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The Hidden Curriculum in Islamic Boarding Schools and Its Implications for the Formation of Santri Character: A Systematic Literature Review

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Abstract

The hidden curriculum is vital in pesantren education, often surpassing formal curricula in shaping students' moral foundations. This research synthesizes literature on its implementation and impact on character building from 2021 to 2026. Employing a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) with the PRISMA protocol, 16 final articles were selected from Google Scholar via Publish or Perish. Findings reveal that implementation manifests through four pillars: exemplary leadership (*uswah hasanah*), organizational culture, dormitory environment, and digital integration. Dominant traits formed include religiosity, self-reliance, discipline, and soft skills. The study highlights a shift from traditional management to digitalization, altering student interaction patterns. These implications offer a strategic framework for pesantren leaders to optimize unwritten elements, strengthening character education in the modern era.

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Introduction

Character education has become a major agenda in the global education system in the 21st century to answer the challenge of moral degradation in the midst of technological advances. According to (Husna & Hamid, 2025) and (Mustari et al., 2025), educational institutions today are required to not only focus on the transfer of cognitive knowledge through a formal curriculum, but must also be able to shape the integrity and personality of students holistically. In the context of Islamic education in Indonesia, Islamic Boarding Schools stand out as original educational institutions (*indigenous*) which has a long track record of printing tough characters through a 24-hour life system. As affirmed by (Maulana & Fuad, 2024) and Fitria et al. (2024), the uniqueness of pesantren lies in its ability to unite cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects in one learning ecosystem that is sustainable and integrated with local wisdom.

The success of pesantren in shaping the character of students is often not only sourced from text material in the classroom, but through the vital role of the hidden curriculum (*hidden curriculum*). This curriculum includes values, norms, traditions, and social interactions that are not written but consistently

experienced by students (Qarnain, 2025); (Rakhmawan et al., 2023)). Although the formal curriculum in Islamic boarding schools has undergone modernization, according to (S. Inayah, 2025) and (Yakin & Amin, 2021), elements *hidden curriculum* Like the example of Kiai, it remains the main spirit that shapes the religiosity of the students. In addition, (Qarnain, 2025) Supported by findings (E. Putri, 2023) and (R. F. Inayah & Fuadi, 2025) added that the culture of independence that grows in the dormitory is the result of a non-formal curriculum that forms *soft skills* students more effectively than verbal instructions in the classroom.

Entering the era of digital transformation, new challenges have emerged in the traditional ecosystem of Islamic boarding schools that have been closed. The global flow of information that permeates through technological devices, as identified by (Kamala et al., 2026) and (R. F. Inayah & Fuadi, 2025), potentially shifting traditional patterns of interaction and discipline management that have been established. This change raises crucial questions about effectiveness *hidden curriculum* in forming religious character and independence in the modern era. (R. F. Inayah & Fuadi, 2025) together (Musahwi & Wahyuni, 2024) highlights that without proper adaptation through *strategic adaptive management* (Mustari et al., 2025), traditional values of pesantren are at risk of degradation due to the penetration of hedonistic and individualistic digital culture.

Although there has been a lot of research that addresses the hidden curriculum individually through case studies, as mapped by (Yakin & Amin, 2021) and (ROHMAD, 2021), there is still a research gap (*research gap*) that are real. According to (Sholihah et al., 2024), (Saputra et al., 2024) and Trimala and (Trimala & Hasibuan, 2025), there is still very little literature that attempts to systematically synthesize these findings to comprehensively look at global trends and the impact of digitalization. Most of the previous research, as criticized by (Khafidhoh & Aminuddin, 2022) and (Rakhmawan et al., 2023) tend to focus on the aspect of religiosity alone, while the development aspect *soft skills* and technology adaptation in *hidden curriculum* is still rarely mapped in depth. Therefore, research *Systematic Literature Review* (SLR) is very important to provide a new roadmap for the development of the character of students in the future that is relevant to the needs of the times.

Method

This study uses the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) method. Based on the protocol developed by Kitchenham and Charters, this method aims to identify, evaluate, and interpret all available research results to objectively answer research questions. The main focus of this research is an empirical portrait of hidden curriculum in Islamic boarding schools in the 2021-2026 period.

