with classical Islamic character theories developed by scholars such as Al-Ghazali and Ibn Miskawaih, who emphasize moral cultivation and virtuous character through disciplined and continuous education (Hanifah & Bakar, 2024; Karya Utami et al., 2025). The concept of *insan kamil* (the ideal human) represents the ultimate goal of character formation—an individual who is not only ritually devout but also socially impactful (Ariani & Ritonga, 2024). Strong religious values form the foundational basis that enables the younger generation at Yayasan An-Nur to become not only personally pious but also socially transformative individuals capable of bringing positive change to their environment and the wider community.

Management Strategies of Islamic Educational Institutions in Empowering Communities through Educational Programs

The management of Islamic educational institutions plays a significant role in organizing educational programs that not only focus on formal instruction but also contribute to the social and economic empowerment of surrounding communities (Sunardi, 2025). At Yayasan An-Nur Malangbong, the management strategies implemented are directed toward strengthening community capacity through various educational initiatives, training activities, and socio-economic programs. This approach positions the educational institution not merely as a learning center, but also as a community empowerment hub that actively contributes to improving societal welfare.

The management strategies at Yayasan An-Nur for empowering communities through educational programs are systematically and participatively designed, resulting in impactful socio-economic empowerment for local residents. The foundation manages several formal educational units—Madrasah Ibtidaiyah (MI), Madrasah Tsanawiyah (MTs), Madrasah Aliyah (MA), and a pesantren complete with dormitories and diniyah education—which serve as the basis for implementing its empowerment programs. In an effort to empower students and the surrounding community economically, the foundation has developed various business units such as a tempe production center, stuffed cireng snacks, a garment convection unit, and pesantren food management enterprises. These initiatives aim to enhance skills and income among students and community members. Planning is carried out by considering the potential and socio-economic conditions of the community to ensure that the programs are well-targeted and result in significant impact (Al Farisi et al., 2024).

Leadership at Yayasan An-Nur plays a crucial role in creating synergy between the pesantren, madrasah, and broader community. The foundation's chairperson and administrators act as facilitators connecting educators, alumni, community leaders, and village authorities. A visionary, communicative, and participatory leadership style ensures that empowerment programs run effectively and inclusively (R. K. Al Amin & Ali, 2024). Additionally, the institution places a strong emphasis on developing teachers and caretakers. Professional development training and managerial capacity-building are undertaken to ensure that all institutional elements can manage education that is relevant to contemporary developments. Consequently, educational management at Yayasan An-Nur is not solely oriented toward students but also prioritizes strengthening the quality of educators as a key pillar of institutional sustainability (Billa, 2025).

Yayasan An-Nur adopts a participatory management approach, actively involving the community in planning, implementation, and evaluation processes. This approach rejects a top-down, instruction-driven system and replaces it with a bottom-up model that encourages collective ownership of every program. Collaboration is carried out with various stakeholders, including village authorities, social organizations, and religious leaders, to strengthen program impact and expand cooperation networks. High levels of community engagement enable the institution to build harmonious relationships among administrators, educators, students, and local residents, positioning Yayasan An-Nur as a model of an Islamic educational institution that is adaptive and responsive to social change (Priyatno, 2020).

Theoretically, the management strategies implemented by Yayasan An-Nur align with the Islamic education management concept proposed by Azyumardi Azra, which emphasizes the importance of inclusive, participatory, and socially responsive institutional governance (Azra, 2023). The community-based education approach adopted at Yayasan An-Nur reflects a paradigm shift in Islamic education management toward a more contextual and empowerment-oriented model. According to Azra (2023), modern Islamic education needs to integrate spiritual, social, and economic dimensions to produce empowered generations capable of fostering sustainable social transformation.

Thus, the management strategies at Yayasan An-Nur demonstrate a concrete form of transformation in the governance of Islamic education that positions the community as an active agent in development. Programs integrating formal education, entrepreneurial training, teacher capacity-building, and community service through participatory collaboration have proven effective in generating positive socio-economic empowerment outcomes for the surrounding community.

