

SPIRITUAL ECOLOGY IN CONTEMPORARY PESANTREN AS A FRAMEWORK FOR FORMING SANTRI INTEGRITY

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Abstract: This conceptual article addresses a problem in Islamic education: religious compliance in pesantren is often treated as evidence of spiritual transformation, even though repeated ritual practice does not automatically produce integrity. The study is important because contemporary pesantren operate as dense educational environments in which authority, worship, textual learning, peer relations, service, digital pressures, and material resource management shape students' moral agency. Using an integrative conceptual review, the article synthesises scholarship on pesantren, Islamic educational philosophy, character education, lived religion, practice theory, and Muslim environmental ethics. The synthesis produces a spiritual ecology framework that understands pesantren as a relational moral environment rather than a collection of programs. Its central model links six processes: exemplarity, habituation, religious experience, reflection and discernment, internalisation, and spiritual agency. The framework argues that integrity becomes visible when santri can transfer religiously grounded values across self-regulation, social relations, knowledge practices, and care for creation. The article contributes a sharper bridge between pesantren studies and spiritual ecology by showing how ecological responsibility can function as a site of Islamic moral formation, not merely as an additional environmental activity. Future research should test the model through ethnography, comparative case studies, longitudinal research, and mixed-method assessment of moral agency, relational trust, and ecological responsibility.

Keywords: spiritual ecology, pesantren, santri integrity, Islamic education, moral ecology, character formation

Abstrak: Artikel konseptual ini membahas sebuah permasalahan dalam pendidikan Islam: ketaatan beragama di pesantren sering kali dianggap sebagai bukti transformasi spiritual, meskipun praktik ritual yang berulang tidak secara otomatis menghasilkan integritas. Penelitian ini penting karena pesantren kontemporer beroperasi sebagai lingkungan pendidikan yang padat, di mana otoritas, ibadah, pembelajaran teks, hubungan sesama, pengabdian, tekanan digital, dan pengelolaan sumber daya material membentuk agensi moral para santri. Dengan menggunakan tinjauan konseptual integratif, artikel ini mensintesis kajian-kajian tentang pesantren, filsafat pendidikan Islam, pendidikan karakter, agama yang dijalani, teori praktik, dan etika lingkungan Muslim. Sintesis tersebut menghasilkan kerangka ekologi spiritual yang memahami pesantren sebagai lingkungan moral relasional, bukan sekadar kumpulan program. Model utamanya menghubungkan enam proses: teladan, pembiasaan, pengalaman keagamaan, refleksi dan penegasan, internalisasi, serta agensi spiritual. Kerangka kerja ini berpendapat bahwa integritas menjadi terlihat ketika santri mampu mengaplikasikan nilai-nilai yang berlandaskan agama dalam regulasi diri, hubungan sosial, praktik pengetahuan, dan kepedulian terhadap ciptaan. Artikel ini memberikan jembatan yang lebih jelas antara studi pesantren dan ekologi spiritual dengan menunjukkan bagaimana tanggung jawab ekologis dapat berfungsi sebagai wadah pembentukan moral Islam, bukan sekadar sebagai kegiatan lingkungan tambahan. Penelitian di masa depan sebaiknya menguji model ini melalui etnografi, studi kasus komparatif, penelitian longitudinal, serta penilaian dengan metode campuran terhadap agensi moral, kepercayaan relasional, dan tanggung jawab ekologis.

Kata kunci: ekologi spiritual, pesantren, integritas santri, pendidikan Islam, ekologi moral, pembentukan karakter

INTRODUCTION

Pesantren is often described as an institution that transmits Islamic knowledge, preserves scholarly authority, and disciplines everyday conduct. That description is accurate but insufficient for understanding how integrity is formed today. A santri learns religious life through prayer, study, service, dormitory relations, obedience, correction, and the interpretation of ordinary events. The educational object is therefore larger than a curriculum: it is a moral environment in which knowledge, authority, embodiment, and social responsibility become mutually intelligible. Earlier studies show that pesantren negotiates tradition and modernity rather than simply

choosing one ¹. The question is how this ecology forms integrity rather than mere compliance.

The question matters because religious character is frequently inferred from visible practices. Regular attendance at congregational prayer, obedience to pesantren rules, participation in pengajian, and respect for the kiai are treated as signs of successful moral education. These practices are important. They establish a rhythm in which ethical dispositions can be cultivated. Yet practice and disposition are not identical. A student may perform a religious routine because of surveillance, social expectation, fear of sanctions, or a desire to protect reputation. The same routine may also become a site of humility, self-regulation, mercy, and responsibility. Recent work in Islamic education continues to demonstrate that worship habituation can support discipline, but the relationship remains a problem of interpretation rather than a simple causal chain ².

This distinction becomes sharper when integrity is used as the central outcome. Integrity refers here to the coherence between religious knowledge, moral judgment, self-regulation, social conduct, and responsibility toward the wider world. It is not identical to piety as public performance, nor is it reducible to obedience to institutional rules. Character education research has long argued that moral formation involves moral understanding, emotional orientation, practical competence, and habitual action. More recent reviews likewise emphasise that character education is strongest when schools align explicit teaching, relationships, institutional culture, and opportunities for ethical action ³. The implication for pesantren is that integrity must be analysed as an

¹ Ronald A Lukens-Bull, "Two Sides of the Same Coin: Modernity and Tradition in Islamic Education in Indonesia," *Anthropology & Education Quarterly* 32, no. 3 (2001): 350–72, <https://doi.org/10.1525/aeq.2001.32.3.350>; Florian Pohl, "Islamic Education and Civil Society: Reflections on the Pesantren Tradition in Contemporary Indonesia," *Comparative Education Review* 50, no. 3 (2006): 389–409, <https://doi.org/10.1086/503882>.

² R Q A'yun, Syaripudin, and W E Wahyudi, "The Relationship between the Practice of Obligatory Prayers and Student's Discipline Character: Focusing on Time Discipline and Engagement," *Ilmuna: Jurnal Studi Pendidikan Agama Islam* 8, no. 1 (2026): 18–36, <https://doi.org/10.54437/ilmuna.v8i1.2833>; S A Hardy et al., "Adolescent Religious Motivation: A Self-Determination Theory Approach," *The International Journal for the Psychology of Religion* 32, no. 1 (2022): 16–30, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10508619.2020.1844968>.

³ P Oldham and S McLoughlin, "Character Education Research: A Scoping Review," *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 2025, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00071005.2025.2557208>; M A Pike et al., "Character Development through the Curriculum: Teaching and Assessing the Understanding and Practice of Virtue," *Journal of Curriculum Studies* 53, no. 4 (2021): 449–66, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00220272.2020.1755996>; J P Dabdoub et al., "Redesigning Schools for

ecological achievement. It emerges through the interaction of multiple environments rather than through a single lesson or program.

A second source of concern comes from the changing conditions of pesantren life. Contemporary pesantren are not sealed communities. They are connected to national education systems, digital media, universities, labour markets, environmental problems, and changing expectations about youth agency. The expansion of formal schooling and the use of digital technologies have widened access to knowledge, but they have also complicated the older relationship between authority, imitation, and textual learning. Research on pesantren has consequently moved beyond the question of whether tradition survives. It now examines how pesantren rework inherited forms of learning, socialisation, and public engagement ⁴. A conceptual framework for integrity must take this reworking seriously. It must describe continuity without romanticising the past and change without treating tradition as an obstacle.

The concept of spiritual ecology offers a productive way to address this problem. In environmental thought, spiritual ecology links ecological crisis to the moral and spiritual assumptions that organise human relationships with creation. Within Islamic environmental scholarship, the concept of tawhid, human accountability, mercy, public good, and justice has been used to challenge the separation between religious life and ecological responsibility ⁵. Recent work argues that Muslim environmentalisms are not simply a religious version of a pre-existing environmental agenda. They can provide communal, rights-based, and justice-oriented ways of thinking about human and more-than-human relations ⁶. These arguments have rarely been connected systematically to pesantren pedagogy. Yet pesantren is

Effective Character Education through Leadership: The Case of PRIMED Institute and VLACE.,” *Journal of Moral Education* 53, no. 3 (2024): 558–74, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03057240.2023.2254510>.

⁴ A Azra, D Afrianty, and R W Hefner, “Pesantren and Madrasa: Muslim Schools and National Ideals in Indonesia BT - Schooling Islam: The Culture and Politics of Modern Muslim Education,” ed. R W Hefner and M Q Zaman (Princeton University Press, 2007), 172–98; M A Firdaus et al., “Pengembangan Model Pengelolaan Pendidikan Karakter Di Pesantren Berbasis Tradisi Dan Tadzkiroh,” *Jurnal Basicedu* 6, no. 5 (2022): 8163–74, <https://doi.org/10.31004/basicedu.v6i5.3770>.

⁵ R C Foltz, F M Denny, and A Baharuddin, eds., *Islam and Ecology: A Bestowed Trust* (Harvard University Press, 2003); S H Nasr, *Religion and the Order of Nature* (Oxford University Press, 1996); A M Gade, *Muslim Environmentalisms: Religious and Social Foundations* (Columbia University Press, 2019).

⁶ A M Gade, “Muslim Environmentalisms and Environmental Ethics: Theory and Practice for Rights and Justice,” *The Muslim World* 113, no. 3 (2023): 242–59, <https://doi.org/10.1111/muwo.12474>.

precisely the kind of institutional setting in which spiritual meanings are materialised through time, space, bodily practice, and community.

In this article, spiritual ecology does not mean adding environmental activities to an otherwise unchanged religious curriculum. It refers to the relational organisation of moral life in which God, human beings, texts, institutions, material surroundings, and other forms of life are interpreted within a shared field of responsibility. The term therefore has two dimensions. The first is ontological: creation is not a neutral backdrop to human action, but a field of signs, relations, and accountability. The second is pedagogical: students learn this ontology through the ways an institution orders attention, desire, movement, consumption, care, and correction. This definition brings ecological thought into conversation with the sociology of practice and lived religion. Habitus, ritual, and embodied repetition explain how values become durable, while lived religion clarifies how people interpret and negotiate those values in everyday settings ⁷.

The article begins from a scholarly unease. Studies of pesantren character formation tend to emphasise exemplary leadership, habituation, curriculum integration, and religious culture. These contributions are valuable, but they often treat the pesantren environment as a container for programs. Studies of religious practice, in turn, show that prayer and other rituals can support discipline, self-control, and belonging, but they do not always explain how practice becomes moral agency beyond the ritual setting. Islamic environmental scholarship supplies a rich ethical vocabulary, yet it has not been adequately translated into a pedagogical model for santri formation. The literatures therefore remain adjacent. The missing link is an account of how spiritual, moral, cultural, and material relations form one educational ecology ⁸.

