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Fenomenologi Pembentukan Karakter Santri Di Ma'had Tahfidz Al-Ansor Medan

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to understand the meaning of students' lived experiences in the process of character formation through non-formal education at Ma'had Tahfidz Al-Ansor Medan. Using a qualitative phenomenological approach, this research explores how students experience daily interactions with teachers, peers, and the pesantren environment an atmosphere rich in religious and disciplinary values. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participatory observations, and documentation of teaching and character-building activities. The findings reveal that character formation at Ma'had Tahfidz Al-Ansor occurs through three main dimensions: exemplary modeling (uswah), habituation (ta'wid), and the internalization of spiritual values in daily routines such as Qur'an memorization, congregational prayers, and community service activities. These dimensions collectively shape a character pattern grounded in sincerity, responsibility, and independence. From a phenomenological perspective, students perceive the pesantren's non-formal education not merely as religious instruction but as a spiritual journey toward developing noble character (akhlaq al-karimah). The study concludes that non-formal education in pesantren plays a significant role in fostering students' character through meaningful existential experiences.

Keywords: *phenomenology*, *student character*, *pesantren*

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INTRODUCTION

Education in Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) plays a crucial role in shaping not only the intellectual capacity but also the moral and spiritual character of students (*santri*). As the oldest Islamic educational institutions in Indonesia, *pesantren* have long served as centers for character development and personality formation through an educational system grounded in religious values and exemplary conduct (Abdurrahman, 2015:47). In the context of modern education, *pesantren* occupy a strategic position as a form of non-formal education that emphasizes value-based learning, discipline, and the internalization of religious teachings in everyday life (Hasan, 2018:102).

Unlike formal educational institutions that are more oriented toward academic achievement, *pesantren* focus on character building through habituation, guidance, and role modeling (Nata, 2016:88). The exemplary behavior (*uswah hasanah*) of a teacher (*ustaz*) becomes a key factor in the moral education process of students, as moral values are not merely taught but must be demonstrated through real actions (Syamsuddin, 2019:134). Furthermore, the religious atmosphere of the *pesantren*—with its routines of worship, social activities, and the study of classical Islamic texts—shapes students into individuals who are independent, disciplined, and possess noble character (*akhlaqul karimah*) (Zamakhsyari Dhofier, 2011:119).

Ma'had Tahfidz Al-Ansor Medan is one of the *tahfidz* (Qur'an memorization) boarding schools that emphasizes character education in every aspect of learning and daily life. The process of character formation in this *ma'had* takes place through systems of habituation, enforcement of discipline, and the strengthening of spiritual and moral responsibility (Fauzi, 2020:56). Activities such as Qur'an memorization, congregational prayers, and social service are not only religious practices but also serve as means for internalizing moral values and developing the students' personalities (Yunus, 2021:77). To gain a deeper understanding of the students' experiences in this process, this study employs a phenomenological approach—an approach that seeks to explore and understand the meaning of lived experiences from the perspective of the participants (Moleong, 2018:6). Through this approach, the

researcher aims to interpret how students perceive non-formal education in the *pesantren* as a process of character formation that is both existential and spiritual in nature. Thus, this study is expected to provide both theoretical and practical contributions to the understanding of value-based Islamic character education within the context of non-formal *pesantren* education.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach with a phenomenological research design. This approach was chosen to understand the meaning of the students' lived experiences in the process of character formation within the non-formal educational environment of the *pesantren*. The phenomenological approach seeks to explore the subjective meanings individuals ascribe to the phenomena they directly experience (Creswell, 2015:76). Therefore, this study is not intended to test hypotheses but rather to interpret the experiences and understandings of students within the context of their life in the *pesantren* (Moleong, 2018:6).

1. Research Location and Subjects

The research was conducted at Ma'had Tahfidz Al-Ansor Medan, a non-formal Islamic educational institution focusing on Qur'an memorization (*tahfidz*) and student character development. The research subjects consisted of students residing and studying at the *ma'had*, their *ustaz* (teachers), and the *pesantren* administrators. Informants were selected using a purposive sampling technique, which involves choosing participants based on specific criteria relevant to the research objectives (Sugiyono, 2019:126). These criteria included students who had lived in the *pesantren* for at least one year and were actively involved in character-building activities.