The Impact of Islamic Education on the Process of Social Transformation in Communities Surrounding Educational Institutions

Islamic education has a significant impact on the process of social transformation within the communities surrounding Yayasan An-Nur, manifested across various social, economic, and religious dimensions. This transformation emerges through learning processes that not only instill spiritual values but also internalize a spirit of independence, social concern, and collective responsibility. One of the most notable changes is the increasing participation of community members in religious, social, and educational activities. The community is no longer passive toward social issues but has become actively involved as agents of change based on Islamic values emphasizing *ukhuwah* (brotherhood) and *amar ma'ruf nahi munkar* (enjoining good and forbidding wrong) (Pangeran et al., 2025).

From a socio-economic perspective, Islamic education at Yayasan An-Nur functions as a catalyst for the development of a creative economic culture grounded in Islamic values. Students and alumni of the pesantren contribute to initiating small business groups, entrepreneurship training, and productive religious-based social activities. Business units such as the tempe production center, stuffed *cireng* snack production, garment convection, and pesantren food management serve as learning arenas for students and local residents to enhance life skills and improve their economic standing. These productive economic activities not only foster financial independence but also reinforce social solidarity among pesantren members and the surrounding community (Alfaruq, 2025).

The role of alumni and students in social transformation is also highly prominent. They serve not only as *da'wah* agents but also as young leaders and social innovators within the community. Many alumni of Yayasan An-Nur are actively involved in religious study circles, children's education, and community-based economic initiatives. Their role as agents of change reflects the success of Islamic education in developing individuals who embody a balance of intellectual, spiritual, and social competencies (Juariah, 2023). Through these contributions, Islamic values are disseminated through contextual approaches that strengthen social cohesion and foster inter-community tolerance.

The transformation of social values in nearby communities is also evident in changes in attitudes and behaviors, which have become more religious, open to innovation, and socially conscious. While the community was previously passive toward educational and social activities, they have now become more active in developing community-based programs such as religious gatherings, student cooperatives, and civic social activities. Islamic education has become a moral and spiritual foundation guiding the community to act justly, responsibly, and adaptively amid contemporary societal changes (Aisyah, 2024).

Theoretically, these changes align with Abdurrahman An-Nahlawi's view that Islamic education serves as a means of *tathwir al-mujtama'* (societal transformation) by shaping an Islamic personality that contributes meaningfully to the community (Sunan, 2023). Paulo Freire's concept of education as the practice of freedom is also relevant, highlighting education's role in fostering critical consciousness and encouraging active participation in transforming social conditions (Rozi et al., 2025). This demonstrates that Islamic education at Yayasan An-Nur embodies a synthesis between spiritual values and social praxis, with the institution's participatory management accelerating sustainable social transformation.

In line with this, Islamic education at Yayasan An-Nur does not merely aim to develop individually pious individuals, but also strives to cultivate a community that is religious, productive, and empowered. Through the integration of religious curriculum, entrepreneurship training, and social engagement programs, the institution has succeeded in building a community that is economically independent, spiritually strong, and socially resilient. This integral and participatory implementation of Islamic education positions Yayasan An-Nur as a model educational institution that plays a transformative role in developing communities aligned with contemporary demands and the Islamic values of *rahmatan lil 'alamin*.

CONCLUSION

Islamic education at Yayasan An-Nur Malangbong plays a central role in shaping students' religious, independent, and socially oriented character. The educational process within the institution does not merely focus on the mastery of religious knowledge but also integrates spiritual values, academic competencies, and life skills through a *pesantren*-based education model. This approach enables students to become not only ritually observant but also socially aware individuals who possess a genuine commitment to contributing to community development.

From a managerial perspective, the management strategies implemented by Yayasan An-Nur are participatory and empowerment-oriented. Through synergy between the educational institution, the community, and local government, the foundation successfully implements various programs that strengthen the socio-economic capacity of surrounding residents, such as entrepreneurship training, the development of *pesantren* business units, and professional development for educators. Visionary and collaborative leadership further contributes to the success of educational management at the institution.

The impact of Islamic education at Yayasan An-Nur is evident in the social transformation experienced by the surrounding community. The community has become more active in religious, social, and educational activities, while also

demonstrating improvements in economic independence and social solidarity. Students and alumni serve as agents of change who disseminate Islamic values through contextual and community-based approaches. The findings of this study reinforce the view that Islamic education at Yayasan An-Nur effectively fulfills the function of tathwir al-mujtama’—sustaining societal transformation—through the integration of spiritual values, social praxis, and participatory management grounded in the principles of rahmatan lil ‘alamin.

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