This article responds to that gap through a conceptual synthesis. It asks three questions. First, what does spiritual ecology mean when it is applied to pesantren as an institution of Islamic education? Second, through what mechanisms can a pesantren

⁷ Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge University Press, 1977); C Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (Oxford University Press, 1992); Meredith B McGuire, *Lived Religion: Faith and Practice in Everyday Life* (Oxford University Press, 2008).

⁸ Oldham and McLoughlin, "Character Education Research: A Scoping Review."; McGuire, *Lived Religion: Faith and Practice in Everyday Life*; Gade, "Muslim Environmentalisms and Environmental Ethics: Theory and Practice for Rights and Justice."

ecology move students from ritual compliance toward integrity? Third, what propositions and practical implications follow for contemporary Islamic education? The article does not report fieldwork and does not claim to describe a particular pesantren. Its purpose is to construct a theoretically defensible framework that can guide future ethnographic, qualitative, and comparative studies ⁹.

The contribution is threefold. First, the article reframes pesantren as a moral ecology rather than a collection of instructional programs. Second, it places spiritual ecology in dialogue with character education, lived religion, Islamic educational philosophy, and the sociology of practice. Third, it proposes a six-part formation model: exemplarity, habituation, religious experience, reflection, internalisation, and spiritual agency. The model preserves the importance of discipline while refusing to equate discipline with integrity. It also adds ecological responsibility as a domain in which the quality of religious formation becomes visible. The central argument is that santri integrity develops when repeated practices are interpreted, relationally negotiated, and extended into responsible action across self, community, knowledge, and creation ¹⁰.

The argument pushes back against two assumptions: that more frequent religious practice necessarily produces deeper character, and that ecological responsibility belongs to a separate curriculum. Both are incomplete. Practice forms disposition when connected to meaning, exemplarity, reflection, and agency. Ecological responsibility becomes religious education when embedded in the institution's understanding of worship, justice, stewardship, restraint, and accountability. Spiritual ecology is therefore a framework for forming integrity, not a label for environmental programming ¹¹.

⁹ L L Gilson and C B Goldberg, "So, What Is a Conceptual Paper?," *Group & Organization Management* 40, no. 2 (2015): 127–30, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1059601115576425>; E Jaakkola, "Designing Conceptual Articles: Four Approaches," 2020, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13162-020-00161-0>.

¹⁰ Pohl, "Islamic Education and Civil Society: Reflections on the Pesantren Tradition in Contemporary Indonesia"; Oldham and McLoughlin, "Character Education Research: A Scoping Review."; Gade, "Muslim Environmentalisms and Environmental Ethics: Theory and Practice for Rights and Justice."

¹¹ Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*; Gade, "Muslim Environmentalisms and Environmental Ethics: Theory and Practice for Rights and Justice."; Dabdoub et al., "Redesigning Schools for Effective Character Education through Leadership: The Case of PRIMED Institute and VLACE."

METHOD

This article uses an integrative conceptual review. A conceptual review is appropriate because the aim is not to estimate an effect, report a bounded case, or reproduce a field setting. The aim is to connect bodies of literature that have usually been discussed separately and to derive a framework that changes how a problem is understood. Conceptual papers are expected to integrate literatures, identify a tension, clarify constructs, and propose relationships that can guide future inquiry¹². The article therefore treats the literature as an argumentative field rather than as a list of summaries.

The source base combined peer-reviewed articles, scholarly books, official educational frameworks, and relevant ilmuna publications. Five clusters guided selection: Islamic education and pesantren studies; character and virtue education; lived religion and embodied practice; spiritual ecology and Islamic environmental ethics; and conceptual theory building. Classical works were retained for necessary constructs such as habitus, ritual, lived religion, Islamic educational purpose, and religious views of nature. Recent works were prioritised for debates on character education, prayer, self-regulation, environmental justice, Muslim environmentalism, and pesantren transformation¹³.

The analysis proceeded in four passes: mapping the problem represented by each cluster; comparing units of analysis; identifying connections and gaps; and translating the relationships into a conceptual model, propositions, and a research agenda. Character education foregrounds virtues and behaviour, pesantren studies institutional tradition and authority, spiritual ecology human and more-than-human relations, and lived religion everyday meaning. The process follows integrative review, in which synthesis should produce sharper conceptual structure rather than repeat prior claims¹⁴.

¹² Gilson and Goldberg, "So, What Is a Conceptual Paper?"; Jaakkola, "Designing Conceptual Articles: Four Approaches."

¹³ Snyder and H., "Literature Review as a Research Methodology: An Overview and Guidelines," 2019, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2019.07.039>; Firdaus et al., "Pengembangan Model Pengelolaan Pendidikan Karakter Di Pesantren Berbasis Tradisi Dan Tadzkirah."; Oldham and McLoughlin, "Character Education Research: A Scoping Review."

¹⁴ R J Torraco, "Writing Integrative Literature Reviews: Guidelines and Examples," *Human Resource Development Review* 4, no. 3 (2005): 356–67, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1534484305278283>; Snyder and H., "Literature Review as a Research Methodology: An Overview and Guidelines."

The review uses three controls: linking claims to traceable sources or explicit inference; distinguishing established findings from propositions requiring testing; and checking boundary conditions such as coercive authority, unequal voice, ritual formalism, digital fragmentation, and ecological branding. These controls limit speculation. The result is presented as a framework for inquiry and educational design, not a settled empirical model ¹⁵.

Table 1. Literature clusters, conceptual limitations, and the proposed contribution

Literature cluster	Dominant contribution	Unresolved limitation	Response of this article
Pesantren studies	Tradition, authority, knowledge transmission, community formation	May treat the environment as a container for programs	Reframe pesantren as a moral ecology of relations
Character education	Virtues, habits, role models, school culture, moral action	May understate worship, revelation, and ecological relations	Connect virtue formation with Islamic spirituality and creation
Prayer and religious practice	Habituation, discipline, self-control, belonging	Observable practice can be mistaken for integrity	Insert meaning, reflection, internalisation, and transfer
Islamic environmental ethics	Trust, mercy, justice, balance, public good, multispecies relations	Often remains at the level of ethics or advocacy	Translate ecological ethics into pesantren pedagogy
Lived religion and practice theory	Embodiment, negotiation, habitus, ritual, everyday meaning	May not explain institutional design in Islamic education	Link everyday practice to institutional and theological horizons

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

A. Pesantren As A Moral Ecology

The first finding of the synthesis is a change in the unit of analysis. Pesantren should be read not only as an organisation that delivers religious instruction, but as a moral ecology that distributes attention, authority, time, movement, responsibility, and recognition. The term ecology is useful because it

¹⁵ Gilson and Goldberg, “So, What Is a Conceptual Paper?”; Jaakkola, “Designing Conceptual Articles: Four Approaches.”

keeps the relationships among these elements in view. A lesson on honesty can be weakened by an institutional practice that rewards concealment. A sermon on mercy can be contradicted by humiliating correction. A lesson on stewardship can lose credibility when water, food, or waste are treated as nobody's responsibility. Integrity therefore depends on the coherence of the surrounding relations, not simply on the quality of the stated curriculum¹⁶.

This perspective extends, but does not discard, the historical understanding of pesantren. The pesantren tradition is sustained through relationships between kiai, ustaz, santri, texts, community, and a distinctive rhythm of residence and study. It is also shaped by negotiations with modern schooling, state regulation, professional aspirations, and global religious discourse.¹⁷ showed that tradition and modernity are not fixed opposites in Indonesian Islamic education.¹⁸ similarly demonstrated that pesantren can contribute to civil society through forms of learning that combine religious knowledge, social participation, and moral responsibility. The concept of moral ecology develops this insight by asking how these relationships are experienced and reproduced in ordinary institutional life.

An ecology is not the same as a culture understood as a stable set of shared values. Culture language can describe an atmosphere, but it can also conceal conflict, inequality, and divergent interpretations. A moral ecology is more explicitly relational and evaluative. It asks who is trusted, who is heard, whose labour is visible, how correction is conducted, how resources are shared, and how the institution responds when its ideals are violated. This makes the concept suitable for a critical study of pesantren. It honours the formative power of shared

¹⁶ A Thapa et al., "A Review of School Climate Research," *Review of Educational Research* 83, no. 3 (2013): 357–85, <https://doi.org/10.3102/0034654313483907>; M.-T. Wang and J L Degol, "School Climate: A Review of the Construct, Measurement, and Impact on Student Outcomes," *Educational Psychology Review* 28 (2016): 315–52, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10648-015-9319-1>; Oldham and McLoughlin, "Character Education Research: A Scoping Review."

¹⁷ Lukens-Bull (2001)

¹⁸ Pohl (2006)

tradition while creating space to examine the effects of authority and the possibility of moral repair ¹⁹.

The ecology has seven interacting components: authority, time, space, text, peers, service, and creation. Authority includes kiai, ustaz, senior santri, administrators, and informal figures who interpret proper conduct. Time includes prayer, lessons, rest, work, silence, and digital attention. Space includes mosque, classroom, dormitory, kitchen, garden, office, and surroundings. Text includes Qur'an, hadith, Islamic works, rules, and digital sources. Peers shape belonging and status; service converts values into contribution; creation makes accountability material through water, food, land, animals, energy, and neighbours. Their educational force lies in coordination ²⁰.

The term ecology also prevents an overly individualistic account of santri character. Character education often focuses on virtues located within a person, while school climate research shows that relationships and institutional expectations influence how those virtues are practised ²¹. In a pesantren, the student is formed through participation in a social and spiritual world. A student who learns to keep promises may have been shaped by a teacher's reliability, a peer system that supports accountability, a schedule that makes responsibility visible, and a religious vocabulary that interprets trust as an amanah. Integrity is personal, but its conditions are distributed.

The distributed nature of formation does not mean that students are passive. A moral ecology offers affordances, pressures, and limits, but santri interpret and negotiate them. They may accept, question, adapt, or quietly resist institutional expectations. The same rule can be experienced as guidance by one student and as arbitrary control by another. The same act of service can cultivate generosity or reinforce an unequal division of labour. Lived religion is valuable

¹⁹ Abdullah Sahin, "Critical Issues in Islamic Education Studies: Rethinking Islamic and Western Liberal Secular Values of Education," *Religions* 9, no. 11 (2018): 335, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel9110335>; McGuire, *Lived Religion: Faith and Practice in Everyday Life*.

²⁰ Wang and Degol, "School Climate: A Review of the Construct, Measurement, and Impact on Student Outcomes"; Thapa et al., "A Review of School Climate Research."; Gade, "Muslim Environmentalisms and Environmental Ethics: Theory and Practice for Rights and Justice."

