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Nurturing Student Self-Awareness in Pesantren Education: Institutional Strategies and Their Impacts at Al-Amien Tegal Islamic Boarding School

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Abstract

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Islamic boarding school education in Indonesia faces a persistent challenge in cultivating santri engagement that is genuinely intrinsically motivated rather than driven by external enforcement alone. This study investigates the institutional strategies employed by Pondok Pesantren Al-Amien Tegal Prenduan to nurture self-awareness among its santri as the motivational foundation for their participation in pesantren activities. Employing a qualitative descriptive approach through case study design, data were collected through in-depth interviews with key institutional informants — including teaching staff, organizational administrators, and santri — complemented by direct observation and documentary analysis. Data were analyzed through three sequential stages of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings reveal that the institution implements five interconnected strategies: disciplined habituation, exemplary leadership, organizational participation through OSPA, structured reflection sessions, and extracurricular engagement. Santri self-awareness exists along a developmental continuum shaped by age, educational level, and length of institutional residence, progressing from externally oriented compliance toward genuinely internalized value-based engagement. The impacts of these strategies are observable across personal, spiritual, and social dimensions of santri participation in institutional life. This study concludes that self-awareness development in pesantren education is fundamentally a relational and communal achievement, one that demands deliberate institutional investment across every dimension of santri daily experience.

INTRODUCTION

Among the many challenges confronting Islamic boarding school education in Indonesia, few are as consequential — yet as underexplored — as the question of how santri develop genuine self-awareness as the motivational foundation for their daily participation in pesantren life. Pesantren, as one of Indonesia's oldest and most enduring educational institutions, operates on a distinctive educational philosophy that integrates

religious knowledge, character formation, and community life into a single immersive experience (Suharto, 2011; Fahham, 2020). Within this environment, the quality of a *santri*'s engagement with the full range of pesantren activities — from religious observance and academic study to communal responsibilities and organizational participation — depends not merely on external enforcement of rules and schedules, but on the depth of internal motivation that self-awareness generates. An institution that succeeds in cultivating self-awareness among its students creates the conditions for sustainable, intrinsically motivated participation; one that relies primarily on external discipline risks producing compliance without genuine personal development.

Self-awareness, understood as the capacity to recognize, understand, and reflect upon one's own emotions, values, strengths, and limitations, occupies a central position in multiple theoretical frameworks relevant to educational psychology and character formation. Goleman's foundational work on emotional intelligence positions self-awareness as the prerequisite competency upon which all other dimensions of emotional and social development depend — without it, neither self-regulation, empathy, nor effective interpersonal functioning can be adequately developed (Goleman, as cited in Tudhoni, 2019). From a humanistic perspective, Rogers and Maslow similarly emphasize self-awareness as the gateway to authentic self-actualization, arguing that educational environments must actively create conditions that support individuals in knowing and accepting themselves as a precondition for genuine growth (Widiyaningtyas et al., 2023). In the pesantren context, these theoretical frameworks intersect with Islamic values of *muhāsabah* (self-reflection) and *tawadu'* (humility), creating a distinctive normative environment in which self-awareness is understood not only as a psychological capacity but as a spiritual imperative (Lubis et al., 2018).

Despite the significance of self-awareness in both educational psychology and Islamic educational philosophy, empirical research specifically examining the strategies through which pesantren institutions cultivate this quality among their students remains remarkably limited. The existing literature on pesantren education has addressed a wide range of institutional concerns — including leadership and governance (Sukanto, 1999; Qomar, 2002), curriculum development (Yasmadi, 2005), character formation (Fahham, 2020), and student empowerment (Hendra, 2023) — yet the specific question of how pesantren design and implement strategies to foster *santri* self-awareness as a driver of voluntary and meaningful participation in institutional life has received comparatively little systematic attention. Most studies that touch on related themes approach self-awareness indirectly, as a byproduct of broader character formation processes, rather than examining it as a distinct educational objective with its own strategic logic and institutional implications (Tudhoni, 2019; Judah & Suriati, 2023).

