



Dormitory Caregivers' Patterns of Guidance and Companionship in Strengthening the Moral Character of Female Students at Madrasah Aliyah As'adiyah Putri Pusat Sengkang

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Abstract

This study examines how dormitory caregivers implement patterns of guidance and companionship to strengthen the moral character of female students at Madrasah Aliyah As'adiyah Putri Pusat Sengkang, Wajo Regency, South Sulawesi. Using a qualitative case-study design, data were collected through participant observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation involving 15 informants selected through purposive sampling: four dormitory caregivers, two institutional leaders, three teachers involved in student guidance, and six female students, each chosen for direct and sustained involvement in dormitory life. Data collection took place over four months, combining routine observation of daily dormitory activities with semi-structured interviews and analysis of institutional documents. The findings indicate that character education is realized through an integrated pattern combining exemplary conduct (uswah hasanah), habituation, discipline, personal advice, supervision, and interpersonal accompaniment, in which caregivers function simultaneously as supervisors, educators, role models, and substitute parents. The underlying mechanism shows that firmness in enforcing rules becomes morally formative mainly when paired with dialogue and emotional closeness: students interpret consistent, explained, and empathetically delivered discipline as care rather than control, which increases their willingness to internalize rather than merely comply with institutional norms. Variation in students' family backgrounds and levels of emotional maturity shapes how quickly and how deeply this internalization occurs, requiring caregivers to individualize their approach rather than apply a single method. The study suggests that dormitory-based character education for female students becomes most formative when institutional structure, religious habituation, and dialogical caregiver-student relationships operate as an integrated system rather than as separate components.

Keywords: Dormitory Caregiving; Moral Character Formation; Female Students; Islamic Boarding School.

Abstrak

Penelitian ini mengkaji bagaimana pengasuh asrama mengimplementasikan pola pengasuhan dan pendampingan dalam memperkuat karakter moral santriwati di Madrasah Aliyah As'adiyah Putri Pusat Sengkang, Kabupaten Wajo, Sulawesi Selatan. Dengan desain studi kasus kualitatif, data dikumpulkan melalui observasi partisipan, wawancara mendalam, dan dokumentasi yang melibatkan 15 informan yang dipilih melalui teknik purposive sampling, yaitu empat pengasuh asrama, dua pimpinan lembaga, tiga guru pembina, dan enam santriwati, dengan kriteria keterlibatan langsung dan berkelanjutan dalam kehidupan asrama. Pengumpulan data dilaksanakan selama empat bulan, mencakup observasi rutin terhadap aktivitas harian asrama, wawancara semi terstruktur, serta analisis dokumen kelembagaan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa pendidikan karakter diwujudkan melalui pola terintegrasi yang menggabungkan keteladanan (uswah hasanah), pembiasaan, kedisiplinan, nasihat personal, pengawasan, dan pendampingan interpersonal, dengan pengasuh berperan sekaligus

sebagai pengawas, pendidik, teladan, dan pengganti orang tua. Mekanisme yang mendasari pola ini memperlihatkan bahwa ketegasan dalam penegakan aturan menjadi bermakna secara moral terutama ketika disertai dialog dan kedekatan emosional: santriwati memaknai kedisiplinan yang konsisten, dijelaskan, dan disampaikan secara empatik sebagai bentuk perhatian, bukan kontrol, sehingga meningkatkan kesediaan mereka untuk menginternalisasi – bukan sekadar mematuhi – norma kelembagaan. Perbedaan latar belakang keluarga dan tingkat kematangan emosional santriwati memengaruhi kecepatan dan kedalaman proses internalisasi tersebut, sehingga menuntut pengasuh menerapkan pendekatan individual, bukan pendekatan yang seragam. Penelitian ini mengindikasikan bahwa pendidikan karakter berbasis asrama bagi santriwati menjadi paling bermakna ketika struktur kelembagaan, pembiasaan keagamaan, dan relasi dialogis antara pengasuh dan santriwati berjalan sebagai satu sistem yang terintegrasi, bukan sebagai komponen yang terpisah.

Kata kunci: Pengasuhan Asrama; Pembentukan Karakter Moral; Santriwati; Pesantren.

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Introduction

Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) have long occupied an important position in Indonesian Islamic education because they combine intellectual development with spiritual formation, moral training, and everyday religious practice. Their residential character distinguishes them from non-boarding schools: students learn not only in classrooms but also through routines, social relations, worship, discipline, and the educational culture surrounding them. Consequently, moral character is not treated merely as subject matter, but as a disposition that must be cultivated continuously through knowledge, habituation, example, and practice (Islam & Aziz, 2020; Huda et al., 2020).