²¹ Wang and Degol, "School Climate: A Review of the Construct, Measurement, and Impact on Student Outcomes"; Thapa et al., "A Review of School Climate Research."

here because it treats religious life as something people inhabit, interpret, and sometimes contest in everyday settings²². A conceptual framework that ignores interpretation would turn pesantren into a mechanism and santri into recipients.

Contemporary conditions intensify the need for this relational account. Santri move between face-to-face authority and digital religious publics. They encounter competing models of piety, success, masculinity and femininity, social status, consumption, and political belonging. Digital access can widen intellectual horizons, but it can also reward speed, certainty, spectacle, and antagonism. Environmental pressures add another layer. Food waste, water scarcity, heat, pollution, and unequal access to clean space are not abstract topics when they appear in the daily life of a residential institution. A pesantren that treats these concerns as outside the religious curriculum misses a central opportunity for moral learning²³.

The moral ecology framework therefore makes a modest but important claim. The educational question is not only what values a pesantren teaches, but what kind of relational world it repeatedly makes possible. If students are expected to become honest, the ecology should make honesty safer than concealment. If they are expected to become compassionate, correction should preserve dignity. If they are expected to become responsible stewards, the institution should provide meaningful occasions to care for shared resources. The framework shifts evaluation from the volume of programs to the coherence between proclaimed values, institutional arrangements, and student agency²⁴.

B. Spiritual Ecology As An Islamic Educational Construct

Spiritual ecology is often used to connect ecological crisis with religious cosmology, ethical responsibility, and the human search for meaning. Its contribution to Islamic education is not that it supplies a new activity, but that it

²² McGuire, *Lived Religion: Faith and Practice in Everyday Life*.

²³ UNESCO, "Reimagining Our Futures Together: A New Social Contract for Education" (UNESCO, 2021); Gade, "Muslim Environmentalisms and Environmental Ethics: Theory and Practice for Rights and Justice."

²⁴ Pike et al., "Character Development through the Curriculum: Teaching and Assessing the Understanding and Practice of Virtue."; Dabdoub et al., "Redesigning Schools for Effective Character Education through Leadership: The Case of PRIMED Institute and VLACE."

challenges the separation of spiritual formation from material relations. Islamic environmental ethics has drawn attention to ideas such as tawhid, khalifah, amanah, mizan, rahmah, justice, and the public good. These concepts are not interchangeable, and none should be treated as a simple slogan. Together, however, they support an account of creation in which human freedom is accompanied by accountability and in which the value of the world cannot be measured only by immediate human utility ²⁵.

Gade's account of Muslim environmentalisms is particularly useful because it resists the assumption that Islam has one single environmental position. Muslim environmental thought is shaped by theological interpretation, local histories, social movements, law, political economy, and experiences of ecological injustice ²⁶. For pesantren, this means that spiritual ecology cannot be imported as a universal package. It must be interpreted through the institution's own intellectual traditions, community relations, and material conditions. A small rural pesantren and an urban pesantren facing water stress may share an ethical vocabulary while requiring different pedagogical responses.

The theological premise of spiritual ecology becomes educational only when it changes how relationships are perceived. Tawhid can be connected to the refusal to treat human beings and the natural world as unrelated fragments. Amanah can frame the use of resources as a trust rather than a private entitlement. Mizan can invite reflection on balance, excess, and the social consequences of consumption. Rahmah can extend beyond interpersonal kindness toward the protection of vulnerable bodies, communities, animals, and habitats. Justice can ask who bears the cost of pollution, scarcity, or institutional convenience. The purpose is not to turn every environmental issue into a sermon, but to make moral reasoning attentive to consequences that are often hidden ²⁷.

²⁵ Gade, *Muslim Environmentalisms: Religious and Social Foundations*; Foltz, Denny, and Baharuddin, *Islam and Ecology: A Bestowed Trust*; Nasr, *Religion and the Order of Nature*.

²⁶ Gade, "Muslim Environmentalisms and Environmental Ethics: Theory and Practice for Rights and Justice."

²⁷ W Jenkins, E Berry, and L B Kreider, "Religion and Climate Change.," *Annual Review of Environment and Resources* 43 (2018): 85–108, <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-environ-102017-025855>; Gade, "Muslim Environmentalisms and Environmental Ethics: Theory and Practice for Rights and Justice.," Nasr, *Religion and the Order of Nature*.

This argument is compatible with the educational language of tarbiyah, ta'dib, and akhlaq, although each term has its own intellectual history. ²⁸ showed that Islamic education involves knowledge, moral purpose, social responsibility, and the cultivation of appropriate dispositions. ²⁹ warns against reducing Islamic education to the transmission of fixed information, arguing for a critical and intellectually engaged approach to Islamic educational studies. In the present framework, spiritual ecology adds a material and relational register to this tradition. Good character is not demonstrated only in interpersonal manners or ritual observance. It is also tested in the way a person inhabits shared spaces, uses resources, responds to vulnerability, and makes decisions under conditions of uncertainty.

Spiritual ecology has an ontological, affective, and institutional dimension. The ontological dimension concerns what kind of world students are invited to perceive. Are water, food, soil, and other forms of life treated as signs of divine creation and shared responsibility, or merely as supplies? The affective dimension concerns what students learn to feel: gratitude, restraint, reverence, grief, responsibility, or indifference. The institutional dimension concerns what the pesantren organises: procurement, cleaning, waste, gardens, energy, service, and dialogue with neighbours. These dimensions must reinforce one another. A theology of stewardship without affective attachment can remain abstract. A feeling of appreciation without institutional practice can remain private. A green program without religious meaning can become a short-term project ³⁰.

This threefold account also prevents two reductions. The first reduction is spiritual romanticism, in which nature is praised while practical questions of labour, access, waste, and inequality are ignored. The second is environmental instrumentalism, in which religious language is used only to secure compliance with a technical program. Islamic spiritual ecology should instead cultivate the capacity to recognise relations and to act responsibly within them. This emphasis aligns with environmental justice scholarship, which insists that ecological questions are

²⁸ Halstead, (2004, 2007)

²⁹ Sahin (2018)

³⁰ Foltz, Denny, and Baharuddin, *Islam and Ecology: A Bestowed Trust*; Gade, "Muslim Environmentalisms and Environmental Ethics: Theory and Practice for Rights and Justice."; Thapa et al., "A Review of School Climate Research."

inseparable from questions of rights, voice, distribution, and dignity³¹. Recent work on integrating religious knowledge with moral development makes a related point: values become educationally meaningful when they are connected to lived relationships rather than left as abstract prescriptions³².

In a pesantren, the material environment is also a form of curriculum. A clean mosque, a shaded pathway, a well-managed kitchen, a dormitory in which privacy is respected, and a waste system that makes responsibility visible all communicate an educational message. So do their opposites. The hidden curriculum is not a minor supplement to the formal curriculum. It is what students encounter when no teacher is explaining the value at stake. School culture research makes a similar point: relationships, norms, safety, and institutional participation influence student development because they shape the context in which learning becomes credible³³. Spiritual ecology makes this hidden curriculum theologically legible.

The concept broadens public relevance in Islamic education. A pesantren need not become an environmental organisation. It can begin with ordinary practice: food purchasing and distribution, leftovers, cleaning, water and electricity, and students' ability to propose and assess changes. Such questions allow theology to meet governance and show that religious responsibility is not confined to private interiority or symbolic reputation³⁴.

C. From Ritual Compliance To Integrity

The central distinction is between ritual compliance and integrity. Compliance is observable alignment with a rule or expected practice. It creates order and repeated encounters with a moral form. Integrity is more demanding: coherence between what a student knows, values, feels responsible for, says, and

³¹ Gade, "Muslim Environmentalisms and Environmental Ethics: Theory and Practice for Rights and Justice."; Jenkins, Berry, and Kreider, "Religion and Climate Change."

³² S Nurhidayati and S Sentosa, "Strengthening Moral Values through Religious Knowledge Integration: Insights from Madrasah Ibtidaiyah," *Bidayatuna: Jurnal Pendidikan Guru Madrasah Ibtidaiyah* 7, no. 2 (2024), <https://doi.org/10.54471/bidayatuna.v7i2.3316>.

³³ Wang and Degol, "School Climate: A Review of the Construct, Measurement, and Impact on Student Outcomes"; Thapa et al., "A Review of School Climate Research."

³⁴ M Muhammad, "Model Pendidikan Akhlak Terintegrasi: Studi Kasus Pembentukan Kepribadian Muslim Di Pondok Pesantren Anwarussunnah Petanahan," *Ilmuna: Jurnal Studi Pendidikan Agama Islam* 8, no. 1 (2026): 564–82, <https://doi.org/10.54437/ilmuna.v8i1.2794>; Jenkins, Berry, and Kreider, "Religion and Climate Change."; Gade, "Muslim Environmentalisms and Environmental Ethics: Theory and Practice for Rights and Justice."

does across situations. An integral student can recognise a moral problem without a stated rule, explain a decision, acknowledge error, and repair harm ³⁵.

This distinction should not be misunderstood as an argument against discipline. Pesantren requires structure because learning, worship, communal life, and safety depend on dependable rhythms. Studies of congregational prayer and prayer habituation show that repeated practice can be associated with discipline and time management ³⁶. Research on religious motivation likewise suggests that the quality of motivation matters, not only the frequency of a practice ³⁷. The conceptual problem arises when the institutional indicator is mistaken for the full educational outcome.

Prayer provides a useful case because it combines bodily repetition, sacred time, communal coordination, textual meaning, and personal address to God. Recent research on Muslim prayer has examined the psychological functioning of verbal and active supplication, while broader daily-life research has shown that prayer is experienced as a process embedded in changing emotions and circumstances ³⁸. These studies do not justify a simple claim that prayer

³⁵ D B Newman, J B Nezelek, and T M Thrash, "The Dynamics of Prayer in Daily Life and Implications for Well-Being," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 124, no. 6 (2023): 1299–1313, <https://doi.org/10.1037/pspp0000454>; Oldham and McLoughlin, "Character Education Research: A Scoping Review."; Pike et al., "Character Development through the Curriculum: Teaching and Assessing the Understanding and Practice of Virtue."