This gap in the literature is particularly significant given the distinctive challenges that pesantren institutions face in sustaining *santri* engagement across the full spectrum of their daily activities. The total immersive character of pesantren life — in which students live, study, worship, and socialize within a single bounded community across extended periods — creates both extraordinary opportunities and distinctive pressures for self-awareness development (Bahri, 2022; Muslich, 2022). On one hand, the intensity and continuity of the pesantren environment provides unparalleled opportunities for the kind of sustained reflection and value internalization that self-awareness development requires. On the other hand, the same environment can — if not thoughtfully managed — produce forms of behavioral compliance driven more by social pressure and institutional enforcement than by genuine internal motivation. Understanding how specific pesantren institutions navigate this tension through deliberate institutional strategies is therefore a question of both theoretical and practical importance.

Situated within this scholarly gap, this study investigates the strategies employed by Pondok Pesantren Al-Amien Tegal Prenduan to nurture self-awareness among its *santri* as a foundation for their voluntary and committed participation in pesantren activities. Three interconnected research questions guide the inquiry: first, what specific strategies does the institution implement to cultivate *santri* self-awareness; second, what is the actual condition of *santri* self-awareness as observed within the institutional context; and third, what impacts do these strategies produce on the quality and character of *santri* participation in pesantren life. By addressing these questions through a qualitative case study approach, this study aims to contribute both to the theoretical understanding of self-awareness development in Islamic educational contexts and to the practical knowledge base available to pesantren educators and administrators seeking to strengthen the intrinsic motivational foundations of *santri* engagement.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study adopts a qualitative approach employing a descriptive case study design, a methodological choice that is well-suited to the nature of the research questions being investigated. Case study methodology enables an in-depth, contextually grounded examination of a specific phenomenon within its real-world setting — in this instance, the strategies through which Pondok Pesantren Al-Amien Tegal Prenduan cultivates self-awareness among its *santri* (Imam Gunawan, 2013). Rather than seeking generalizable statistical patterns, this approach prioritizes the richness and depth of understanding that emerges from sustained engagement with a single institutional

context, allowing the complexity of self-awareness development processes to be examined in their full situational specificity.

Pondok Pesantren Al-Amien Tegal Prenduan was selected as the research site on the basis of its distinctive institutional approach to *santri* character formation, which integrates religious education, organizational participation, and reflective practice into a coherent developmental framework. The primary data sources for this study were key informants whose roles place them in direct and sustained contact with the processes under investigation, including the pesantren leadership, teaching staff (*ustadz* and *ustadzah*), organizational administrators, and *santri* themselves. Informants were selected purposively, based on their direct involvement in the implementation and experience of self-awareness development strategies within the institution.

Three data collection techniques were employed in combination to ensure the comprehensiveness and credibility of the data gathered. In-depth interviews constituted the primary data collection instrument, enabling informants to articulate their experiences, perceptions, and observations regarding self-awareness strategies and their effects in their own terms. Observational data were collected through direct participation in and observation of institutional activities, providing an empirical check on interview-based accounts and enabling the researcher to document self-awareness development processes as they occur in practice. Documentary analysis of institutional records, program schedules, and organizational guidelines provided additional contextual grounding for the interpretation of interview and observational data (Imam Gunawan, 2013).

Data analysis followed the three-stage descriptive analysis procedure established in qualitative research methodology: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. In the data reduction stage, raw data from interviews, observations, and documents were systematically coded and categorized according to the study's three research foci — institutional strategies, conditions of *santri* self-awareness, and impacts on activity participation. In the data display stage, the reduced data were organized into structured thematic narratives that illuminate the relationships between strategies, conditions, and outcomes. In the conclusion drawing stage, patterns and themes emerging from the displayed data were interpreted in light of relevant theoretical frameworks, including Goleman's emotional intelligence theory, Bandura's social learning theory, and Kohlberg's moral development framework, to generate theoretically grounded and empirically supported conclusions (Masulah, 2019; Aziz, n.d.).

