



## Research Article

# Developing Religious Character in *Santri* with Special Needs at *Pesantren*

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## Abstract

This study aimed to explore the process of religious character development in students with special needs and identify the specific religious traits developed at Pondok Pesantren Salafiyah Nurul 'Ulum Gresik. This study was conducted using a qualitative descriptive approach, utilizing observation, interviews, and documentation for data collection. The findings showed that religious character formation in students with special needs occurred through three stages: the learning stage, the awareness formation stage, and the habit formation stage. The religious traits developed include worship (demonstrated by their ability to perform obligatory and sunnah prayers), *jihad* (determination, reflected in their willingness to worship, study, and help others), discipline (seen in their commitment to learning and religious practices), independence (evident in their ability to manage daily tasks without relying on others), and social care (shown through their concern for others and the environment).

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## INTRODUCTION

At the 12<sup>th</sup> International Conference on Special Education in the South East Asia Region (ICSAR) in Bali in 2021, the topic of Islamic Education services for Children with Special Needs was discussed. One of the challenges in providing Islamic Education for Children with Special Needs is the stigma associated with them. They are still viewed as a social problem and tend to be seen merely as a burden on society (Wari Setiawan, 2008: 1)

According to statistics from the Coordinating Ministry for Human Development and Cultural Affairs, the disability rate among children aged 5–19 is approximately 3.3%. With a total population of 66.6 million in this age group in 2021, this means around 2,197,833 children have disabilities. Meanwhile, data from the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology shows that only 269,398 children are enrolled in Special Schools (SLB) or inclusive education programs. This indicates that only 12.26% of children with disabilities are receiving formal education, highlighting a significant gap in educational access for those who should be supported by government-provided education (Ma'arif; 2023).

It has been acknowledged that, the government has ensured that children with special needs receive an education equal to that of other children (the National Education System Law No. 20 of 2003). This means that every child with special needs has the right to education, as outlined in Article 31, Paragraph 1 of the

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1945 Constitution, which states that “every citizen, without exception, whether they have disabilities or not, has the same right to receive an education.”

Based on the explanation above, it can be concluded that education is a fundamental right for every individual, regardless of differences, as it aligns with the concept of *education for all*. This principle can be realized by ensuring equal opportunities for all children, including children with special needs, to receive education tailored to their abilities and needs, including character education. Through character education, children with special needs are taught to act independently, with confidence, discipline, and teamwork, enabling them to adapt effectively to their environment.

Based on interviews conducted by the researchers in August 2022, children with special needs at this *pesantren* do not attend formal education in inclusive institutions like other children with special needs. This is due to financial constraints and their family's economic situation. However, based on observations, although these children do not receive formal education, they are still provided with religious education at the *pesantren*. They become *santri* and participate in various activities at the *pesantren*, just like other *santri*, by engaging in routine practices such as reciting the Qur'an and collectively chanting *sholawat*. These religious practices are expected to bring positive changes for *santri* with special needs, particularly in shaping their religious character, including strengthening their religious knowledge, fostering empathy, respect, humility, self-control, and the ability to express their desires and competencies. Additionally, these activities serve as spiritual therapy. This study aimed to highlight the process of religious character formation in *santri* with special needs, ultimately contributing to the development of their overall character.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Character Education

Character education consists of two words: ‘education’ and ‘character.’ The term ‘education’ originates from the Greek word ‘*paedagogi*’, which means guidance given to children. It was later translated into English as ‘education,’ meaning guidance, and into Arabic as *tarbiyah*, which means education (Ramayulis, 2011: 13). Character education, on the other hand, refers to an educational approach that instills values in individuals, enabling them to develop noble character traits by applying these values in their daily lives as members of society and responsible citizens (Prayetno dan Belferik Manullang, 2011: 48).

### Character Development Process

Thomas Lickona presents a theoretical model in his book that explains the process of character development, which consists of three key components:

1. *Moral Knowing*: The process of educating students on the importance of character and moral reasoning in navigating broader society. This component comprises six essential aspects, including moral awareness, knowing moral values, perspective-taking, moral reasoning, decision-making, and self-knowledge (Thomas Lickona, 2012: 108).
2. *Moral Feeling*: The emotional aspects that individuals must develop to become people of character (Thomas Lickona, 2012: 109). There are six key emotional aspects essential for moral development: conscience, self-esteem, empathy, loving the good, self-control, and humility (Thomas Lickona, 2012: 110).
3. *Moral Action*: The tangible implementation of moral knowing and moral feeling. Lickona categorizes moral action into three aspects: competence, will, and habit (Thomas Lickona, 2012: 111).

### Children with Special Needs

Children with Special Needs are individuals who experience physical, mental-intellectual, social, or emotional developmental differences compared to their peers, requiring specialized educational services to support their learning and growth (Miftakhul Jannah & Ira Darmawanti, 2004: 15).