³⁶ A Abdurachman, N Hanafiah, and A Sukandar, "Manajemen Program Pembiasaan Shalat Berjamaah Dalam Membentuk Karakter Disiplin Siswa.," *Edukasi: The Journal of Educational Research* 1, no. 3 (2021): 101–15, <https://doi.org/10.57032/edukasi.v1i3.103>; N Luthfi and T A Mustofa, "The Effect of Dhuha Prayer Habituation on Student Learning Discipline: A Study at a Junior High School in Surakarta.," *TARBAWY: Indonesian Journal of Islamic Education* 11, no. 2 (2024): 175–86, <https://doi.org/10.17509/t.v11i2.75670>; M Nadila, R Romelah, and N A K Maknin, "Implementation of Congregational Duha and Zuhur Prayers as an Effort to Discipline Students.," *Scaffolding: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam Dan Multikulturalisme* 6, no. 2 (2024): 342–53, <https://doi.org/10.37680/scaffolding.v6i2.6061>; L Masruroh, "Religious Strengthening Program to Improve Student Discipline at SMPN 2 Pandaan in 2024.," *Global Education Journal* 2, no. 3 (2024): 285–91, <https://doi.org/10.59525/gej.v2i3.273>; A Z Nareswari, "The Effect of Dhuha Prayer Habituation on Student Discipline: Study at Muhammadiyah 2 Surakarta Senior High School.," *Jurnal Pendidikan* 2, no. 2 (2024): 282–93; A Andayani and Z Dahlan, "Konstruksi Karakter Siswa via Pembiasaan Shalat Dhuha.," *Muallimuna: Jurnal Madrasah Ibtidaiyah* 7, no. 2 (2022): 99.

³⁷ N Faidah, S R Ratnawati, and R W Daryono, "Self-Control Mediation: The Influence of Islamic Learning and Parents' Support on Students' Religious Character.," *Edureligia: Jurnal Pendidikan Agama Islam* 8, no. 1 (2024): 42–58, <https://doi.org/10.33650/edureligia.v8i1.8472>; Hardy et al., "Adolescent Religious Motivation: A Self-Determination Theory Approach."

³⁸ Z J Chen et al., "Muslim Verbal and Active Prayer (MVAP): Measurement and Psychological Functioning of Supplications in Islam.," *The International Journal for the Psychology of Religion* 31, no. 4 (2021): 249–59, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10508619.2020.1858254>; Newman, Nezelek, and Thrash, "The Dynamics of Prayer in Daily Life and Implications for Well-Being."

automatically produces virtue. They support a more careful proposition: prayer can become a formative practice when its meanings, emotions, relationships, and consequences are interpreted within a wider moral ecology.

An institution may therefore observe two students performing the same prayer routine while the educational significance differs. One may be acting primarily to avoid a sanction. Another may be developing a practice of recollection that supports patience, attention, and accountability. A third may comply publicly while experiencing resentment or exclusion. The institution cannot infer the whole moral state from the visible act. It must create conditions for explanation, reflection, safe questioning, and conduct that extends beyond the ritual setting. Without those conditions, the institution risks measuring conformity more accurately than integrity³⁹.

The distinction can be specified through four domains of transfer: self-regulation of attention, desire, time, and consumption; social integrity in truthfulness, promises, respect, repair, and protection; epistemic integrity in seeking knowledge, handling uncertainty, representing sources, and accepting correction; and ecological integrity in using shared resources and recognising human and more-than-human relations. The domains are distinct but connected: trustworthiness can appear in speech, scholarship, friendship, and environmental care⁴⁰.

This multidimensional account addresses a limitation in some character education designs. A list of virtues can become detached from the situations in which virtues are difficult. Oldham and McLoughlin's (2025) scoping review points to the breadth and diversity of character education research, but the diversity also makes it necessary to specify how character is formed and evidenced. The present framework proposes that integrity becomes visible at moments of

³⁹ Chen et al., "Muslim Verbal and Active Prayer (MVAP): Measurement and Psychological Functioning of Supplications in Islam."; Hardy et al., "Adolescent Religious Motivation: A Self-Determination Theory Approach."; Newman, Nezelek, and Thrash, "The Dynamics of Prayer in Daily Life and Implications for Well-Being."

⁴⁰ OECD, "Beyond Academic Learning: First Results from the Survey of Social and Emotional Skills" (OECD Publishing, 2021); Pike et al., "Character Development through the Curriculum: Teaching and Assessing the Understanding and Practice of Virtue."; Dabdoub et al., "Redesigning Schools for Effective Character Education through Leadership: The Case of PRIMED Institute and VLACE."

transfer: when a student moves from mosque to dormitory, from textbook to online source, from supervised work to unsupervised work, or from a stated rule to an unfamiliar problem. Transfer is where a value becomes an orientation rather than a performance tied to one setting.

The transfer test also changes how success is discussed. A pesantren should not ask only whether students know the vocabulary of akhlaq or attend religious activities. It should ask whether students can recognise a moral question, articulate the relevant religious and human considerations, act with proportion, and remain accountable when the result is inconvenient. This is close to the emphasis on moral reasoning, moral emotion, and moral action in character education, but it is placed within an Islamic spiritual horizon and an institutional ecology ⁴¹. Integrity is thus neither purely internal nor purely behavioural. It is a pattern of accountable action sustained by meaning.

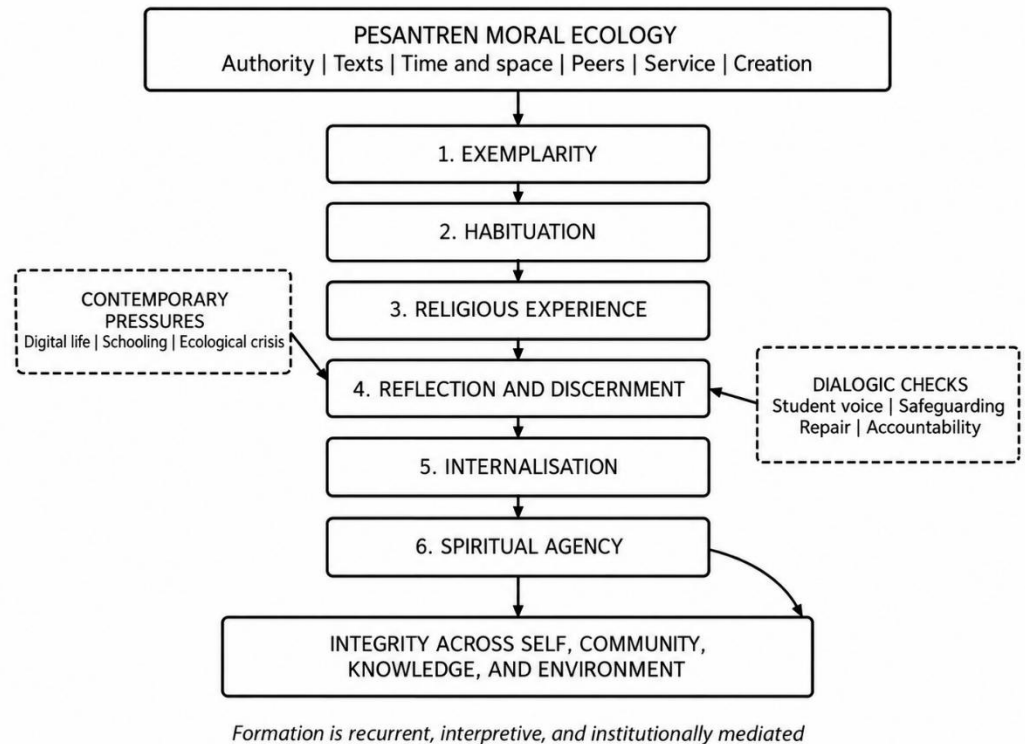
D. The Six-Part Formation Model

The integrative review yields a six-part model: exemplarity, habituation, religious experience, reflection and discernment, internalisation, and spiritual agency. It is recurrent rather than a one-way staircase: students may advance, pause, regress, or reinterpret. Institutional arrangements can strengthen or weaken each transition. Rules can support habituation but generate resentment; examples can open moral imagination but be compromised by power; reflection can deepen practice while exposing contradictions. The model therefore includes feedback and dialogic checks ⁴².

⁴¹ Oldham and McLoughlin, "Character Education Research: A Scoping Review."; Halstead, "Islamic Values: A Distinctive Framework for Moral Education?"

⁴² Gilson and Goldberg, "So, What Is a Conceptual Paper?"; Jaakkola, "Designing Conceptual Articles: Four Approaches."

Figure 1. Conceptual Model Of Spiritual Ecology and Santri Integrity



The first process is exemplarity. Students learn from what significant others do, tolerate, repair, and refuse. In pesantren, the kiai and ustaz remain important figures, but exemplarity is distributed across senior santri, administrators, kitchen workers, teachers, and peers. Role modelling is not mere imitation. ⁴³ explains that the moral meaning of role modelling depends on the perceived credibility of the model and on the learner's interpretation of the relationship. A teacher who speaks about humility but treats subordinate workers with contempt teaches a lesson, although not the intended one. Conversely, a teacher who admits uncertainty, apologises, and corrects a mistake demonstrates that moral authority includes accountability.

Exemplarity should therefore be evaluated by consistency rather than charisma. Charismatic authority can mobilise commitment, but integrity formation requires ordinary reliability. Students need to see how authority

⁴³ Sanderse (2013)

handles disagreement, protects confidentiality, uses institutional resources, responds to criticism, and applies rules to powerful as well as less powerful persons. The model's first proposition is consequently normative and empirical: exemplary credibility is a mediating condition between institutional ideals and student internalisation. This proposition invites research on how santri describe trustworthy authority, not only on how leaders describe themselves ⁴⁴.

The second process is habituation. Habituation gives moral life a body and a calendar. Prayer, study, cleaning, greeting, recitation, service, and rest become easier to perform because they are woven into repeated routines. ⁴⁵ concept of habitus helps explain how repeated social arrangements become practical dispositions. ⁴⁶ study of ritual practice adds that ritual repetition also organises attention and social difference. In a pesantren, habituation can make discipline feel less like an external command and more like a shared rhythm.

Yet habituation has a double edge. It can stabilise a value, but it can also routinise an act until the original meaning becomes invisible. A schedule that leaves no time for rest can produce compliance through exhaustion. A cleaning duty can form service, or it can reproduce status hierarchies if some students always perform invisible labour. A prayer routine can cultivate attention, or it can become a race to fulfil a requirement. The formative question is not whether repetition exists, but whether repetition is connected to explanation, dignity, agency, and feedback. ⁴⁷ illustrate how prayer discipline is often organised through reminders, guidance, parental or institutional support, and consequences. The present framework adds that these mechanisms should be examined for the quality of motivation and the distribution of voice they create.

The third process is religious experience. Religious education is not exhausted by information or external behaviour because prayer, recitation, fasting, service, gratitude, fear, hope, and repentance can become lived

⁴⁴ Wang and Degol, "School Climate: A Review of the Construct, Measurement, and Impact on Student Outcomes"; Thapa et al., "A Review of School Climate Research."; Sanderse, "The Meaning of Role Modelling in Moral and Character Education."