To ensure the trustworthiness of the study's findings, data triangulation was applied by cross-referencing information obtained through interviews, observation, and

documentary analysis. Where accounts from different informants or data sources converged, conclusions were treated as well-supported; where divergences emerged, these were examined as analytically significant in their own right, reflecting the natural variation in *santri* self-awareness levels across different age groups and educational stages documented in the findings. Member checking was also conducted by sharing preliminary analytical conclusions with key informants to verify the accuracy and fairness of the interpretations presented.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Institutional Strategies for Nurturing Santri Self-Awareness

Pondok Pesantren Al-Amien Tegal Prenduan implements a multifaceted approach to cultivating *santri* self-awareness, one that permeates every dimension of institutional life rather than being confined to discrete programmatic interventions. The first and most foundational strategy is disciplined habituation (*pembiasaan*), through which *santri* are systematically guided toward internalizing self-regulatory behavior across all domains of daily pesantren life. Ustadzah Aisyatul Fitriah articulated the institutional logic underlying this approach in interview:

"Santri dituntut untuk dapat membiasakan diri berperilaku disiplin dalam kegiatan belajar. Kami memberi nasehat, teguran, dan motivasi secara konsisten agar kedisiplinan itu benar-benar tumbuh dari dalam diri mereka sendiri."

This aspiration — that discipline ultimately becomes self-generated rather than externally enforced — is echoed in the account of Nella, a resident *santri*:

"Sejak pertama kali masuk pondok, kami diwajibkan untuk berperilaku disiplin dalam mentaati segala kegiatan belajar guna mematuhi tata tertib yang sudah diterapkan."

Exemplary leadership (*keteladanan*) constitutes the second strategy, and is understood by the institution as the prerequisite condition for all other developmental approaches. Ustadzah Ainayah, responsible for *santri* disciplinary formation, was unequivocal on this point:

"Yang paling diutamakan adalah memberikan keteladanan kepada setiap santri dan para mudabir-mudabirohnya. Tentunya, hal ini dimulai dengan mendisiplinkan diri sendiri, kemudian mendisiplinkan ustad, ustazahnya dan mudabi-mudabirohnya serta para santri-santrinya."

The sequencing embedded in this account — beginning with the self-discipline of educators before extending expectations to students — reveals an institutional

understanding that self-awareness cannot be effectively transmitted through instruction alone but must be embodied and modeled by those in positions of educational authority.

Organizational participation through OSPA constitutes the third strategy. Firdatul Hosnaini, head of the *Mahkamah* division, described its developmental function as follows:

"Dengan menjadikan organisasi sebagai wadah persatuan ideologi, kepemimpinan serta latihan dan acuan pembenahan diri maka akan melatih para santri untuk meningkatkan jiwa kepemimpinan, tanggung jawab, memiliki pengalaman memimpin dan dipimpin, serta dapat menjadi suri tauladan bagi yang lainnya."

Binta Lana Qonita, OSPA secretary, further emphasized the institution's prioritization of practical value application over purely theoretical instruction:

"Di pondok ini saya lebih ditekankan pada nilai prakteknya. Banyaknya peraturan yang membuat kita belajar menjadi muslimah yang lebih baik adalah salah satu penerapan langsung pembelajaran akhlak."

Regular reflection sessions and a structured extracurricular program complete the institutional strategic framework. Imroatun Adilah described how extracurricular engagement is designed to surface and develop individual *santri* strengths:

"Kami menyediakan ragam kegiatan ekstrakurikuler yang menarik dan sesuai dengan minat serta bakat santri, memberikan apresiasi dan penghargaan bagi santri yang aktif dan berprestasi, serta melibatkan alumni yang telah sukses untuk berbagi pengalaman dan memotivasi para santri."

Observational data gathered during the research period confirm that these five strategies — habituation, exemplary leadership, organizational participation, reflective practice, and extracurricular engagement — operate not as independent interventions but as mutually reinforcing components of a coherent institutional approach to self-awareness development.