2. Data Collection Techniques

Data were collected through three main techniques:

a. In-depth interviews, conducted to explore the students' personal experiences related to the process of character formation;
b. Participant observation, in which the researcher directly observed the students' daily activities within the *pesantren* environment; and
c. Documentation, which included records of activities, daily schedules, and the *pesantren*'s character development guidelines (Miles & Huberman, 2014:12).

These three techniques were used in an integrated manner to ensure that the data obtained were deep, authentic, and contextual.

3. Data Analysis Techniques

Data were analyzed phenomenologically following the steps proposed by Moustakas (1994:120), namely:

a. Epoche, suspending the researcher's preconceptions about the phenomenon;
b. Horizontalization, identifying significant statements from participants' experiences;
c. Imaginative variation, interpreting the deeper meaning of those experiences; and
d. Synthesis of meaning, formulating the essence of the students' experiences in character formation.

The analysis process was supported by techniques of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing, following the interactive model developed by Miles & Huberman (2014:16).

4. Data Validity

To ensure the validity and reliability of the data, this study applied four criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985:301). Source and method triangulation were used to compare the results of interviews, observations, and documentation. In addition, member checking was conducted with the informants to confirm the accuracy of the researcher's interpretations (Moleong, 2018:330).

Through this method, the study is expected to provide an in-depth description of the meaning of students' experiences in character formation at Ma'had Tahfidz Al-Ansor Medan and contribute to the development of a *pesantren*-based character education model.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

Outer Model or Measurement Model

1. Research Findings

Ma'had Tahfidz Al-Ansor Medan is a non-formal educational institution that focuses on Qur'an memorization (*tahfidz Al-Qur'an*) and the moral development of its students (*santri*). Established in 2015, the *pesantren* has the vision of producing *hafizh* generations with Qur'anic character, high discipline, and noble morality (*akhlaqul karimah*). The educational system at the *ma'had* integrates Qur'an memorization, the study of Islamic classical texts (*kitab*), congregational worship, and a structured character-building program embedded in the students' daily activities (Fauzi, 2020:56). Daily activities begin at 4:00 a.m. and end at 10:00 p.m., including congregational prayers, Qur'an memorization sessions (*tahfidz*), study circles (*halaqah*), environmental cleanliness, and community service. This disciplined and religious environment creates a conducive atmosphere for character formation (Hasan, 2018:104). Based on in-depth interviews and observations, the researcher found that the character formation of students at Ma'had Tahfidz Al-Ansor takes place through three main dimensions: exemplary behavior (*uswah*), habituation (*ta'wīd*), and internalization of spiritual values.

A. Exemplary Behavior (*Uswah Hasanah*)

The students perceive their *ustaz* (teachers) as primary role models in daily behavior, particularly in discipline, simplicity, and responsibility. One informant stated, "We learn not only from lessons but also from how our *ustaz* speaks, dresses, and patiently deals with us. "This aligns with Nata's (2016:91) view that effective character education in *pesantren* stems from the moral and spiritual exemplarity of teachers, internalized through direct interaction. Thus, values such as sincerity (*ikhlas*) and patience (*sabr*) are not taught theoretically but transmitted through daily life practices (Syamsuddin, 2019:138).

B. Habituation (*Ta'wīd*)

The aspect of habituation plays a vital role in shaping consistent student behavior.

Routines such as congregational prayers, Qur'an memorization, room cleanliness, and community service are performed daily under close supervision by the mentors. These repetitive activities cultivate a sense of discipline and personal responsibility (Yunus, 2021:79).