Research Questions and Objectives

In accordance with the SLR format, the research questions (RQ) are designed to direct the data extraction process to match the research objectives (RO), as presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Research Questions and Objectives

No.	Research Questions (RQ)	Research Objectives (RO)
RQ1	Article Characteristics: What is the publication profile (year, journal, and method) regarding the hidden curriculum?	To identify bibliometric profiles and methodological trends in current scientific literature.
RQ2	Implementation: What are the manifestations of the hidden curriculum applied in students' daily lives?	To classify hidden curriculum practices in terms of tradition and digital adaptation.
RQ3	Character Implications: How does the hidden curriculum affect students' character dimensions and soft skills?	To analyze the correlation between non-formal curriculum practices and students' personality outcomes.
RQ4	Challenges: What are the main factors hindering or supporting the hidden curriculum in the global era?	To identify management obstacles and opportunities for Islamic boarding schools in adapting to digital transformation.
RQ5	Solutions: What are the future research directions and gaps for further scientific development?	To provide strategic recommendations and scientific solutions based on the limitations of current studies.

Search Process Strategy

This stage describes the steps to find the primary data source. Data was obtained through the Google Scholar database using the Publish or Perish (PoP) application with keyword details in Table 2.

Table 2. Data Search Keywords

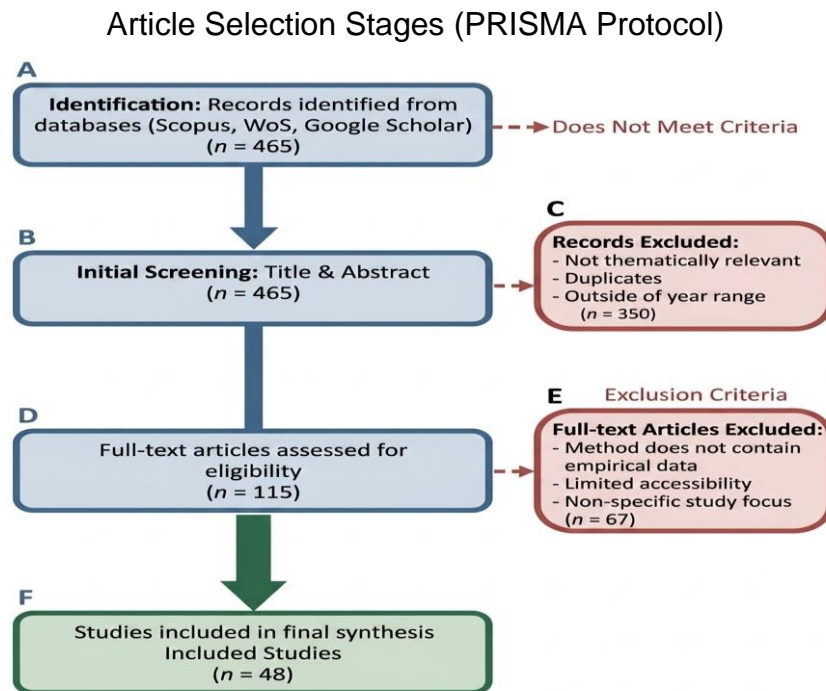
Database	Keywords
Google Scholar (via Publish or Perish)	"Hidden Curriculum" AND "Islamic Boarding School" AND "Character"
Scopus / Web of Science*	"Hidden Curriculum" AND "Islamic Boarding School" AND "Character"

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

To ensure the quality of the articles analyzed, the researcher set the limitations of the selection criteria as described in Table 3.

Table 3. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Criteria	Inclusions (Accepted)	Exclusion (Denied)
Document Type	Scientific Journal Articles (Original Research)	Books, Theses, Dissertations, Proceedings
Publication Period	Year 2021 to 2026	Published before 2021
Data Access	Full-text access	Abstract only / No full-text access
Language	English and Indonesian	Other than English and Indonesian
Study Focus	Hidden curriculum in Islamic Boarding Schools	Formal curriculum / Public schools



The selection process is carried out in stages to filter data from initial findings to final articles that are ready for analysis (Table 4).