⁴⁵ Bourdieu's (1977)

⁴⁶ Bell's (1992)

⁴⁷ Abdurachman et al. (2021), Tabroni et al. (2022), and Zein and Nugraha (2022)

experiences. The term experience is used cautiously. The article does not claim that a researcher can directly measure spiritual depth from a student's report, nor that intense emotion is proof of moral maturity. It means that practices are encountered as meaningful events that shape attention and self-understanding. Chen et al. (2021) show the importance of distinguishing dimensions of Muslim prayer rather than treating prayer as a single undifferentiated behaviour. Newman et al. (2023) likewise demonstrate the value of studying prayer in daily process rather than only through a global frequency measure.

In the pesantren ecology, experience is supported by the interaction of bodily posture, sound, shared time, textual language, place, and relationships. A quiet moment before study, the act of caring for a sick roommate, or the recognition of waste after a communal meal can generate religious significance when students have resources to interpret it. Religious experience is therefore not confined to formally designated sacred spaces, although the mosque and study circle remain central. The concept of spiritual ecology expands the possible sites in which students perceive dependence, gratitude, restraint, and accountability ⁴⁸.

The fourth process is reflection and discernment. Without reflection, practice may remain tied to supervision. Reflection allows students to ask what an action means, whose interests it serves, what harms it may produce, and how religious principles should guide a new situation. Discernment is more than abstract reasoning. It is the practical ability to identify what is morally at stake when values conflict. A student may need to decide whether loyalty to a friend permits silence about harm, whether obedience permits a demeaning instruction, or whether institutional convenience justifies avoidable waste ⁴⁹.

Reflection must be designed as an educational practice rather than assumed to occur automatically. It can take place through halaqah discussion,

⁴⁸ McGuire, *Lived Religion: Faith and Practice in Everyday Life*; Gade, *Muslim Environmentalisms: Religious and Social Foundations*; Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*.

⁴⁹ Sahin, "Critical Issues in Islamic Education Studies: Rethinking Islamic and Western Liberal Secular Values of Education"; Halstead, "An Islamic Concept of Education"; Dabdoub et al., "Redesigning Schools for Effective Character Education through Leadership: The Case of PRIMED Institute and VLACE."

guided journaling, case analysis, peer dialogue, reading across interpretations, service debriefing, and structured conversations after conflict. The goal is not to weaken reverence for religious knowledge. It is to help students connect knowledge with judgment. Sahin (2018) argues for critical engagement in Islamic education, while Halstead (2004, 2007) locates moral education within knowledge and purpose. In this model, reflection protects practice from becoming empty formalism and protects interpretation from becoming detached opinion.

The fifth process is internalisation. A value is internalised when it becomes personally and relationally significant enough to guide conduct even when external monitoring is weak. Internalisation is not the same as agreement with a statement. It involves a gradual reorganisation of motives, emotions, habits, and self-understanding. Students begin to see honesty, mercy, justice, restraint, and responsibility as part of the person they are trying to become. The language of Islamic education would describe this as a movement from knowledge toward *adab* and *akhlaq*, but the framework keeps the process open to empirical investigation ⁵⁰.

Internalisation is often socially mediated. Students interpret a value through the responses of peers and teachers. They notice whether honesty is rewarded, whether apology leads to repair, whether questions are welcomed, and whether service brings dignity or humiliation. Character education research emphasises the alignment of explicit instruction, relational climate, and opportunities for moral action because a contradiction among these levels can block internalisation ⁵¹. A *pesantren*'s formal language of integrity will not be persuasive if students learn that status protects some people from accountability.

⁵⁰ H Susanto, A Setiaji, and N Sulastri, "Strategi Internalisasi Nilai-Nilai Akhlak Dalam Upaya Membentuk Kepedulian Sosial Siswa," *Edumaspul: Jurnal Pendidikan* 6, no. 1 (2022): 556–64, <https://doi.org/10.33487/edumaspul.v6i1.3178>; Halstead, "An Islamic Concept of Education"; Oldham and McLoughlin, "Character Education Research: A Scoping Review."

⁵¹ Oldham and McLoughlin, "Character Education Research: A Scoping Review."; Dabdoub et al., "Redesigning Schools for Effective Character Education through Leadership: The Case of PRIMED Institute and VLACE."; Susanto, Setiaji, and Sulastri, "Strategi Internalisasi Nilai-Nilai Akhlak Dalam Upaya Membentuk Kepedulian Sosial Siswa."

The sixth process is spiritual agency. Agency marks the point at which students can carry a religiously grounded orientation into situations that the institution has not scripted. Spiritual agency does not mean individual autonomy without tradition. It means the capacity to act responsibly through a tradition, with reflective judgment and concern for consequences. A santri demonstrates agency when identifying an unfair practice, proposing a more sustainable use of resources, mediating a conflict, correcting a false citation, or continuing a service commitment outside direct supervision. The act is spiritual because it is connected to accountability before God and to the meaning of a life in relation with others ⁵².

Agency also creates a test for the institution. If students are never allowed to make decisions, negotiate tasks, initiate service, or question an interpretation, the ecology may produce dependent compliance rather than integrity. This does not imply that every rule should be optional. It means that guided participation should increase over time. Students can be given responsibility with clear boundaries, mentoring, review, and the right to raise concerns. Such arrangements turn authority from a system of control into a structure that prepares students for accountable freedom ⁵³.

The processes are mutually reinforcing. Exemplarity makes habituation credible. Habituation creates embodied opportunities for experience. Experience generates questions that require reflection. Reflection gives practice a moral orientation. Internalisation sustains conduct when surveillance recedes. Agency then feeds back into the ecology by allowing students to improve routines and make the institution more responsive. A failure at any point can interrupt the process. For example, harsh correction can damage the credibility

⁵² Pohl, "Islamic Education and Civil Society: Reflections on the Pesantren Tradition in Contemporary Indonesia"; Halstead, "Islamic Values: A Distinctive Framework for Moral Education?"; Dabdoub et al., "Redesigning Schools for Effective Character Education through Leadership: The Case of PRIMED Institute and VLACE."

⁵³ M Mahfud and S Zahriyah, "Internalizing Islamic Values in Students: The Role of Character Education in Building Morals and Ethics.," *MA'ALIM: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 6, no. 1 (2025): 93–105, <https://doi.org/10.21154/maalim.v6i1.10150>; Dabdoub et al., "Redesigning Schools for Effective Character Education through Leadership: The Case of PRIMED Institute and VLACE.," Pike et al., "Character Development through the Curriculum: Teaching and Assessing the Understanding and Practice of Virtue."

of authority, empty repetition can prevent experience, fear can suppress reflection, and institutional hypocrisy can block internalisation. The model is therefore useful as a diagnostic map ⁵⁴.

Table 2. Dimensions Of A Pesantren Spiritual Ecology And Their Integrity-Forming Questions

Dimension	Educational sites	Integrity-forming question
Authority	Kiai, ustaz, senior santri, correction, safeguarding	Trustworthy exemplarity and accountable guidance
Time	Prayer, study, rest, work, silence, digital attention	A rhythm that supports discipline without exhaustion
Space	Mosque, classroom, dormitory, garden, kitchen, waste area	Material messages about dignity, care, and belonging
Text	Qur'an, hadith, kitab kuning, rules, digital sources	Moral reasoning rather than memorisation alone
Peers	Mentoring, friendship, status, conflict, repair	Relational responsibility and protection from humiliation
Service	Cleaning, teaching, administration, outreach, mutual aid	Dignified contribution linked to common good
Creation	Water, food, energy, waste, animals, land, neighbours	Ecological accountability as lived religious practice

The seven dimensions in Table 2 can be read as fields of pedagogical possibility. Authority asks whether guidance is trustworthy and accountable. Time asks whether discipline is balanced with rest and attentiveness. Space asks what the material arrangement communicates about dignity and belonging. Text asks whether religious knowledge is memorised only or used to reason. Peers ask how status, friendship, conflict, and protection operate. Service asks whether contribution is meaningful and fairly distributed. Creation asks whether ecological responsibility is treated as an expression of worship and justice. No dimension is sufficient by itself; each modifies the others ⁵⁵.

⁵⁴ Gilson and Goldberg, "So, What Is a Conceptual Paper?"; Dabdoub et al., "Redesigning Schools for Effective Character Education through Leadership: The Case of PRIMED Institute and VLACE."; Jaakkola, "Designing Conceptual Articles: Four Approaches."

⁵⁵ Thapa et al., "A Review of School Climate Research."; Gade, "Muslim Environmentalisms and Environmental Ethics: Theory and Practice for Rights and Justice."; Halstead, "An Islamic Concept of Education."

Authority is the most sensitive dimension because it can open or close the other six. The classical pesantren relationship between kiai and santri is pedagogically powerful precisely because it combines knowledge, trust, moral example, and social attachment. It can also create vulnerability when students lack safe channels for questioning or reporting harm. A spiritual ecology framework must therefore distinguish reverence from immunity. Respect for teachers is compatible with institutional accountability. Indeed, accountability protects the moral credibility of religious authority. The recent ilmuna discussion of integrated moral education similarly underscores the importance of exemplary leadership, habituation, structured moral activity, and system integration, but the present model adds the need to examine student interpretation and institutional power ⁵⁶.

Time is not merely a scheduling problem; it is moral pedagogy. Prayer can interrupt instrumental time, study can support perseverance, and rest can teach that bodies are not machines. Digital restrictions may create attention but, without explanation, invite resistance. A spiritually ecological schedule asks how work, worship, study, friendship, solitude, sleep, and service sustain one another, and whether its burdens are shared equitably ⁵⁷.

Space communicates a theology of relation. Alongside the mosque, the dormitory, kitchen, garden, washroom, and waste area are educational spaces. A well-kept space can express gratitude; a neglected space can teach that maintenance is someone else's problem. Curriculum review should therefore ask who uses and cleans a space, what resources it consumes, what life it supports, and what behaviour it encourages. This makes spiritual ecology concrete without reducing it to decoration ⁵⁸.

⁵⁶ Muhammad, "Model Pendidikan Akhlak Terintegrasi: Studi Kasus Pembentukan Kepribadian Muslim Di Pondok Pesantren Anwarussunnah Petanahan."

⁵⁷ Tabroni et al., "Parenting Patterns in Educating Children's Prayer Discipline during the Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19)."; OECD, "Beyond Academic Learning: First Results from the Survey of Social and Emotional Skills"; Wang and Degol, "School Climate: A Review of the Construct, Measurement, and Impact on Student Outcomes."

⁵⁸ Gade, "Muslim Environmentalisms and Environmental Ethics: Theory and Practice for Rights and Justice."; Thapa et al., "A Review of School Climate Research."; Wang and Degol, "School Climate: A Review of the Construct, Measurement, and Impact on Student Outcomes."