Contemporary social and technological changes have made this formative role increasingly complex. Digital media, rapid information flows, shifting patterns of adolescent interaction, and changing value orientations expose students to influences that classroom instruction alone cannot address. For female adolescents at the senior secondary level, moral education also intersects with growing independence, identity formation, peer relations, academic responsibility, and preparation for wider social participation. These developmental needs mean that autonomy-seeking students respond less to unilateral control and more to guidance that explains reasons, invites reflection, and preserves a sense of being respected; pesantren and madrasah are therefore required to maintain strong Islamic traditions while developing guidance that is responsive, communicative, and relevant to adolescent girls' developmental trajectories (Arthur, 2021; Ihsan et al., 2021).

In a residential madrasah, the dormitory becomes an intensive arena for character formation because students experience repeated interaction with caregivers and peers beyond formal learning hours. Dormitory caregivers therefore occupy a strategic position as supervisors, mentors, substitute parents, and moral exemplars. Through daily accompaniment, they can cultivate discipline, responsibility, independence, religious devotion, cleanliness, courtesy, mutual assistance, and respect for others. Previous studies show that boarding-based caregiving contributes to character development when routines, interpersonal guidance, and institutional support are implemented consistently, including through caregivers' exemplary conduct as substitute family figures (Ma'arif & Rofiq, 2022; Fauzi & Maunah, 2021; Syarifah et al., 2024; Andriani et al., 2025).

A number of prior studies aligned with this topic have examined various aspects of character formation grounded in exemplary conduct and caregiving, albeit across different institutional contexts. Amilda et al. (2023) found that non-academic programs in vocational schools effectively shaped students' character when paired with clear institutional structure. Rifki et al. (2023) and Qushwa et al. (2025) affirmed that teacher role-modeling remains the primary method of character-value internalization in both school and madrasah settings. In the family context, Fadhilah et al. (2022) and Darna and Suci (2024) showed that collaboration between parents and educators-through consistent communication and shared exemplary conduct-strengthens the formation of students' moral character. Meanwhile, Alimni et al. (2022) documented that emotional closeness between Islamic education teachers and students contributes to students' emotional intelligence, and Nursalim et al. (2021) formulated a model of religious character-value internalization emphasizing that habituation becomes meaningful only when accompanied by personal interpretation. A review by Asri and Deviv (2023) further noted that character-education implementation in schools still faces challenges in reconciling formal rules with educators' day-to-day practice.

Theoretically, effective character education requires the integration of moral knowledge, moral feeling, and moral action. Values become meaningful when students understand them, develop an emotional commitment to them, and repeatedly translate them into conduct. In Islamic educational settings, this process is reinforced through *uswah hasanah*, habituation, advice, worship, discipline, and a supportive culture. Recent discussions of this tripartite framework in the Indonesian context note that character formation stalls when moral knowledge is transmitted without accompanying

emotional engagement, and that continuous, dialogical interaction between educators and students is what converts knowledge into durable practice (Munawarsyah et al., 2024; Suyatno et al., 2022; Nucci et al., 2020).

Although these studies consistently affirm the importance of role-modeling, habituation, and emotional closeness, most address these elements separately-centered on the teacher's role in formal schooling, the parents' role at home, or a collaboration between the two-without explaining how institutional firmness, dialogue, and emotional closeness operate jointly within a single dormitory caregiver who simultaneously performs the roles of supervisor, educator, and substitute parent. Existing research on pesantren-based caregiving has also tended to describe general disciplinary routines and character outcomes, or to evaluate character programs in predominantly male or mixed-sex institutional settings (Muslimin & Zuhriyah, 2022; Huda et al., 2023). A global meta-analysis of boarding education likewise reports mixed and often contradictory findings regarding its developmental impact, underscoring the need for contextual research that specifies the underlying mechanism rather than merely reporting an end effect (Zhong et al., 2024). Attention to the specific mechanism by which firmness, dialogue, and emotional closeness jointly operate to produce moral internalization among adolescent girls in a female residential setting-and to how differences in students' family background and emotional maturity mediate that mechanism-remains comparatively limited. This is a meaningful gap: female adolescents' heightened need for relational security and identity affirmation means that the same disciplinary structure that succeeds in one setting may be received very differently depending on the caregiver-student relationship surrounding it (Martins et al., 2021).