Table 4. Article Selection Process

Stages	Process Description	Number of Articles
Identification	Initial search via Publish or Perish (2021-2026)	986
Screening	Selection based on title, abstract, and duplication	145
Eligibility	Full-text eligibility assessment	42
Inclusion	Final selection for synthesis	16

Results and Discussion

The results of this study are a synthesis of 16 articles that meet the inclusion criteria. This section begins with a mapping of the characteristics of the article to provide an overview of the development of hidden curriculum research in Islamic boarding schools

Article Characteristics (RQ1)

. The characteristics of the articles are analyzed based on three main indicators, namely the year of publication, the source of the journal, and the research method used to provide an empirical portrait of research trends during the period 2021-2026. The profile data of the publication is presented in depth in Table 5.

Table 5. Article Publication Profiles by Year, Journal, and Method

Author & Year	Journal Name	Research Methods
Amen & Yakin (2021)	Syaikhuna: Journal of Education	Qualitative (Case Study)
Rohmad & Kolis (2021)	Excelencia: Journal of Islamic Education	Qualitative
Lestari & Sukanti (2021)	Research Journal	Descriptive Qualitative
Arpinal, et al. (2023)	Al-Mikraj: Journal of Islamic Studies	Qualitative
Rakhmawan, et al. (2023)	Bemas: Journal of Society	Qualitative
Al-Paraby, et al. (2023)	Millia Islamia	Qualitative
Princess (2023)	Millia Islamia	Qualitative
Wahyuwani, et al. (2023)	Al-Ilmi Journal	Qualitative (Phenomenology)
Fitria & Khalimah (2024)	Curricula: Journal of Curriculum	Descriptive Qualitative
Saputra, et al. (2024)	Al-Muaddib	Descriptive Qualitative
Maulana & Fuad (2024)	Arrus Journal of Social Sciences	Qualitative
Khafidhoh & Aminuddin (2024)	Tartib: Journal of Islamic Education	Qualitative
Inayah, et al. (2025)	IPSSJ	Qualitative
Trimala & Hasibuan (2025)	Ahsani Taqwim	Descriptive Qualitative
Husna & Hamid (2025)	Istifkar: Transformative Media	Literature Review
Kamala & Aimah (2026)	Journal of Academic Media (JMA)	Qualitative (Case Study)

Based on the data summarized in Table 5, the publication profile of the hidden curriculum (hidden curriculum) in Islamic boarding schools shows a very dynamic trend in the last five years. As reflected in the findings (Yakin & Amin, 2021), (ROHMAD, 2021) and Lestari and Sukanti (2021), research at the beginning of the period (2021) focused on the foundations of discipline and example. The productivity of this research then reached its peak in 2023 and 2024, supported by studies from. (Rakhmawan et al., 2023) (Rakhmawan et al., 2023) (Maghfiroh et al., 2023) (E. Putri, 2023)), and (Sholihah et al., 2024) This indicates that the discourse on strengthening the character of students through non-formal channels is a crucial issue. This trend continued the following year through research (Fitria & Khalimah, 2024) (Saputra et al., 2024) (Maulana & Fuad, 2024), and (Khafidhoh & Aminuddin, 2022) who began to explore managerial and ethical aspects.

Judging from the publication sources, the articles are spread across various reputable Islamic education and management journals, ranging from Syaikhuna, Millia Islamia, to Tartib. This distribution shows that the hidden curriculum has been recognized as a key variable in the governance of educational institutions, in line with the vision carried out by the. (Inaya et al., 2025) (Trimala & Hasibuan, 2025) and (Husna & Hamid, 2025) which emphasizes the transformation of education. The latest thought on digital adaptation in this context is enhanced by research (Kamala & Aimah, 2026)

Meanwhile, from the aspect of research methods, the vast majority of articles (93.75%) use a qualitative approach. The use of this method, either through case studies ((Yakin & Amin, 2021); (Kamala & Aimah, 2026)), phenomenology (Musahwi & Wahyuni, 2024)), or descriptive ((Sibarani et al.,

2025)(Fitria & Khalimah, 2024); (Saputra et al., 2024); (Trimala & Hasibuan, 2025)It is considered very relevant to dissect the characteristics of hidden curriculum that are abstract and embedded in daily interactions. Other qualitative approaches carried out by (ROHMAD, 2021)(2023), (Rakhmawan et al., 2023)), (Rakhmawan et al., 2023)(E. Putri, 2023)),(Inaya et al., 2025) (Khafidhoh & Aminuddin, 2022)Islamic boarding schools are the best way to uncover unwritten values. Study only (Husna & Hamid, 2025)which specifically uses a literature review to synthesize the integration of values theoretically.