Text remains central because pesantren identity is inseparable from Islamic sources and inherited scholarship. Spiritual ecology does not replace textual learning with activism; it asks how texts are read in relation to life. Qur'anic and hadith language about trust, balance, mercy, justice, and creation can guide reasoning about contemporary dilemmas. Textual authority should not close every question before examination, nor should contemporary concerns be imposed without interpretive responsibility. The desired practice is disciplined reading that lets tradition illuminate new problems and new problems expose the ethical stakes of inherited concepts⁵⁹.

Peers form another crucial layer because santri spend much of their time with one another. Peer culture can amplify the values of teachers, but it can also produce informal hierarchies, ridicule, exclusion, or the policing of piety. A student may know the language of compassion and still participate in humiliation because belonging is at stake. Integrity education therefore needs peer practices of listening, mentoring, conflict repair, and protection. Students should learn that correcting a friend is not the same as shaming a friend. They should also learn that solidarity does not require concealing harm. A peer ecology becomes spiritual when it treats the dignity of others as a religious responsibility rather than as a matter of personal preference⁶⁰.

Service provides the transition from virtue language to contribution. Cleaning, teaching younger students, managing a library, helping in a kitchen, visiting neighbours, and organising mutual aid can all become formative. The key question is whether service is interpreted as dignified responsibility or assigned as a low-status burden. Service should include decision making, explanation of purpose, rotation of tasks, and opportunities to evaluate impact. When students see how their work affects others, service can cultivate humility, competence, and public responsibility. When service is invisible or coercive, it

⁵⁹ Halstead, "Islamic Values: A Distinctive Framework for Moral Education?"; Halstead, "An Islamic Concept of Education"; Sahin, "Critical Issues in Islamic Education Studies: Rethinking Islamic and Western Liberal Secular Values of Education"; Gade, "Muslim Environmentalisms and Environmental Ethics: Theory and Practice for Rights and Justice."

⁶⁰ Thapa et al., "A Review of School Climate Research."; Wang and Degol, "School Climate: A Review of the Construct, Measurement, and Impact on Student Outcomes"; McGuire, *Lived Religion: Faith and Practice in Everyday Life*.

can generate resentment while allowing the institution to claim moral success. Recent studies of religious culture and santri character likewise point to the importance of institutional routines and opportunities for participation, although their findings should not be read as proof that routine alone produces integrity ⁶¹.

Creation completes the ecology by making the material world visible as a partner in moral reasoning. Water, food, energy, soil, animals, and air are not passive objects in the life of a residential institution. They are conditions of collective existence. A spiritual ecology can begin with modest practices: reducing avoidable waste, protecting water quality, managing heat, caring for trees, monitoring energy use, and discussing the social distribution of environmental costs. The educational aim is not to produce a perfect institution. It is to help students recognise that religious responsibility has material consequences and that small practices can be linked to wider questions of justice ⁶².

E. From Framework To Pedagogical Design

The model becomes useful when it guides institutional design. It is not a ready-made curriculum that can be copied across pesantren. It is a set of design principles for asking whether existing practices support the movement from compliance toward integrity. The first principle is coherence. A pesantren should identify a limited number of core values, trace where those values appear in schedules and relationships, and examine contradictions. More activities do not necessarily create stronger formation. Coherence may require removing a

⁶¹ S A Selamat et al., "Model Pendidikan Karakter Santri Di Pesantren Modern Muhammadiyah Kwala Madu," *Edukasi Islami: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 12, no. 4 (2023): 3141–52, <https://doi.org/10.30868/ei.v12i04.5268>; A Sugianti, A N Mun'amah, and A Munip, "Implementation of Dhuha Prayer in Forming Student Character," *Zabags International Journal of Education* 1, no. 1 (2023): 1–9, <https://doi.org/10.61233/zijed.v1i1.1>; I Yuliani and C Chusniatun, "The Implementation of Religious Culture to Develop Students' Discipline Character," *Electronic Journal of Education, Social Economics and Technology* 6, no. 1 (2025): 302–7, <https://doi.org/10.33122/ejeset.v6i1.623>.

⁶² Gade, "Muslim Environmentalisms and Environmental Ethics: Theory and Practice for Rights and Justice."; Gade, *Muslim Environmentalisms: Religious and Social Foundations*; Jenkins, Berry, and Kreider, "Religion and Climate Change."

symbolic program that competes with the deeper work of repair, care, and accountability⁶³.

The second principle is interpretive depth. Recurring practices need opportunities for meaning-making, not a lecture after every prayer, cleaning task, or service activity. Periodic reflection can ask what students are learning, what difficulties they encounter, and how practice connects with religious purposes. A short conversation after service may reveal more about responsibility than an extended statement of values detached from experience⁶⁴.

The third principle is graduated agency. Students should not be expected to display integrity in unscripted settings if they have never been entrusted with meaningful responsibility. Agency can be developed through rotating leadership, peer mentoring, student committees, ethical case discussions, community projects, and supervised decisions about shared resources. The adult role is not to withdraw, but to accompany, set boundaries, protect vulnerable students, and review consequences. This approach treats authority as formative when it prepares students to exercise responsibility rather than making them permanently dependent⁶⁵.

The fourth principle is ecological integration. Environmental responsibility should not be placed at the margins as an annual tree-planting ceremony. It can be connected to *fiqh*, *tafsir*, *hadith*, ethics, economics, health, science, and community service. Students can compare religious arguments about waste with actual waste flows in the *pesantren*. They can examine how food procurement affects farmers and affordability. They can measure water use, interview

⁶³ Pike et al., "Character Development through the Curriculum: Teaching and Assessing the Understanding and Practice of Virtue."; Dabdoub et al., "Redesigning Schools for Effective Character Education through Leadership: The Case of PRIMED Institute and VLACE."; Muhammad, "Model Pendidikan Akhlak Terintegrasi: Studi Kasus Pembentukan Kepribadian Muslim Di Pondok Pesantren Anwarussunnah Petanahan."

⁶⁴ Sahin, "Critical Issues in Islamic Education Studies: Rethinking Islamic and Western Liberal Secular Values of Education"; Halstead, "An Islamic Concept of Education"; Pike et al., "Character Development through the Curriculum: Teaching and Assessing the Understanding and Practice of Virtue."

⁶⁵ Sahin, "Critical Issues in Islamic Education Studies: Rethinking Islamic and Western Liberal Secular Values of Education"; Pike et al., "Character Development through the Curriculum: Teaching and Assessing the Understanding and Practice of Virtue."; Dabdoub et al., "Redesigning Schools for Effective Character Education through Leadership: The Case of PRIMED Institute and VLACE."

maintenance workers, or design a fairer distribution system. The activity is educational when it joins empirical observation, religious interpretation, ethical judgment, and accountable action ⁶⁶.

The fifth principle is dialogic safeguarding. A moral ecology requires ways for students to raise concerns without fearing retaliation. Dialogic safeguarding includes clear complaint pathways, confidential support, transparent rule application, protection against bullying, and opportunities to question institutional practice. These measures are not external additions to spiritual education. They demonstrate that dignity and justice apply within the institution itself. Without safeguarding, the language of obedience can be used to silence those who experience harm, and the institution may confuse quietness with moral success ⁶⁷.

Table 3. Conceptual Propositions, Mechanisms, and Possible Evidence

Proposition	Mechanism	Conceptual claim	Possible evidence
P1 Exemplarity	Students interpret the credibility of authority through consistent conduct, accountability, and repair	Exemplary credibility mediates the movement from institutional ideals to internalisation	Narratives of trustworthy and untrustworthy role models; observation of correction and decision-making
P2 Habituation	Repeated practices form dispositions when they are meaningful, dignified, and supported by feedback	Habituation supports integrity when repetition is connected to interpretation and agency	Observation of routines; student accounts of motivation; evidence of conduct beyond supervision
P3 Religious experience	Prayer, study, service, and care for creation can generate spiritual significance when students connect experience with religious meaning	Experience links embodied practice with attention, gratitude, and ecological responsibility	Reflective journals; interviews; accounts of gratitude, responsibility, uncertainty, and change

⁶⁶ Gade, *Muslim Environmentalisms: Religious and Social Foundations*; Gade, "Muslim Environmentalisms and Environmental Ethics: Theory and Practice for Rights and Justice."; Jenkins, Berry, and Kreider, "Religion and Climate Change."; Nurhidayati and Sentosa, "Strengthening Moral Values through Religious Knowledge Integration: Insights from Madrasah Ibtidaiyah."

⁶⁷ Thapa et al., "A Review of School Climate Research."; Wang and Degol, "School Climate: A Review of the Construct, Measurement, and Impact on Student Outcomes"; Sahin, "Critical Issues in Islamic Education Studies: Rethinking Islamic and Western Liberal Secular Values of Education."

Proposition	Mechanism	Conceptual claim	Possible evidence
P4 Reflection and discernment	Structured dialogue mediates the movement from visible compliance to moral judgment and internalisation	Reflection is the bridge between performance and transferable integrity	Case discussions; written reasoning; responses to dilemmas involving authority, peers, knowledge, and resources
P5 Spiritual agency	Integrity is most visible when students transfer values into unscripted contexts and accept responsibility for consequences	Spiritual agency is the outcome of formation and a source of institutional renewal	Student-led initiatives; conflict repair; ethical decisions; alumni narratives
P6 Institutional coherence	The alignment of authority, time, space, text, peers, service, and creation strengthens or weakens every formation process	Moral ecology moderates the quality and durability of the six formation processes	Institutional documents; climate data; environmental mapping; multi-perspective interviews

Table 3 translates the framework into empirical propositions: exemplarity; the conditions under which habituation becomes disposition; religious experience and ecological attention; reflection as the bridge between performance and internalisation; agency and transfer as demanding evidence of integrity; and institutional coherence as a moderator. These are not yet statistical hypotheses, but focused questions for future research ⁶⁸.

The first practical application is a moral ecology audit. An audit should not rank pesantren from best to worst. It should help an institution notice⁶⁹ relationships that are usually taken for granted. The audit can examine whether stated values appear in teacher conduct, student discipline, material management, peer culture, service distribution, and decision-making. It can combine document analysis, student dialogue, observation, environmental mapping, and reflection on

⁶⁸ Torraco, "Writing Integrative Literature Reviews: Guidelines and Examples"; Snyder and H., "Literature Review as a Research Methodology: An Overview and Guidelines"; Gilson and Goldberg, "So, What Is a Conceptual Paper?"

⁶⁹ Thapa et al., "A Review of School Climate Research."; Snyder and H., "Literature Review as a Research Methodology: An Overview and Guidelines"; Gilson and Goldberg, "So, What Is a Conceptual Paper?"

incidents. The process should be participatory and ethically designed so that students are not exposed for speaking honestly ⁷⁰.