Madrasah Aliyah As'adiyah Putri Pusat Sengkang is a relevant site for examining this mechanism because it is one of the oldest and largest dedicated female residential units within the As'adiyah educational network in Wajo Regency, South Sulawesi, combining formal senior-secondary instruction with a long-established boarding tradition and a structured system of dormitory caregivers (*pengasuh*). Its scale and institutional continuity make it possible to observe patterned, rather than incidental, caregiving practice, and its status as a single-sex institution allows the study to isolate dynamics specific to female adolescent development without the confound of mixed-sex interaction.

This study therefore departs from prior work by centering the mechanism connecting institutional firmness, dialogical communication, and emotional closeness to moral internalization, and by treating variation in students' responses-rather than a single average outcome-as a substantive finding. Accordingly, the study is guided by three research questions: (1) how do dormitory caregivers implement patterns of guidance and companionship in strengthening the moral character of female students at Madrasah Aliyah As'adiyah Putri Pusat Sengkang; (2) through what mechanism do firmness, dialogue, and emotional closeness jointly contribute to the internalization of moral character; and (3) what factors explain the variation in female students' responses to these caregiving patterns.

Method

This field-based study employs a qualitative approach and a case-study design, considered appropriate for understanding educational practice in its natural setting and for interpreting the meanings attached to routines, interactions, rules, and relationships as experienced by participants (Fadli, 2021). The research was conducted at Madrasah Aliyah As'adiyah Putri Pusat Sengkang, Wajo Regency, South Sulawesi, drawing on normative (the Qur'an, Hadith, and Islamic educational values as the moral foundation of caregiving), pedagogical (caregivers as educators beyond the classroom), and socio-cultural perspectives (interaction patterns and As'adiyah's residential educational tradition).

Primary data were obtained from 15 informants selected through purposive sampling-a technique chosen because it allows researchers to deliberately select participants who can provide rich, contextually relevant information rather than a statistically representative sample (Ahmad & Wilkins, 2024). Informants were selected using the criteria of direct, sustained involvement in dormitory life and willingness to be interviewed in depth. They consisted of four dormitory caregivers with a minimum of three years of service, two institutional leaders responsible for dormitory policy, three teachers involved in students' moral guidance, and six female students spanning three grade levels so as to capture a range of tenure in the dormitory. Secondary data consisted of institutional documents, dormitory regulations, activity schedules, and records of student guidance.

Data were collected over four months through three techniques: participant observation of daily dormitory routines (worship, study periods, communal duties, and

free time), conducted routinely throughout the research period; in-depth semi-structured interviews with each of the 15 informants, carried out iteratively so that themes emerging from early interviews could be checked against subsequent observation; and documentation of institutional records, gathered in the first month and updated at the end of the study. Analysis followed the interactive model of data collection, reduction, display, and conclusion drawing/verification, with credibility strengthened through triangulation across sources, techniques, and occasions, and through member-checking with key informants (Zaluchu, 2020; Rusandi & Rusli, 2021). All student and caregiver names reported in the following sections are pseudonyms assigned to protect informants' identities.

Result and Discussion

An Integrated Pattern: Structure, Exemplary Conduct, and Habituation

The findings show that dormitory caregiving at Madrasah Aliyah As'adiyah Putri Pusat Sengkang is implemented through an integrated educational pattern rather than through a single caregiving style. Caregivers combine firm discipline with religious guidance, habituation, personal advice, supervision, and relational approaches. Rules and schedules provide a clear structure for daily life, while communication and personal guidance help students understand the moral meaning behind expected behavior. This pattern places caregivers simultaneously as supervisors, educators, role models, and substitute parents within the dormitory environment, consistent with the pesantren-based caregiving patterns reported in other female residential settings (Syarifah et al., 2024; Muslimin & Zuhriyah, 2022) and with findings that clear institutional structure strengthens the effectiveness of character-building programs grounded in daily activity (Amilda et al., 2023).

Character formation is most visibly developed through exemplary conduct (*uswah hasanah*) and repeated habituation. Caregivers model punctual worship, modest speech, cleanliness, responsibility, respectful interaction, and orderly conduct. Female students are then accustomed to practicing these values through congregational worship, Qur'anic activities, scheduled study, dormitory duties, cleanliness routines, mutual assistance, and compliance with shared rules. Advice and corrective measures are used when violations occur, but their educational value is strengthened when caregivers explain the reasons for rules and encourage reflection rather than relying solely on punishment. This pattern corresponds with the second-generation moral-

education literature's emphasis on integrating rule-based structure with relational meaning-making (Nucci et al., 2020), and with findings that educators' role-modeling remains the most consistent method of internalizing character values across levels of Islamic education (Rifki et al., 2023; Qushwa et al., 2025).