Overall, the results of the analysis in RQ1 reveal that research on hidden curriculum in pesantren continues to develop methodologically and substantially. The surge in publications in the 2023-2024 period reflects the collective efforts of academics to reformulate the role of pesantren in shaping religious character in the midst of increasingly open global information flows.

Implementation of the Hidden Curriculum (RQ2)

Based on the results of a systematic analysis of the 16 selected articles, various forms of hidden curriculum manifestations were found that were consistently applied in the pesantren environment. This implementation is not explicitly written in the formal syllabus or textbook, but as emphasized by the (Yakin & Amin, 2021)) and (ROHMAD, 2021)This is an integral part of the life of students for 24 hours. Broadly speaking, these forms of implementation can be classified into the categories of exemplary, traditional, dormitory organizational culture, and technological adaptation as presented briefly in Table 6.

Table 6. Manifestation of Hidden Curriculum Implementation in Islamic Boarding Schools

Categories Implementation	Form of Practice in the Field	Main Reference Sources
Keteladanan (Exemplary)	Kiai's daily behavior, Asatidz's politeness, and the simple lifestyle of the caregiver.	Amin (2021); Rohmad (2021)
Habituation of Tradition	Congregational prayers, sunnah fasting, ro'an (community service), and muhadharah.	Maulana (2024); Saputra (2024)
Organizational Culture	Seniority rules, independence in taking care of personal logistics, and cleanliness pickets.	Arpinal (2023); Wahyudi (2023)*
Integration of Book Values	The application of the ethics of the book of Ta'lim Muta'allim in the interaction of teachers and students.	Fitria (2024); Khafidhoh (2024)
Digital Transformation	Use of activity monitoring applications and control the use of gadgets.	Kamala (2026); Inayah (2025)

The first implementation, which is the most fundamental and consistently appears in the entire literature, is through the path of exemplarity (Uswah Hasanah). In the pesantren ecosystem, the figure of Kiai and ustadz is not just a teacher of material in class, but as expressed by (Yakin & Amin, 2021)They are the central figures whose every movement becomes a "life curriculum" for students. Narrative in the article reviewed by (ROHMAD, 2021)shows that students tend to carry out the process of imitation (modelling) on the lifestyle of

their caregivers. This includes polite speaking, discipline in worship, and simplicity in appearance. These moral messages, according to the findings (R. F. Inayah & Fuadi, 2025) It is delivered effectively without the need for repetitive verbal instructions, because authority figures in Islamic boarding schools provide tangible evidence through daily actions that go beyond formal lesson texts.

Furthermore, the hidden curriculum manifests through habituation or habituation of traditions that are carried out in a repetitive and structured manner. Activities such as congregational tahajud prayer rituals and collective wirid readings, according to (Maulana & Fuad, 2024) creating a value order that is internally internalized naturally. The culture of queuing when picking up food rations in the public kitchen, as explained by (Saputra et al., 2024) It functions as a social control tool that disciplines students physically and mentally. Literature analyzed by (Rakhmawan et al., 2023) and (Rakhmawan et al., 2023) Emphasizing that through a very dense and disciplined routine, students learn about the meaning of patience, togetherness, and submission to the collective norms that apply in the institution, which ultimately forms a strong santri identity.

The cultural aspects of the organization and management of the dormitory also play a crucial role as a social laboratory for students. The hidden curriculum here works through a system of personal responsibility, where according to (Rakhmawan et al., 2023) Students are required to manage all their living needs independently. Phenomenological studies by (Sholihah et al., 2024) It shows that washing your own clothes to keeping the dormitory room clean is a real practice of independence. In addition, there are unwritten rules regarding the hierarchy of seniority, as portrayed by (E. Putri, 2023) Teaching students about the manners of communicating with older people. The dynamic interaction in this dormitory becomes a space where students' emotional intelligence is naturally honed through direct experience, a finding that is also reinforced by (R. F. Inayah & Fuadi, 2025) in the context of development soft skills.