The second application is a formation portfolio. Instead of treating character as a final score, the portfolio would collect evidence of practice, reflection, transfer, and repair. A student might document a service project, analyse a conflict, explain an ethical decision about resources, respond to a case involving academic honesty, and identify a personal pattern that requires improvement. Teachers and peers could provide feedback, but the student would retain a voice in interpreting the evidence. Such a portfolio would be compatible with the broader movement toward formative assessment and social-emotional learning, while remaining grounded in Islamic concepts of accountability and self-cultivation ⁷¹.

The third application is a curriculum of moral cases. Cases should be drawn from dilemmas that students can recognise: a friend asks for help hiding a violation, an online source contains an attractive but unreliable claim, a senior student humiliates a junior, a communal meal leaves avoidable waste, or an instruction conflicts with a student's safety. The class can identify the facts, affected parties, relevant principles, possible actions, and mechanisms of repair. The aim is not to produce one memorised answer. It is to cultivate the habits of careful attention, proportional judgment, and responsibility for consequences ⁷².

The fourth application is a spiritual ecology project. A project might focus on water, food, energy, shade, waste, biodiversity, or relations with neighbouring residents. Students should begin by observing and listening rather than by announcing a solution. They can then connect observations with Islamic ethical concepts, relevant scientific knowledge, and community priorities. The project

⁷⁰ Thapa et al., "A Review of School Climate Research."; Gade, "Muslim Environmentalisms and Environmental Ethics: Theory and Practice for Rights and Justice."; Dabdoub et al., "Redesigning Schools for Effective Character Education through Leadership: The Case of PRIMED Institute and VLACE."

⁷¹ OECD, "Beyond Academic Learning: First Results from the Survey of Social and Emotional Skills"; Pike et al., "Character Development through the Curriculum: Teaching and Assessing the Understanding and Practice of Virtue."

⁷² Pike et al., "Character Development through the Curriculum: Teaching and Assessing the Understanding and Practice of Virtue."; Halstead, "Islamic Values: A Distinctive Framework for Moral Education?"; Dabdoub et al., "Redesigning Schools for Effective Character Education through Leadership: The Case of PRIMED Institute and VLACE."

should include a public explanation, a practical intervention, and a review of unintended effects. This sequence allows ecological care to become a form of inquiry, service, and spiritual discipline. It also guards against the tendency to measure success through photographs of activities rather than through changes in relationships and practice ⁷³.

The fifth application concerns teacher and caregiver formation. No model of santri integrity can be implemented by students alone. Teachers need opportunities to discuss role modelling, correction, boundaries, digital life, ecological responsibility, and the emotional labour of residential education. Caregivers and maintenance staff should be recognised as educational actors because students learn from how adults manage space, conflict, resources, and fatigue. Research on self-regulatory behaviour through religious values and religious caregiving similarly highlights the role of adults and family systems in translating moral language into durable practice ⁷⁴. A spiritual ecology approach thus expands professional development beyond lesson planning. It asks what kind of adults the institution needs in order to make its moral claims credible.

The sixth application concerns digital ecology. Digital life is not simply an external threat to be blocked. Students need to evaluate sources, manage attention, respond to disagreement, protect privacy, and resist turning religious language into spectacle or antagonism. Digital literacy can be integrated with epistemic integrity and adab. Students can compare a viral claim with a primary source, trace an argument, and reflect on the consequences of sharing unverified information. Prayer reminder applications show how technology can support attention while raising questions about dependence and discipline; the wider education debate

⁷³ Gade, "Muslim Environmentalisms and Environmental Ethics: Theory and Practice for Rights and Justice."; Jenkins, Berry, and Kreider, "Religion and Climate Change."; Pike et al., "Character Development through the Curriculum: Teaching and Assessing the Understanding and Practice of Virtue."

⁷⁴ K A Shukor et al., "Fostering Self-Regulatory Behaviour through Religious Values: Challenges, Strategies, and the Role of Parents.," *International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science* 9, no. 2454 (2025): 1497–1505, <https://doi.org/10.47772/IJRIS>; M S Rambe, W Wantini, and A M Diponegoro, "Metode Pengasuhan Dalam Pembentukan Karakter Religius Di Panti Asuhan Yatim Putra Islam Yogyakarta.," *Urwatul Wutsqo: Jurnal Studi Kependidikan Dan Keislaman* 12, no. 1 (2023): 1–21, <https://doi.org/10.54437/urwatulwutsqo.v12i1.833>.

likewise stresses context, governance, equity, and teacher preparation ⁷⁵ Global Education Monitoring Report ⁷⁶. The relevant virtue is responsible participation in a wider knowledge environment.

Assessment should follow the model's logic. Attendance and rule compliance remain relevant indicators of participation, but they should not be presented as complete evidence of integrity. Additional evidence can include the quality of student explanations, the ability to acknowledge uncertainty, patterns of peer trust, the handling of feedback, the repair of harm, and the transfer of ecological responsibility beyond supervised projects. Qualitative evidence is especially important because some of the most meaningful changes are visible in how students narrate a dilemma or respond to a person who has less power. At the same time, qualitative evidence should not be romanticised. It must be collected ethically, triangulated, and interpreted with attention to the limits of self-report ⁷⁷.

F. Boundary Conditions and Critical Questions

The framework has boundary conditions. Its first risk is the romanticisation of pesantren. Describing pesantren as a moral ecology can unintentionally portray the institution as naturally harmonious, spiritually superior, or immune to contradiction. Historical and contemporary pesantren are diverse. Some are highly centralised, others more participatory. Some provide strong pastoral care, others struggle with resources or safeguarding. A conceptual model is useful only if it can accommodate variation and criticism. The framework therefore treats moral ecology as an object of inquiry, not as a presumption of virtue ⁷⁸.

⁷⁵ W Paradisa, D R Nabhila, and N S Alhafidhza, "Improving Worship Discipline and Focus through Prayer Reminder Apps.," *Journal of Islamic Education and Social Studies* 4, no. 2 (2025): 219–40.

⁷⁶ Team, (2023)

⁷⁷ OECD, "Beyond Academic Learning: First Results from the Survey of Social and Emotional Skills"; Pike et al., "Character Development through the Curriculum: Teaching and Assessing the Understanding and Practice of Virtue."; Dabdoub et al., "Redesigning Schools for Effective Character Education through Leadership: The Case of PRIMED Institute and VLACE."

⁷⁸ Lukens-Bull, "Two Sides of the Same Coin: Modernity and Tradition in Islamic Education in Indonesia"; Pohl, "Islamic Education and Civil Society: Reflections on the Pesantren Tradition in Contemporary Indonesia"; Sahin, "Critical Issues in Islamic Education Studies: Rethinking Islamic and Western Liberal Secular Values of Education."

The second risk is the normalisation of authority. Religious authority can inspire trust and learning, but it can also silence students or protect misconduct. The language of adab must not be used to make students responsible for enduring harm. A spiritually serious institution needs both reverence and accountability. Research should examine how santri distinguish legitimate guidance from arbitrary control, how complaints are received, and whether disciplinary procedures preserve dignity. These questions are not attacks on pesantren identity. They are tests of whether the institution's moral ecology supports the justice it teaches ⁷⁹.

The third risk is the reduction of integrity to a single ideal student. Students differ in gender, class, region, ability, language, family experience, and religious interpretation. A practice that builds agency for one student may create pressure for another. Residential education can intensify peer comparison and make exclusion difficult to escape. The framework should therefore be used with an intersectional sensitivity, even when the term is not part of the institution's preferred vocabulary. Care, fairness, and public responsibility require attention to who bears the cost of a practice and who receives recognition for it ⁸⁰.

The fourth risk is moral overwork. A pesantren can fill every hour with religious or service activity and assume that intensity equals formation. However, fatigue can weaken attention, increase irritability, and turn worship into a burden. Spiritual ecology requires a balanced temporal environment in which rest, solitude, play, study, worship, and work are mutually supportive. This point is especially important when students are also enrolled in formal schooling and expected to manage digital communication. Discipline that ignores the limits of bodies may produce outward order while undermining inward integrity ⁸¹.

⁷⁹ Sahin, "Critical Issues in Islamic Education Studies: Rethinking Islamic and Western Liberal Secular Values of Education"; Thapa et al., "A Review of School Climate Research."; Muhammad, "Model Pendidikan Akhlak Terintegrasi: Studi Kasus Pembentukan Kepribadian Muslim Di Pondok Pesantren Anwarussunnah Petanahan."

⁸⁰ Thapa et al., "A Review of School Climate Research."; Dabdoub et al., "Redesigning Schools for Effective Character Education through Leadership: The Case of PRIMED Institute and VLACE."; Wang and Degol, "School Climate: A Review of the Construct, Measurement, and Impact on Student Outcomes."

⁸¹ OECD, "Beyond Academic Learning: First Results from the Survey of Social and Emotional Skills"; Tabroni et al., "Parenting Patterns in Educating Children's Prayer Discipline during the Coronavirus

The fifth risk is ecological branding. A green garden, recycling bin, or environmental slogan does not by itself establish spiritual ecology. The institution should ask whether the activity changes habits, includes students in reasoning, respects workers, and addresses material consequences. It should also avoid claiming ecological virtue while ignoring unsafe water, unfair labour, or excessive consumption. Gade (2023) is helpful here because environmental ethics is linked to rights and justice, not merely to symbolic care. Spiritual ecology is credible when it joins meaning with institutional responsibility.

The sixth risk is theological simplification. Concepts such as khalifah, amanah, and mizan have rich interpretive histories. They should not be used as interchangeable translations of modern sustainability. Teachers need to acknowledge disagreement, interpretation, and context. Students should be allowed to examine how different scholars and communities understand human responsibility. This approach makes Islamic environmental ethics more, not less, educationally powerful because it invites serious reasoning instead of instrumental quotation⁸².

The seventh risk concerns evidence. Because this article is conceptual, it cannot claim that the six-part model describes every pesantren. The model identifies plausible mechanisms and relationships that require testing through observation, interviews, student narratives, institutional documents, environmental data, and comparison. Its propositions may be supported, revised, or rejected. A conceptual article should be judged by the clarity and fruitfulness of its questions, not by an appearance of empirical certainty⁸³.

G. Theoretical and Research Implications

The first theoretical contribution is to pesantren studies. Research on pesantren has explained how the institution transmits knowledge, negotiates

Disease (COVID-19).”; Wang and Degol, “School Climate: A Review of the Construct, Measurement, and Impact on Student Outcomes.”

⁸² Foltz, Denny, and Baharuddin, *Islam and Ecology: A Bestowed Trust*; Nasr, *Religion and the Order of Nature*; Gade, “Muslim Environmentalisms and Environmental Ethics: Theory and Practice for Rights and Justice.”