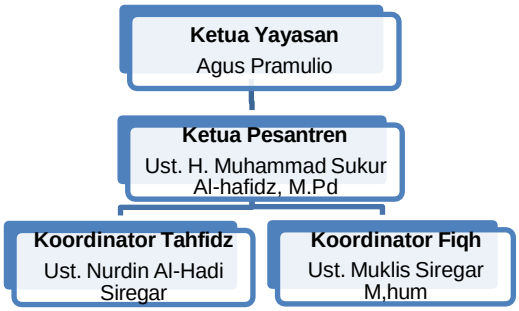
From a phenomenological perspective, such habits create a stable structure of lived experience, where moral values are not merely understood but become an inherent part of the students' existence (Moustakas, 1994:125).

C. Internalization of Spiritual Values

Spiritual values such as sincerity (*ikhlas*), trust in God (*tawakal*), and patience are internalized through worship, remembrance of God (*dzikir*), and social interaction. The students perceive each activity as a form of worship that nurtures their awareness of accountability before Allah SWT. This finding is consistent with Abdurrahman (2015:53), who states that *pesantren* education shapes character through the reinforcement of spiritual values influencing moral and behavioral dimensions.

The phenomenological approach reveals that students do not view *pesantren* activities merely as formal obligations but as a spiritual journey. For them, being part of Ma'had Tahfidz Al-Ansor means undergoing a process of self-purification (*tazkiyatun nafs*) through social interaction and collective worship. They regard discipline, sincerity, and independence as forms of worship that train the soul toward moral maturity. These findings reinforce experiential learning theory, which posits that meaningful learning arises from direct experiences that are reflectively interpreted (Kolb, 1984:41). In the *pesantren* context, such experiences are manifested in the relationships among *kyai* (religious leader), *ustaz*, and *santri*, all of whom mutually influence the formation of values and behavior.

Organizational Structure of Ma'had Tahfidz Al-Anshor Medan



In the context of educational phenomenology, the process of character formation among students (*santri*) at *Ma'had Tahfidz Al-Ansor* Medan is not merely understood as a transfer of knowledge activity, but as a holistic existential experience involving the students, the *ustadz* (teachers) as foster fathers, and the educational environment of the *pesantren* itself (Moleong, 2019: 14). This phenomenon illustrates a profound relationship between spiritual, emotional, and social aspects that form the foundation of students' discipline and religious character. As parental figures, the *ustadz* not only serve as formal educators but also as foster fathers residing in the dormitory. They assume full caregiving responsibilities—from supervising behavior and providing spiritual guidance to motivating students to be diligent in memorizing the Qur'an (Nata, 2010: 67). The *ustadz* also act as daily role models; they continue to review (*muroja'ah*) their own memorization while inspiring students to achieve their memorization targets until completing all 30 *juz* (Syafii, 2020: 55).

From a phenomenological perspective, the students' daily religious routines represent a form of repeated and meaningful *conscious experience*. Activities such as congregational prayers, *dzikir*, *dhuha* and *tahajjud* prayers, voluntary fasting, and Friday-night *wirid* are not merely rituals but habituation processes that shape the structure of consciousness and spiritual values within the students (Zuhairini, 2004: 91). Through such habituation, students learn to control emotions, manage desires, and build personalities grounded in sincerity and responsibility (Suyatno, 2012: 112).

The *pesantren* life, which begins at dawn, serves as a representation of internalized discipline. The *ustadz* wake the students for the *Subuh* prayer, lead collective *wirid* and *muroja'ah*, oversee environmental cleanliness, and guide daily worship activities (Hidayat, 2016: 88). All these activities carry phenomenological meaning: the formation of students' character does not occur through coercion but through shared life experiences within a religious educational space that nurtures self- awareness and moral responsibility (Mustaqim, 2017: 134).

However, not all students enter *Ma'had* with intrinsic motivation. Some are enrolled due to parental encouragement rather than personal desire (Rahman, 2021: 47). In this context, the *ustadz*, as both educators and caregivers, play a crucial role in restoring the students' learning motivation and spiritual enthusiasm. Through a personal approach, they provide guidance, advice, and motivation so that students comprehend the profound meaning of memorizing the Qur'an and appreciate their parents' sacrifices (Azizah, 2020: 103). This approach demonstrates that character formation among students is not solely about memorization, but also an empathetic process that cultivates awareness and a sense of responsibility toward oneself and one's family (Sukmadinata, 2013: 55).