In addition to the social aspect, the integration of the values of the book of turats (yellow book) in daily behavior is also a unique form of implementation. For example, the ethics contained in the book Ta'lim Muta'allim regarding respect for teachers, according to (Fitria & Khalimah, 2024) not only discussed at the study desk but practiced in real behavior. Actions such as kissing the teacher's hand or not speaking while the teacher is passing by, as observed by (Khafidhoh & Aminuddin, 2022) (Khafidhoh & Aminuddin, 2022) creating an environmental atmosphere that is loaded with manneric values. The pesantren environment, according to the analysis (Husna & Hamid, 2025) It is conditioned in such a way that every corner of the space has a hidden educational content, which consistently reminds students of their status as students who must maintain moral integrity.

Finally, contemporary findings highlight a shift towards digitalization in hidden curriculum management. Some modern Islamic boarding schools have begun to adopt digital technology, which according to (Kamala & Aimah, 2026) It includes worship monitoring applications and digital card-based licensing systems. Although technology is often considered a challenge to tradition, (R. F. Inayah & Fuadi, 2025) shows that this tool is actually used as a new instrument to enforce discipline and transparency. The integrity character of the students,

as affirmed in the findings (Kamala & Aimah, 2026)), tested when they interact with information technology under more systematic supervision. This proves that the hidden curriculum in pesantren has the flexibility to adapt to the progress of the times without having to lose its original spirit as a character printing institution.

Implications of the Hidden Curriculum on the Character of Students (RQ3)

Analysis of selected literature shows that the hidden curriculum has a much more permanent and significant influence in shaping the character of students than the formal curriculum. This is because, as explained (Yakin & Amin, 2021) and supported by (Education et al., 2026)The hidden curriculum works through affective and psychomotor aspects simultaneously in the daily lives of students. Based on the synthesis of data from various studies ((Qarnain, 2025)., 2023; (Rakhmawan et al., 2023)(Mustari et al., 2025)There are five main character dimensions that are the output of the implementation hidden curriculum in Islamic boarding schools, as explained in Table 7.

Table 7. Implications of the Hidden Curriculum on the Character Dimension of Students

Character Dimensions	Character Output Indicator	Main Reference Sources
Religiosity	Regularity of worship, sincerity of intention, and spontaneous spiritual obedience.	Fitria (2024); Khafidhoh (2024); Mustari et al. (2024); Al-Paraby et al. (2023)
Independence	Self-efficacy, personal logistics management, and social responsibility.	Wahyuwani (2023); Arpinal (2023); Rakhmawan et al. (2023); Putri (2023)
Discipline	Time management, rule compliance, and behavioral consistency.	Rohmad (2021); Wulandari (2024)*; Lestari & Sukanti (2021); Inayah et al. (2025)
Manners & Ethics	Politeness of language, respect for teachers, and social etiquette.	Amin (2021); Saputra (2024); Fitria & Khalimah (2024); Husna & Hamid (2025)
Soft Skills	Leadership, teamwork, and digital adaptability.	Inayah (2025); Kamala (2026); Mustari et al. (2024); Saputra et al. (2024)

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The first dimension that most dominantly emerges in the narrative of literature is deep religiosity. The hidden curriculum forms a religious character not just as theoretical knowledge, but as emphasized by (Fitria & Khalimah, 2024)as a spontaneous inner consciousness. Students who are used to living in an atmosphere of dhikr and collective prayer, according to the findings (Khafidhoh & Aminuddin, 2022)and (Mustari et al., 2025), tend to have high moral integrity due to constant spiritual supervision. This implication can be seen from how students carry out worship not because of instructional coercion, but because according to (Rakhmawan et al., 2023)and strengthened by research (Mustari et al., 2025)It has become a spiritual need formed through an environment that conditions them to stay connected to divine values for a full 24 hours.