## METHOD

Based on the background, this study employed a qualitative approach with a descriptive method. Data were collected through interviews with key informants, direct observations, and documentation. The collected data were then analyzed using Miles and Huberman's analysis model, which includes data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Through this specific phenomenon, the analyzed data were generalized to generate findings that can be presented through the study's propositions.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### The Process of Developing Religious Character in *Santri* with Special Needs

Education is defined as a means of developing intelligent individuals. Therefore, character development is essential within the education system. Moreover, education is also seen as a process of shaping human character to ensure individuals truly embody the essence of humanity (Darsiti Suratman, 1985: 6-7). The efforts made by the caretakers of the *pesantren* in shaping the religious character of *santri* with special needs involve providing character education through moral value instruction, which is carried out in three stages, as outlined below:

#### Learning Stages

The learning process for *Santri* with Special Needs is adapted to their individual limitations. One of the key approaches used in teaching them involves patience, persistence, and consistent practice. They tend to learn by imitating what has been taught.

The learning process at Pondok Pesantren Salafiyah Nurul 'Ulum Kebomas Gresik aligns with Thomas Lickona's concept of the first stage in character development, known as moral knowing. This stage involves providing students with an understanding of the importance of character and moral reasoning in navigating life within a broader society (Thomas Lickona, 2012: 108). Through this learning process, *santri* with special needs can more easily receive and internalize the moral values taught, ultimately shaping their religious character.

#### Stage of Awareness Development

After undergoing the learning process, *santri* with special needs develop an awareness of the moral values taught to them, which in turn fosters positive character traits. Among these moral values is the emergence of *himmah* (determination) within them, motivating them to engage in worship, pursue learning, and perform good deeds.

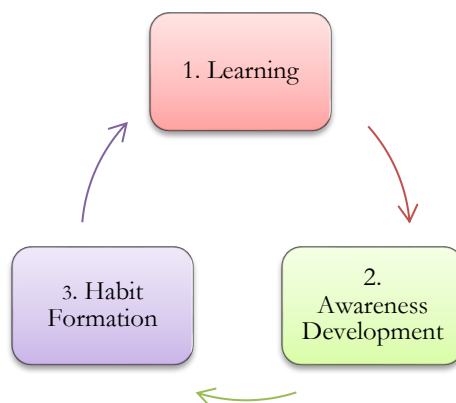
The development of self-awareness in *santri* with special needs aligns with Thomas Lickona's concept of moral feeling (the emotional aspect of character development). According to Lickona, after receiving understanding and education, students are encouraged to develop a sense of character, which includes aspects such as conscience, empathy, and humility (Muhammad Iqbal Hasani, 2019: 78).

Character formation is not limited to knowledge alone but also involves emotional aspects and personal habits. This is because a person who understands moral values does not necessarily act accordingly unless they are trained to internalize these values through daily practice (Heri Gunawan, 2017: 38).

#### Stage of Habit Formation

After developing self-awareness and internalizing moral values, *santri* with special needs become accustomed to practicing these values through various activities in the *pesantren*. These include performing prayers independently without guidance, reciting the Qur'an, engaging in daily *wirid*, helping one another, and reciting *Sholawat Fatih* and *Do'a Birrul Walidain* after each prayer. Through these habitual practices, they are able to embody the moral values they have been taught. This aligns with Thomas Lickona's concept of moral action, which emphasizes that an individual's willingness to act comes from within, and that continuously practicing certain behaviors helps shape one's character and moral integrity (Muhammad Iqbal Hasani, 2019: 80).

Based on the findings of this study, the process of shaping the religious character of *santri* with special needs consists of three stages: the learning stage, the awareness formation stage, and the habit formation stage. For a clearer illustration, refer to the diagram below:



### Religious Character Formed in Santri with Special Needs

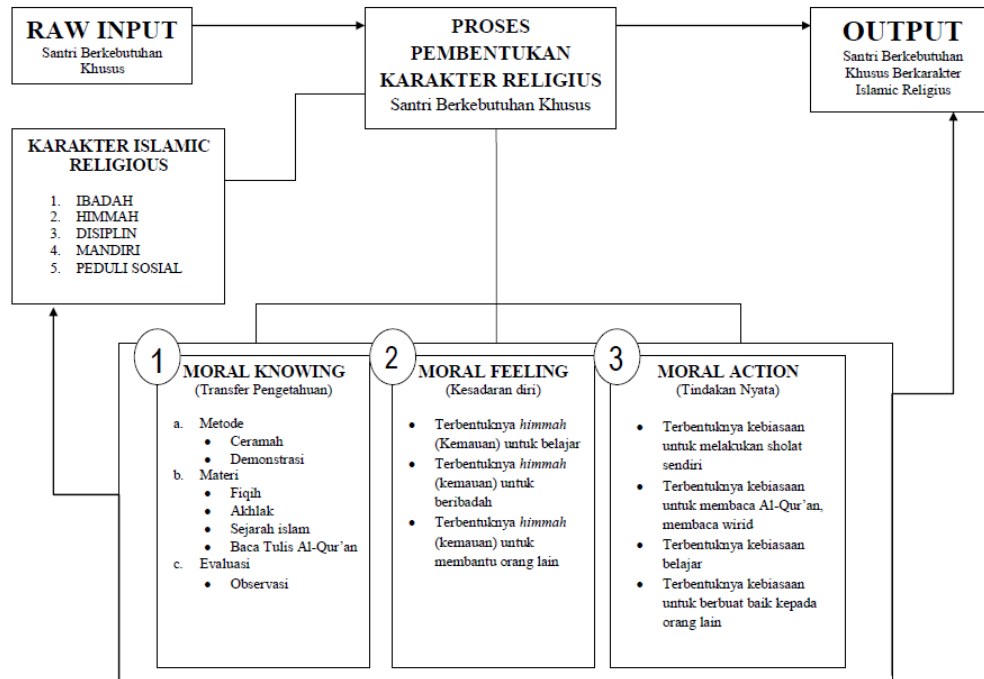
Religious character is a belief in the teachings of one's religion that becomes ingrained in an individual, manifesting in attitudes and behaviors in daily life. This is reflected both in one's demeanor and actions, distinguishing them from the character of others (Muhammad Bakhruddin, 2019: 66).

Based on the findings of this study, the religious character formed in *santri* with special needs includes the following aspects:

1. **Worship Character:** This aspect refers to the development of a religious character in *santri* with special needs through habitual practice, leading to an awareness of the importance of worshipping Allah SWT. One of the key informants explained that the worship character observed in these *santri* is their willingness to perform both obligatory and voluntary prayers, particularly tahajjud. They also participate in congregational prayers alongside other *santri*. This aligns with the view of Agus Maimun and Agus Zainul Fitri, who emphasized that instilling the value of worship in students is essential to help them understand the significance of devotion to Allah (Agus Maimun dan Agus Zainul, 2010: 83-89).
2. **Jihad Character (Determination):** This aspect refers to the strong motivation and perseverance that emerge within *santri* with special needs. One of the key informants explained that their jihad (determination) is evident in their high enthusiasm for learning, especially in religious studies. This aligns with the perspective of Agus Maimun and Agus Zainul Fitri, who state that the character of jihad (determination) is always rooted in the attitude of striving and making sincere efforts (Agus Maimun dan Agus Zainul, 2010: 90).
3. **Discipline Character:** This aspect refers to the ability of *santri* with special needs to consistently practice what they have been taught. One of the key informants explained that their discipline is reflected in their awareness and commitment to performing congregational prayers on time and regularly. This aligns with the definition outlined in the Regulation of the Minister of National Education regarding discipline, which describes it as the habit and consistent adherence to established rules and regulations (Kemendiknas, 2011: 2).
4. **Independence Character:** This aspect refers to the ability to stand on one's own without relying on others. One of the key informants explained that the independence of *santri* with special needs is reflected in their ability to carry out daily activities without assistance, such as performing personal hygiene routines, studying, and even worshipping independently. This aligns with the definition outlined in the Regulation of the Minister of National Education regarding independence, which describes it as an attitude and behavior that does not depend on others in completing tasks or solving problems (Kemendiknas, 2011: 2).
5. **Social Care Character:** This aspect refers to an attitude that reflects concern for others and social awareness. One of the key informants explained that the social care of *santri* with special needs is evident when they show concern for friends who are sick or in need of assistance. Additionally, they actively

contribute to their surroundings, such as participating in the development of the *pesantren* and helping to clean the *pesantren* environment.

This aligns with the definition outlined in the Regulation of the Minister of National Education regarding social care, which describes it as attitudes and actions that reflect concern for others and the community in need (Kemendiknas, 2011: 2).



## CONCLUSION

Based on the findings and analysis presented in the previous chapters, it can be concluded that the process of developing the religious character of *santri* with special needs at Pondok Pesantren Salafiyah Nurul 'Ulum Kebomas Gresik occurred through three stages. First, the learning stage, which was carried out with patience, persistence, and repetition, tailored to the specific limitations of each child. Second, the awareness stage, where *santri* with special needs develop *himmah* (motivation) to learn and engage in good deeds. Third, the habit formation stage, where they became accustomed to performing prayers independently, reciting the Qur'an and wirid daily, reading *Sholawat Fatih* and *Do'a Birrul Walidain* after prayers, and helping one another. Through this character-building process, the religious character developed in *santri* with special needs includes the character of worship, *jihad* (determination) reflected in their *himmah* (motivation), discipline, independence, and social care.

## RECOMENDATION

This study can be further explored in future studies that shares similar variables, namely religious character formation and children with special needs. Given that studies on character development in children with special needs still require further development, it is hoped that this study will contribute to promoting equality in access to Islamic education for character development among children with special needs, as well as the development of other potential character traits within them.

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