In practice, *Ma'had Tahfidz Al-Ansor* Medan applies a situational parenting model. When strict discipline is required, the *ustadz* adopt an authoritarian approach to enforce rules and curriculum. However, in learning and deliberative contexts, they employ a democratic approach to foster intellectual maturity and the students' ability to express opinions respectfully (Baumrind, 1991: 747). Thus, this parenting model is adaptive and contextual, tailored to the developmental needs of the students' character (Nata, 2012: 86).

From a phenomenological standpoint, the relationship between *ustadz* and students in the *Ma'had* is not merely that of teacher and learner, but an existential relationship full of meaning—a bond that shapes character, spiritual consciousness, and moral responsibility (Creswell, 2013: 76). The

ustadz act as motivators, role models, advisors, and evaluators who guide students toward spiritual maturity and self-discipline. Through shared daily experiences within the *Ma'had* environment, the values of sincerity, discipline, and responsibility are not only taught but also internalized and genuinely lived by each student in their everyday lives (Hasanah, 2021: 144).

2. **Discussion**

The research findings indicate that character formation among students at Ma'had Tahfidz Al-Ansor does not occur instantly but through a long, holistic, and contextual process. Non-formal education in the *pesantren* integrates cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects simultaneously (Nata, 2016:93). From a phenomenological perspective, this process reflects the *santri's* lived experience, where life in the *pesantren* is interpreted as an existential space for discovering moral and spiritual meaning (Moleong, 2018:14).

The *pesantren* has proven effective as a model of character education because its system is based on community, exemplarity, and spirituality (Dhofier, 2011:124). These values not only shape individual behavior but also strengthen social solidarity and collective consciousness within the framework of Islamic values. Thus, non-formal education in the *pesantren* functions as a process of integral character formation, instilling the values of sincerity, responsibility, independence, and discipline. This study affirms that the students' lived experiences in the *pesantren* represent a meaning- based form of character education, rather than a mere normative routine.

CONCLUSIONS

This study reveals that the process of character formation among students (*santri*) at *Ma'had Tahfidz Al-Ansor* Medan takes place through meaningful existential experiences that are deeply internalized in the students' daily lives. The non-formal education system in this *pesantren* is not only oriented toward Qur'anic memorization but also toward personality development through exemplary behavior (*uswah hasanah*), habituation (*ta'wīd*), and the consistent internalization of spiritual values in daily routines (Nata, 2016: 91). The role of the *ustadz* as foster fathers serves as a central factor in this character formation. They function not only as instructors but also as exemplary figures who provide supervision, guidance, and moral as well as spiritual motivation to the students (Nata, 2010: 67). The relationship between *ustadz* and students is not merely formal; it is existential and empathetic, allowing the development of moral awareness, discipline, and personal responsibility (Creswell, 2013: 76).

The religious life within the *pesantren* such as congregational prayers, *muroja'ah*, *dzikr*, and social activitiesacts as an effective medium for instilling the values of sincerity, patience, and independence (Zuhairini, 2004: 91). This process of habituation shapes a new structure of consciousness within the students, in which spiritual values are not only learned but also experienced and lived as part of their existence (Moustakas, 1994: 125). From the perspective of educational phenomenology, character formation in this *pesantren* can be understood as a process of meaning realization (*lived experience*) that nurtures self-awareness of moral and spiritual responsibility. The students perceive *pesantren* life not merely as routine, but as a journey of *tazkiyatun nafs* (self-purification) that leads them toward spiritual maturity (Mustaqim, 2017: 134).

Thus, the non-formal education system at *Ma'had Tahfidz Al-Ansor* Medan has proven to be an effective medium for shaping students' character to become sincere, disciplined, responsible, and morally upright (*akhlaq al-karimah*) through an adaptive, situational, and existential experience-based parenting approach (Baumrind, 1991: 747). This study affirms that the *pesantren* education model possesses a unique strength in cultivating Islamic character values contextually and sustainably through meaningful shared living practices (Hasanah, 2021: 144).

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