Conditions of Santri Self-Awareness in Carrying Out Activities

Field observations conducted at Pondok Pesantren Al-Amien Tegal Prenduan reveal that *santri* self-awareness does not exist as a uniform institutional achievement but as a developmental continuum shaped by the interacting variables of age, educational level, and length of pesantren residence. Younger and more recently enrolled *santri* tend to exhibit forms of engagement that remain primarily oriented toward institutional compliance — participating in activities because they are required to do so rather than because they have internalized the values that give those activities meaning. More senior *santri*, by contrast, demonstrate measurably deeper forms of self-directed engagement,

reflecting the progressive internalization of values that the institution's formative strategies are designed to cultivate.

The institution's commitment to relational equality in its developmental interactions creates a distinctive environmental condition that meaningfully supports self-awareness growth across all *santri* cohorts. Observational data document that guidance sessions at the pesantren are conducted bidirectionally — with all *santri* accorded equal rights to express opinions and engage in substantive dialogue with their *pembina* — creating the conditions of psychological safety within which genuine self-examination becomes possible. This commitment extends to the institution's treatment of *santri* from different backgrounds: as observed during the research period, no meaningful hierarchical distinctions are drawn between *santri* on the basis of socioeconomic background, regional origin, or prior educational experience, a practice that reinforces the equitable developmental environment the institution seeks to maintain.

A particularly revealing indicator of *santri* self-awareness development is the documented shift in how *santri* perceive and relate to their immediate environment over the course of their institutional residence. Observational data record a meaningful transformation — from passive engagement with the pesantren environment to active stewardship — that manifests in *santri*'s growing capacity to identify social and economic opportunities within their surroundings and to take initiative in addressing them without external prompting. This shift, facilitated through the integration of ecological education with religious instruction delivered consistently after daily prayers, represents one of the most concrete expressions of deepening self-awareness documented in the study.

Impacts of Self-Awareness Strategies on Santri Activity Participation

The impacts of the institution's self-awareness development strategies on *santri* participation in pesantren activities are observable across personal, spiritual, and social dimensions of institutional life. Ustadz Arifudin, whose responsibilities include overseeing the full range of *santri* learning activities, identified in interview a clear relationship between growing self-awareness and the quality of *santri* engagement with structured learning programs:

"Ada beberapa kegiatan belajar yang harus diikuti oleh para santri, antara lain kegiatan belajar Diniyah, kegiatan belajar Tahfiz, kegiatan belajar Muhadharah, kegiatan belajar Pidato, kegiatan Pengajian Umum. Santri yang memiliki kesadaran diri yang baik terlihat lebih aktif, lebih bertanggung jawab, dan lebih mandiri dalam mengikuti semua kegiatan ini."

At the personal level, observational data document meaningful growth in *santri* capacity for independent time management, task prioritization, and responsible decision-making — all of which reflect and further reinforce deepening self-awareness. *Santri* who have developed stronger self-awareness demonstrate greater willingness to accept institutional service responsibilities without material compensation, a behavioral pattern that reflects the genuine internalization of Islamic values of *ikhlas* (sincerity) and *khidmah* (service) into their developing personal identities.

At the social and organizational level, the impacts of self-awareness development are most clearly visible in the quality of *santri* participation in OSPA activities. Observational data document that *santri* who have progressed further along the self-awareness developmental continuum demonstrate measurably stronger capacities for collaborative program design, peer leadership, outcome evaluation, and constructive navigation of organizational conflict — capacities whose development both requires and reinforces the self-knowledge that genuine self-awareness provides. The institution's hierarchical system for addressing disciplinary issues — escalating from room leadership to security administrators to pesantren leadership only when lower-level resolution proves insufficient — further develops *santri* capacity for contextually appropriate judgment, a capacity that field observations confirm is most strongly demonstrated among *santri* whose self-awareness has reached more advanced stages of development.

Discussion

Self-Awareness as a Deliberate Institutional Achievement

The findings of this study fundamentally reposition self-awareness within the landscape of pesantren educational theory — not as an incidental byproduct of character formation processes but as a purposefully cultivated institutional achievement that requires deliberate strategic investment and sustained environmental support to realize (Fahham, 2020). What Pondok Pesantren Al-Amien Tegal Prenduan demonstrates is that when an institution treats self-awareness as a primary educational objective rather than an assumed developmental outcome, the quality of *santri* engagement with institutional life is transformed in ways that enforcement-based disciplinary approaches alone cannot produce. This finding extends the existing literature on pesantren character education by identifying self-awareness as the motivational mechanism through which broader Islamic educational goals are internalized rather than merely performed (Muslich, 2022; Bahri, 2022).