The next very crucial implication is the formation of independence (self-reliance) which is incredibly strong. In Islamic boarding schools, according to the analysis (Musahwi & Wahyuni, 2024) The hidden curriculum forces students to step out of their comfort zone at home to face independent social realities. This character is formed from real experience in managing conflicts in the dormitory, where according to (Qarnain, 2025) as well as findings (T. N. Putri, 2023) the ability to manage limited finances to take care of oneself is part of the survival skill. Literature from (Education et al., 2026) and models parenting Reviewed by (Rakhmawan et al., 2023) emphasized that the independence of students is not only a matter of domestic work, but rather the formation of a mentality of steel and life skills who do not easily give up under the pressure of a homogeneous social environment.

In addition to independence, discipline and time management are characters that are automatically attached to students. A very busy pesantren schedule, as photographed by (ROHMAD, 2021) and supported by (R. F. Inayah & Fuadi, 2025)), is a form of hidden curriculum that systematically disciplines students. The implication, according to (Maulana & Fuad, 2024) Students are trained to appreciate every second of time through a consistent routine from before dawn to late at night. This discipline, according to the view (Rakhmawan et al., 2023) as well as findings (Pendidikan et al., 2026), is not rigid militaristic, but discipline on the basis of an awareness of responsibility. Literature from (E. Putri, 2023) It shows that students who graduate have better time adaptation when entering the world of work because they are used to an orderly rhythm of life.

The dimension of character of manners and ethics is also the main selling point of the implementation hidden curriculum. In the tradition of pesantren, as explained by (Yakin & Amin, 2021) and Husna and (Husna & Hamid, 2025), manners are positioned above knowledge so that it becomes an ingrained behavior. This implication can be seen from the way the students position themselves, where according to (Saputra et al., 2024), respect for teachers through tradition Ta'dzim internalized as a genuine value of humility. The formation of this ethics, according to (Fitria & Khalimah, 2024) Through the study of the Scriptures Ta'lim Muta'allim, very imprinted on the students so that their character can be recognized by the public from the way they speak polite words. This, as reiterated by (Saputra et al., 2024), is a tangible result of an unwritten curriculum that is applied consistently in teacher-student interactions.

Finally, the implications of hidden curriculum in the modern era are beginning to touch on the development aspect soft skills and digital integrity. Along with the entry of technology, according to (R. F. Inayah & Fuadi, 2025), students began to learn about organizational leadership through the management of dormitories in the midst of the flow of digital information. Integrity character was tested when students were given the trust to access gadgets, where according to the findings (Kamala & Aimah, 2026) and the strategic management model of (Mustari et al., 2025), they must still maintain the boundaries of religious norms independently. The latest literature highlights that the current hidden curriculum is able to produce students who have the collaboration, communication, and digital intelligence skills needed in the 21st

century without uprooting the roots of their original pesantren values (R. F. Inayah & Fuadi, 2025); (Kamala & Aimah, 2026); (Mustari et al., 2025)

Challenges and Supporting Factors for the Implementation of the Hidden Curriculum (RQ4)

The implementation of the hidden curriculum in Islamic boarding schools does not operate in a vacuum, but rather is in a vortex of complex internal and external dynamics. According to the findings (Yakin & Amin, 2021) and (ROHMAD, 2021) The success of internalizing these non-formal values is highly dependent on how the institution is able to optimize the supporting variables while mitigating obstacles. The mapping of these factors is presented in detail in Table 8.

Table 8. Mapping of Hidden Curriculum Supporting Factors and Challenges

Category	Variable Factor	Impact on the Character of Students	Reference Source
Supporting Factors	Kiai's Charismatic Leadership	Strengthening integrity and behavioral modeling.	Amin (2021); Rohmad (2021)
	24-Hour Dormitory Ecosystem	Internalizing values through intensive habituation.	Arpinal (2023); Putri (2023)
	Ta'dzim Culture (Adab)	The formation of ethics and spiritual humility.	Saputra (2024); Fitria (2024)
Internal Challenges	Managerial Gaps	Inconsistency in rule enforcement among caregivers.	Khafidhoh (2024); Wahyudi (2023)
	Curriculum "By Accident"	Values that emerge without a clear planned design.	Rakhmawan (2023); Saputra (2024)*
External Challenges	Digital Disruption & Social Media	Risk of value shifts due to hedonistic culture.	Kamala (2026); Inayah (2025)
	Guardians' Expectations	Clash between traditional ascetic values and modern facilities.	Trimala (2025); Husna (2025)