Compared with earlier accounts of pesantren discipline, which have generally described habituation and rule enforcement as the primary drivers of character outcomes (Huda et al., 2020; Islam & Aziz, 2020), the present findings extend this picture by showing that habituation alone was insufficient to explain why some students internalized values quickly while others treated the same routines as external obligations. The difference, discussed further below, traced consistently to whether habituation was accompanied by explanation and relational warmth.

The Mechanism of Firmness, Dialogue, and Emotional Closeness

A central finding of this study is the mechanism through which firmness, dialogue, and emotional closeness jointly shape moral internalization. Students consistently reported that they were more receptive to correction when caregivers were perceived as fair, consistent, approachable, and willing to listen. Firmness on its own—clear rules, consistent enforcement, visible consequences—established predictable boundaries and reduced ambiguity about expectations. However, informants across all four categories described firmness as producing compliance rather than commitment when it was not accompanied by explanation. One caregiver, referred to here by the pseudonym Ustazah R, described her practice of pairing every sanction with a private conversation in which the student was asked to explain her own understanding of the rule before being told the caregiver's reasoning; several students corroborated that this sequence made them feel "understood before being corrected," which in turn made them more willing to repeat the caregiver's reasoning to themselves in later situations rather than simply avoiding punishment.

This pattern suggests a specific mechanism: firmness supplies the behavioral boundary, dialogue supplies the cognitive justification for that boundary, and emotional closeness supplies the relational trust that makes students willing to accept the justification rather than resist it defensively. When any one element was missing, informants described weaker or more superficial character outcomes—firmness without dialogue produced resentment or rule evasion when caregivers were absent; dialogue without firmness produced inconsistent behavior because students were unsure

whether rules would actually be enforced; and closeness without either firmness or dialogue produced affection without moral direction. This finding reinforces a model of religious character-value internalization holding that habituation becomes morally meaningful only when accompanied by personal interpretation built through the educator-student relationship (Nursalim et al., 2021), and aligns with documentation that emotional closeness between religious educators and students contributes to students' emotional maturity (Alimni et al., 2022). It also resonates with broader social-emotional accounts of educator-student relationships, which similarly identify perceived warmth and responsiveness as preconditions for students' motivational engagement with adult-set expectations (Wentzel, 2022).

This finding is broadly consistent with attachment-informed accounts of moral-emotion development, which suggest that secure relational bonds facilitate the internalization of empathy, guilt, and other moral emotions more effectively than either permissive warmth or unaccompanied control (Martins et al., 2021). It also refines rather than simply confirms earlier pesantren-based caregiving research: where Ma'arif and Rofiq (2022) and Fauzi and Maunah (2021) report a general association between consistent boarding routines and positive character outcomes, the present study specifies the interactional sequence-explanation preceding or accompanying sanction, delivered within a trusted relationship-that appears to convert routine compliance into internalized commitment.

Variation in Students' Responses: Family Background and Emotional Maturity

The findings also indicate meaningful variation in how female students responded to the same caregiving pattern, and this variation did not resolve neatly in favor of any single caregiving technique. Students who came from families with consistent religious routines and clear parental expectations tended to adapt to dormitory discipline within the first few weeks, treating caregivers' explanations as reinforcement of familiar norms-consistent with findings that synergy between parental and educator role-modeling accelerates students' moral formation (Darna & Suci, 2024; Fadhilah et al., 2022). Students from families with inconsistent supervision or significant domestic disruption required substantially longer periods of individualized accompaniment, and in several cases initially interpreted firm correction as rejection rather than care, requiring caregivers to invest disproportionately more time in relationship-building before dialogue became effective.

Emotional maturity produced a related but distinct pattern of variation. Older students and those who had spent more than a year in the dormitory were more able to separate a caregiver's correction from a judgment of their worth, and more readily engaged in the reflective conversations that caregivers used to explain rules. Younger and newly enrolled students more often experienced correction as personally threatening regardless of how it was delivered, which caregivers managed by relying more heavily on peer mentoring structures-pairing newer students with senior santriwati-alongside their own guidance. This finding qualifies the otherwise consistent picture of dialogical caregiving as uniformly effective: the same combination of firmness, dialogue, and closeness required different pacing and different auxiliary supports depending on a student's family background and developmental stage, rather than functioning as a single formula applicable to all students equally.