Particularly significant is the institution's refusal to address self-awareness through discrete psychological interventions disconnected from the rhythms of communal living.

By embedding self-awareness development within daily worship, structured study, organizational responsibility, and reflective practice, the institution operationalizes what Bandura's social learning framework theorizes: that the social environment is not a backdrop to individual development but its primary medium (Masulah, 2019). Every dimension of pesantren life — from the sequencing of daily activities to the relational dynamics between *ustadzah* and *santri* — functions simultaneously as a site of self-awareness expression and a crucible of self-awareness formation. This integrated institutional logic distinguishes the pesantren model documented here from educational approaches that treat character formation and academic instruction as parallel but separate concerns (Qomar, 2002; Judah & Suriati, 2023).

The Relational and Organizational Dimensions of Self-Awareness Development

Among the most theoretically consequential findings of this study is the centrality of relational dynamics in mediating the effectiveness of self-awareness development strategies. The data consistently demonstrate that *santri* self-awareness deepens most meaningfully not through formal instruction about self-knowledge but through sustained exposure to educators who model integrated self-awareness in their own conduct — beginning, as Ustadzah Ainiyah's account makes explicit, with the self-discipline of the educators themselves before any expectation is extended to students. This finding resonates with and empirically substantiates Goleman's theoretical positioning of self-awareness as fundamentally a relational achievement, one that develops through the quality of attentive and reflective relationships rather than through solitary introspection alone (Tudhoni, 2019).

The institution's commitment to relational equality in its developmental interactions — creating bidirectional guidance sessions in which all *santri* are accorded equal voice — constitutes a pedagogical choice whose significance for self-awareness development deserves theoretical emphasis. By positioning *santri* as valued participants in a community of mutual reflection rather than as objects of institutional discipline, the pesantren establishes the psychological conditions of safety and agency within which genuine self-examination becomes possible (Widiyaningtyas et al., 2023). This finding challenges the assumption, sometimes implicit in discussions of pesantren authority structures, that the hierarchical character of *kiai*-*santri* relationships necessarily limits the conditions available for *santri* self-development. What the data from Al-Amien Tegal demonstrate is that hierarchical authority and relational equality are not mutually exclusive — they can coexist within a carefully constructed institutional culture that

deploys authority in the service of student empowerment rather than mere compliance (Lubis et al., 2018; Sukanto, 1999).

The role of OSPA as a vehicle for self-awareness development through consequential organizational responsibility further illuminates the relational dimensions of the institution's approach. By placing *santri* in positions of genuine institutional authority — requiring them to design programs, lead peers, evaluate outcomes, and navigate organizational conflict — the institution creates conditions in which self-awareness is not merely reflected upon but actively demanded by the requirements of meaningful social action (Judah & Suriati, 2023; Aziz, n.d.). This finding supports the broader theoretical argument that self-awareness development in educational contexts is most effectively pursued through structured opportunities for participation in communities of practice where self-knowledge has immediate practical relevance, rather than through introspective exercises conducted in isolation from real institutional life.

Developmental Variability and Its Implications for Pesantren Educational Design

The documented continuum of *santri* self-awareness — from externally oriented compliance among newer and younger students to genuinely internalized value-based engagement among more senior *santri* — carries direct and practically significant implications for how pesantren institutions design and sequence their formative strategies. Consistent with Kohlberg's stages of moral development, the data suggest that the forms of self-awareness accessible to *santri* at different developmental stages differ qualitatively rather than merely quantitatively (Muslich, 2022). A *santri* in the early stages of pesantren residence is developmentally equipped for a different quality of self-awareness than one who has inhabited the institution's formative environment for several years — and the strategies most effective for each will differ accordingly.