The main supporting factors that are the pillars of the strength of the Islamic boarding school, as explained by (Yakin & Amin, 2021) is the authority and charismatic leadership of a Kiai. In the sociological structure of Islamic boarding schools, according to (ROHMAD, 2021) Kiai acts as the center of spiritual gravity whose actions become the main reference for students. This creates a voluntary compliance mechanism in which students, according to observations (Naily, 2024) absorbs the value of discipline automatically through the process of imitation (modelling). Supported by a closed dormitory ecosystem, as researched by Arpinal dkk. (2023) and (T. N. Putri, 2023), the pesantren has full control to create an environment full of Islamic values without outside interference, which according to (Maulana & Fuad, 2024) allows character habituation to occur on an ongoing basis.

Nevertheless, significant internal challenges arise in terms of institutional management. According to (Khafidhoh & Aminuddin, 2022) often character values are allowed to grow naturally without a planned curriculum design (by accident). This challenge is exacerbated, as expressed by (Sholihah et al., 2024) If there is a gap in competence between senior caregivers and young ustadz in enforcing the rules. This inconsistency, according to (Rakhmawan et al., 2023) can confuse students and weaken the effectiveness of the hidden curriculum. In addition, (Fitria & Khalimah, 2024) highlighting that without

synchronization between the moral message in the classroom and field practice, the integrity of the hidden curriculum is at risk of degradation.

The toughest external challenges of today, as identified by (Kamala & Aimah, 2026) is the massive penetration of digital technology and social media into the pesantren environment. Global information flow, according to (R. F. Inayah & Fuadi, 2025) it carries the value of hedonism that has the potential to erode the character of the simplicity of the students. This digital penetration, according to the analysis (Kamala et al., 2026) creating a "new hidden space" that often escapes traditional oversight. This is in line with the findings (Trimala & Hasibuan, 2025) and (Husna & Hamid, 2025) regarding the shift in expectations of parents who want modern facilities, which sometimes clash with the philosophy of "living concerned" in pesantren to form independence.

As a solution, according to the recommendations of the (Kamala & Aimah, 2026) and (R. F. Inayah & Fuadi, 2025) Islamic boarding schools need to reorient their strategies through digital literacy that is integrated in spiritual supervision. Strengthening synergy between managers and parents, as suggested by (Trimala & Hasibuan, 2025), is an essential supporting factor so that the hidden curriculum runs in harmony. By integrating the strength of the kiai tradition, according to (Kolis, 2021) and a professional managerial system as proposed (Khafidhoh & Aminuddin, 2022) The pesantren will remain strong in shaping the character of students in the midst of globalization.

Research Gap and Strategic Solutions (RQ5)

The final stage of the Systematic Literature Review it is to identify the emptiness of the literature (Gap) and formulate strategic solutions for future research and practice development. Based on the synthesis of the 16 articles reviewed, it was found that although the study of the hidden curriculum is quite extensive, as mapped by (Sholihah et al., 2024), (Husna & Hamid, 2025), and reinforced by (Mustari et al., 2025) (Sibarani et al., 2025), And there are still some aspects that have not been explored in depth. The mapping of these gaps and solutions is presented systematically in Table 9.

Table 9. Research Gap and Future Solutions

Category: Gap	Problem Identification (Research Gap)	Academic & Practical Solutions Recommendations	Additional References
Methodology	Dominance of subjective descriptive qualitative methods.	Development of research using mixed methods and longitudinal studies.	Sholihah (2024); Wahyudi (2023)
Substance	Focus on physical traditions; lack of studies on hidden curriculum in cyberspace.	Reorientation of studies toward the "Cyber Hidden Curriculum" and digital literacy.	Kamala (2026); Inayah (2025); Al-Paraby (2023)
Managerial	Lack of standardization in character effectiveness measurement instruments.	Creation of character KPIs based on digital applications and adaptive management.	Mustari (2024); Khafidhoh (2024); Saputra (2024)
Sociological	Lack of study on the impact of hidden curriculum on inclusion or minority students.	Implementation of inclusive curricula and diversification of parenting approaches.	Rakhmawan (2023); Wulandari (2024)*; Fitria (2024)