⁸³ Gilson and Goldberg, “So, What Is a Conceptual Paper?”; Jaakkola, “Designing Conceptual Articles: Four Approaches”; Snyder and H., “Literature Review as a Research Methodology: An Overview and Guidelines.”

tradition and modernity, participates in civil society, and develops new educational forms⁸⁴. The spiritual ecology framework adds a relational account of formation. It asks how authority, ritual, space, resources, and everyday encounters are assembled into a moral world. This approach can connect institutional history with lived experience and material practice. It does not replace existing analyses; it gives them a common educational question: how does the institution make integrity possible or difficult?

The second contribution is to Islamic education. The framework preserves the centrality of worship, texts, adab, and akhlaq while refusing to isolate them from social and ecological relations. It translates Islamic environmental ethics into a pedagogical problem without reducing Islamic education to environmental activism. The concept of spiritual agency also clarifies the relation between obedience and freedom. Students learn within a tradition, but they must eventually act in situations that tradition has not scripted in detail. Islamic education is therefore strongest when it forms judgment and responsibility as well as memory and conformity⁸⁵.

The third contribution is to character education. The article argues that integrity should be assessed as coherence and transfer across domains. This proposition helps connect virtue language with institutional design. A school or pesantren can claim to teach honesty, but the relevant question is whether honesty is supported in assessment, authority, peer relations, information use, and resource management. Recent work on curriculum-based character development and leadership similarly stresses the relation between virtue understanding, practice, and institutional conditions⁸⁶. A systematic review of extracurricular character education also suggests that the formative value of activities depends on

⁸⁴ Robert W Hefner, *Making Modern Muslims: The Politics of Islamic Education in Southeast Asia* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2009); Lukens-Bull, "Two Sides of the Same Coin: Modernity and Tradition in Islamic Education in Indonesia"; Pohl, "Islamic Education and Civil Society: Reflections on the Pesantren Tradition in Contemporary Indonesia."

⁸⁵ Sahin, "Critical Issues in Islamic Education Studies: Rethinking Islamic and Western Liberal Secular Values of Education"; Halstead, "An Islamic Concept of Education"; Halstead, "Islamic Values: A Distinctive Framework for Moral Education?"; Mahfud and Zahriyah, "Internalizing Islamic Values in Students: The Role of Character Education in Building Morals and Ethics."

⁸⁶ Pike et al., "Character Development through the Curriculum: Teaching and Assessing the Understanding and Practice of Virtue."; Dabdoub et al., "Redesigning Schools for Effective Character Education through Leadership: The Case of PRIMED Institute and VLACE."

design, relationships, and contextual factors, which supports the ecological rather than programmatic reading proposed here⁸⁷. The moral ecology perspective also brings creation into the field of character formation. Environmental responsibility is not an optional virtue appended to an existing list; it is one context in which justice, restraint, gratitude, and trust are made visible.

The fourth contribution is to spiritual ecology scholarship. Much spiritual ecology work examines religious ideas, environmental movements, or ethical responses to ecological crisis. The pesantren framework shows how an educational institution could serve as an intermediary between theology and practice. It makes the institution itself a site of ecological interpretation. This matters because habits of consumption, care, and attention are learned through routines. If spiritual ecology remains at the level of discourse, it may not alter conduct. If it begins with institutional practice, it can become a field of moral learning and public accountability⁸⁸.

Future research should begin with ethnographic studies of diverse pesantren. Ethnography can examine how students describe authority, prayer, service, correction, friendship, text, and the material environment. It can trace moments when a practice becomes meaningful and moments when it becomes merely performative. It should also observe what happens after a violation: whether the institution uses punishment, reconciliation, concealment, or learning. Researchers should include maintenance workers, caregivers, teachers, and neighbouring communities because moral ecology is distributed beyond formal classrooms⁸⁹.

Comparative research can examine how the model operates across traditional, modern, urban, rural, large, and small pesantren. The purpose should not be to rank institutional types. It should be to identify how different

⁸⁷ A P Rahayu and Y Dong, "The Relationship of Extracurricular Activities with Students' Character Education and Influencing Factors: A Systematic Literature Review," *AL-ISLAH: Jurnal Pendidikan* 15, no. 1 (2023): 459–74, <https://doi.org/10.35445/alishlah.v15i1.2968>.

⁸⁸ Gade, "Muslim Environmentalisms and Environmental Ethics: Theory and Practice for Rights and Justice."; Jenkins, Berry, and Kreider, "Religion and Climate Change."; Foltz, Denny, and Baharuddin, *Islam and Ecology: A Bestowed Trust*.

⁸⁹ McGuire, *Lived Religion: Faith and Practice in Everyday Life*; Pohl, "Islamic Education and Civil Society: Reflections on the Pesantren Tradition in Contemporary Indonesia"; Gilson and Goldberg, "So, What Is a Conceptual Paper?"

configurations of authority, resources, formal schooling, and community ties shape the formation process. A rural pesantren may have close relations with agricultural practices but limited infrastructure. An urban pesantren may have advanced facilities but greater digital and ecological pressures. Comparison can reveal which mechanisms are portable and which are context-dependent ⁹⁰.

Longitudinal research is needed because integrity is a trajectory. A cross-sectional survey may show that students attend prayer or endorse environmental responsibility, but it cannot show how motives change or whether conduct transfers after graduation. Researchers could follow students across stages of residence, compare novice and senior santri, and examine the transition from institutional supervision to university, work, family, or public leadership. Alumni research could ask which practices remained meaningful and which were rejected, reinterpreted, or transformed ⁹¹.

Mixed-method research could combine observation, interviews, reflective writing, peer nominations, institutional climate measures, and ecological indicators. Quantitative measures might examine perceived trust, moral agency, belonging, self-regulation, or ecological responsibility. Qualitative data would be needed to interpret how students understand these constructs and how they respond to contradictions. Environmental measures could include water use, waste patterns, energy consumption, or access to shade and clean space. The goal would not be to turn spirituality into a score. It would be to study how different forms of evidence illuminate different parts of the ecology ⁹².

Research ethics deserve special emphasis. In residential religious institutions, students may feel obliged to provide acceptable answers or may fear that criticism will affect their status. Researchers should protect confidentiality,

⁹⁰ Lukens-Bull, "Two Sides of the Same Coin: Modernity and Tradition in Islamic Education in Indonesia"; Firdaus et al., "Pengembangan Model Pengelolaan Pendidikan Karakter Di Pesantren Berbasis Tradisi Dan Tadzkirah."; Pohl, "Islamic Education and Civil Society: Reflections on the Pesantren Tradition in Contemporary Indonesia."

⁹¹ Newman, Nezlek, and Thrash, "The Dynamics of Prayer in Daily Life and Implications for Well-Being."; OECD, "Beyond Academic Learning: First Results from the Survey of Social and Emotional Skills"; Snyder and H., "Literature Review as a Research Methodology: An Overview and Guidelines."

⁹² OECD, "Beyond Academic Learning: First Results from the Survey of Social and Emotional Skills"; Thapa et al., "A Review of School Climate Research."; Dabdoub et al., "Redesigning Schools for Effective Character Education through Leadership: The Case of PRIMED Institute and VLACE."

separate research from disciplinary processes, and create age-appropriate consent procedures. They should also avoid treating religious language as evidence of deception when students describe their experiences differently from institutional ideals. Reflexivity is necessary because researchers, teachers, and students occupy unequal positions. A study of moral ecology should itself model the respect and accountability it recommends ⁹³.

The framework can also inform policy and institutional self-evaluation. Accreditation and quality assurance often privilege visible programs, documents, and facilities. These indicators matter, but they do not fully capture moral formation. Policy discussions could include questions about relational climate, student participation, safeguarding, teacher example, service dignity, digital literacy, and ecological responsibility. Such a shift would encourage pesantren to show not only what activities they hold, but how their institutional life supports trustworthy persons ⁹⁴.

The article's conceptual pushback is therefore constructive. It does not reject prayer programs, character curricula, rules, or environmental projects. It asks what happens between the program and the person. Does the practice become meaningful? Can the student explain it? Is the student allowed to exercise judgment? Does the institution accept correction? Can the value travel across contexts? These questions turn a familiar concern about moral education into a more demanding theory of formation. They also offer a more precise research agenda for Islamic education journals, including ILMUNA, where conceptual analysis can complement field-based studies ⁹⁵.

⁹³ Gilson and Goldberg, "So, What Is a Conceptual Paper?"; Sahin, "Critical Issues in Islamic Education Studies: Rethinking Islamic and Western Liberal Secular Values of Education"; Thapa et al., "A Review of School Climate Research."

⁹⁴ Pohl, "Islamic Education and Civil Society: Reflections on the Pesantren Tradition in Contemporary Indonesia"; UNESCO, "Reimagining Our Futures Together: A New Social Contract for Education"; Dabdoub et al., "Redesigning Schools for Effective Character Education through Leadership: The Case of PRIMED Institute and VLACE."

⁹⁵ Muhammad, "Model Pendidikan Akhlak Terintegrasi: Studi Kasus Pembentukan Kepribadian Muslim Di Pondok Pesantren Anwarussunnah Petanahan."; A'yun, Syaripudin, and Wahyudi, "The Relationship between the Practice of Obligatory Prayers and Student's Discipline Character: Focusing on Time Discipline and Engagement."; Gilson and Goldberg, "So, What Is a Conceptual Paper?"

CONCLUSION

This article has argued that contemporary pesantren can be understood as a spiritual and moral ecology in which integrity is formed through relations among authority, worship, texts, time, space, peers, service, and creation. The argument responds to a persistent problem in Islamic education: visible religious compliance is often treated as if it were identical to spiritual transformation. Compliance is important because it creates rhythm and shared practice, but it becomes integrity only when students can interpret practice, internalise its moral meaning, exercise judgment, and transfer responsibility beyond supervised routines.

The proposed six-part model links exemplarity, habituation, religious experience, reflection and discernment, internalisation, and spiritual agency. Its novelty lies in the bridge it builds between pesantren studies, character education, lived religion, practice theory, and Islamic environmental ethics. It also makes ecological responsibility part of the formation question. Care for water, food, space, energy, animals, neighbours, and shared resources is not an extra activity once creation is understood as a field of accountability.

The framework remains a conceptual proposal, not a report of ethnographic findings. Its value will depend on empirical testing and critical revision across diverse pesantren. Future studies should examine how students experience authority and ritual, how practices become or fail to become dispositions, how material environments communicate religious values, and how integrity travels after students leave the institution. The future implication is clear: pesantren education will be more capable of forming trustworthy santri when it evaluates the coherence of its moral ecology, protects dialogic agency, and treats spiritual life as responsibility for the relationships that make communal existence possible.

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