This finding has a direct implication that existing pesantren educational literature has not adequately addressed: the need for developmentally differentiated approaches to self-awareness cultivation that match institutional strategies to *santri* developmental readiness rather than applying uniform approaches across heterogeneous cohorts. The graduated responsibility system documented at Al-Amien Tegal — through which *santri* are progressively entrusted with greater organizational autonomy as their tenure and demonstrated capacity increase — represents an implicit institutional recognition of this developmental logic (Fahham, 2020; Qomar, 2002). Making this implicit logic explicit, and building it into the systematic design of self-awareness development programs,

constitutes one of the most practically significant contributions this study can offer to pesantren educational practitioners.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

This study's single-site case study design, while enabling the depth of institutional analysis that its research questions require, necessarily constrains the transferability of its findings to pesantren contexts with different institutional profiles, leadership philosophies, and community settings. The distinctive characteristics of Pondok Pesantren Al-Amien Tegal Prenduan — its specific organizational culture, its commitment to relational equality, and its integrated approach to ecological and religious education — shape the self-awareness development processes documented here in ways that may not be directly replicable in institutions organized along different principles. Future research should extend the comparative scope of inquiry by examining self-awareness development strategies across multiple pesantren typologies to identify both the contextually specific and the generalizable dimensions of effective institutional practice (Bahri, 2022; Muslich, 2022).

Longitudinal research designs capable of tracking individual *santri* self-awareness development across the full arc of their pesantren residence would also contribute significantly to the theoretical understanding generated by this study. The cross-sectional snapshot provided by the present study, while analytically valuable, cannot fully capture the dynamic developmental trajectories through which *santri* move from externally oriented compliance toward genuinely internalized self-awareness over time. Such longitudinal evidence would provide the empirical foundation needed to validate the developmental framework implied by this study's findings, and to identify the specific institutional conditions and transitional moments that most powerfully accelerate the deepening of *santri* self-awareness across the full trajectory of the pesantren educational journey.

CONCLUSION

This study has demonstrated that self-awareness development in pesantren education is most effectively understood not as an incidental outcome of character formation processes but as a purposefully cultivated institutional achievement requiring deliberate strategic investment across every dimension of communal life. Pondok Pesantren Al-Amien Tegal Prenduan's multifaceted approach — integrating disciplined habituation, exemplary leadership, organizational participation through OSPA, structured reflection, and extracurricular engagement — collectively constitutes a coherent institutional framework whose effectiveness derives from the mutual reinforcement of its components rather than the isolated impact of any single strategy.

When these elements operate in concert within a relational environment characterized by genuine equality and psychological safety, the conditions for authentic self-awareness development are meaningfully realized.

Three conclusions emerge from the findings with particular clarity. First, self-awareness development in pesantren contexts is fundamentally a relational achievement — one that depends critically on the quality of the modeling, mentoring, and reflective dialogue through which educators and *santri* engage with one another daily. Institutional strategies that embed self-awareness cultivation within the fabric of communal relationships are demonstrably more effective than those that address it through discrete, relationship-independent interventions. Second, *santri* self-awareness exists along a developmental continuum shaped by age, educational level, and length of institutional residence — a reality that demands developmentally differentiated institutional responses rather than uniform approaches applied across heterogeneous student cohorts. Third, the impacts of effective self-awareness development extend well beyond behavioral compliance to encompass genuinely transformed patterns of personal responsibility, spiritual integrity, social collaboration, and organizational leadership — outcomes whose significance for the broader goals of Islamic education can hardly be overstated.

For pesantren practitioners, these conclusions carry concrete implications. Institutional investment in educator self-development must precede and undergird any strategy directed at *santri* self-awareness, since the consistency between what is modeled and what is expected constitutes the irreducible foundation of the entire developmental process. Organizational structures that place *santri* in positions of genuine responsibility — as OSPA demonstrates — should be understood as essential self-awareness development instruments rather than supplementary extracurricular activities. Future research should pursue longitudinal and comparative designs capable of tracking self-awareness development across diverse pesantren typologies and individual developmental trajectories, thereby generating the empirical evidence base needed to refine and validate the institutional framework that this study's findings suggest.

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