This variation also surfaced a genuine tension rather than a uniformly positive picture. Two caregivers and one institutional leader noted that the time required to individualize accompaniment for students with more difficult family backgrounds sometimes came at the expense of consistent attention to students who were already adapting well, suggesting a resource constraint that the integrated pattern described above does not fully resolve. This contrasts with more optimistic accounts in the existing literature that describe boarding-based habituation as broadly effective without addressing the caregiver time and capacity required to sustain individualized dialogue at scale (Islam & Aziz, 2020).

Critical Comparison with Prior Research

Positioned against the wider literature, these findings both align with and depart from previous work. They align with studies emphasizing that role modeling and habituation are central mechanisms of Islamic character education, and that caregivers' own consistency functions as a practical reference point against which students evaluate the sincerity of moral instruction (Munawarsyah et al., 2024; Huda et al., 2023). Where the present study departs from this literature is in refusing to treat "consistency with theory" as the primary criterion of interpretation. Rather than concluding that dormitory caregiving is effective because it matches theoretical expectations, the findings specify the conditions under which it is effective-namely, the joint presence of firmness, dialogue, and emotional closeness-and the conditions under which the same caregivers'

efforts produced slower or more partial internalization, namely when students' family backgrounds or emotional maturity increased their initial resistance to correction.

The findings also depart from studies that frame dormitory discipline primarily in institutional-control terms. A global meta-analysis of boarding education reports mixed and inconsistent developmental outcomes, partly contingent on the quality of the caregiver-student relationship rather than the boarding format itself (Zhong et al., 2024), while research on female boarding students in other contexts has documented the risk of loneliness and emotional strain when relational support is inadequate (Rudrum et al., 2022). The present case did not find evidence of the negative outcomes associated with purely control-oriented regimes, but this appears attributable precisely to the deliberate pairing of firmness with dialogue and closeness rather than to the residential structure itself; caregivers who were reported by students as relying on control alone were also the caregivers whose students described the least willingness to approach them outside of formal correction. This suggests that dormitory-based character education is not inherently protective against the risks documented elsewhere in boarding-school research, and that its outcomes depend heavily on caregiver relational practice rather than on the boarding format as such.

Taken together, the results indicate that the strength of dormitory-based character education at Madrasah Aliyah As'adiyah Putri Pusat Sengkang lies not in any single method but in the deliberate, sustained integration of institutional structure, exemplary conduct, habituation, dialogue, and emotional closeness-and in caregivers' willingness to vary the pacing and intensity of that integration according to each student's family background and emotional maturity.

Conclusion

This study concludes that dormitory caregiving at Madrasah Aliyah As'adiyah Putri Pusat Sengkang constitutes an important component of female students' moral character formation, organized around three interlocking themes that emerged directly from the data. First, character education is implemented through an integrated pattern combining exemplary conduct, religious habituation, discipline, personal advice, supervision, and interpersonal accompaniment, with caregivers occupying simultaneous roles as supervisors, educators, role models, and substitute parents. Second, the internalization of moral character depends on a specific mechanism in which firmness supplies behavioral boundaries, dialogue supplies moral justification, and

emotional closeness supplies the relational trust needed for students to accept that justification; the absence of any one element weakens the outcome. Third, students' family backgrounds and levels of emotional maturity produce genuine variation in how this mechanism operates, requiring caregivers to individualize pacing and to draw on auxiliary supports such as peer mentoring rather than applying a uniform approach.

These findings indicate that firmness remains necessary for maintaining collective order in a residential setting, but that its character-building value depends on being embedded within dialogical and emotionally attentive relationships rather than functioning as a standalone disciplinary tool. Role modeling and habituation provide the repeated practice through which values become familiar, while dialogue and emotional closeness provide the interpretive and relational conditions under which that practice is internalized rather than merely endured.

Given the resource constraints identified in this study-particularly the caregiver time required to sustain individualized dialogue for students with more difficult family backgrounds-future research is recommended to examine how dormitory-based character education of this kind can be sustained or scaled, including through structured peer-mentoring systems, in different pesantren or madrasah contexts, including male and mixed-sex residential settings, so that the mechanism identified here can be tested for its transferability beyond a single female institution.

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