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Methodological Gap Analysis: The Need for a More Precise Approach

The first gap that is very striking is the dominance of the use of qualitative methods (93.75%) in the literature for the 2021-2026 period. Most researchers, according to observations (Sholihah et al., 2024) and (R. F. Inayah & Fuadi, 2025), trapped in describing the phenomenon without providing strong statistical data on the effectiveness of hidden curriculum on student behavior change. There is a gap in research that uses a quantitative approach or Mixed Methods, where as suggested by (Husna & Hamid, 2025) and supported by the urgency of data accuracy in (Elita et al., 2025) and (Qarnain, 2025), this approach is needed to test the correlation between dormitory environment variables and student character scores empirically. In addition, according to a review (Maulana & Fuad, 2024) and (Yakin & Amin, 2021), no longitudinal studies have been found that monitor the impact of the hidden curriculum of pesantren on alumni in the long term.

As a solution, future research should start adopting more objective measurement instruments. The use of psychometric scales to measure the level of religiosity and ethics of students, according to (Sholihah et al., 2024), (Qarnain, 2025), and (Rakhmawan et al., 2023), and (Chasanah & Nursikin, 2021) It is necessary to provide evidence-based data (evidence-based). This is so that the management of the Islamic boarding school, as emphasized by (Saputra et al., 2024) and (R. F. Inayah & Fuadi, 2025), has a scientific reference to make measurable system improvements.

Substance Gap: Towards Cyber Hidden Curriculum

The second gap is related to the substance of the study which is still focused on physical interaction in the real world. In the era of digital transformation, according to (Kamala et al., 2026) and (Mustari et al., 2025), Islamic boarding schools face challenges in the form of the emergence of "hidden spaces" in students' devices that have not been touched by conventional curriculum. Literature that discusses social media value management, as criticized by (R. F. Inayah & Fuadi, 2025) and (Warsah & Septian, 2022), is still very limited. The phenomenon of digital decay degradation, according to findings (Kamala & Aimah, 2026) and confirmed by (R. F. Inayah & Fuadi, 2025), has not been comprehensively mapped as part of today's hidden curriculum risks.

The strategic solution offered is the development of the concept Cyber Hidden Curriculum. Islamic boarding schools, according to the view (Inaya et al., 2025) and (Mustari et al., 2025), can no longer only limit the use of gadgets totally, but must design an educational digital environment. Creating a student-only online community, as proposed by (Kamala & Aimah, 2026) and strengthened by the digital literacy narrative in (R. F. Inayah & Fuadi, 2025), can be a means to instill integrity values in cyberspace.

Managerial Gaps: Standardization and Professionalism

Managerial challenges suggest that hidden curricula are still often traditional and unplanned (by accident). This gap, according to (Khafidhoh & Aminuddin, 2022) and adaptive management models of (Mustari et al., 2025),

shows the lack of managerial models that can be duplicated by other institutions by standard. Most Islamic boarding schools, as observed by (Fitria & Khalimah, 2024) and (Rakhmawan et al., 2023), has a unique but difficult way of measuring its success administratively. Standardization of caregiver competencies, according to (Saputra et al., 2024) and (E. Putri, 2023), is still a focus that is rarely discussed in the current scientific literature.

The solution to this managerial gap is the formalization of the hidden curriculum through the strategic adaptive management (Mustari et al., 2025). Islamic boarding schools, according to recommendations (Khafidhoh & Aminuddin, 2022), need to compile a parenting handbook that includes Key Performance Indicators (KPI) character of the students. With the help of technology, character development, according to (Saputra et al., 2024) and supported by the theory of inner independence (Trimala & Hasibuan, 2025), can be recorded digitally through portfolio applications for targeted interventions.

Synthesis: The Future of the Hidden Curriculum of Islamic Boarding Schools

To conclude the analysis, the current research gap is a great opportunity for future researchers. The curriculum is hidden, as deduced from the thought (Yakin & Amin, 2021) up to (Kamala & Aimah, 2026), should be viewed as a dynamic entity that requires methodological and managerial updates. Through the integration of data-driven research (Musahwi & Wahyuni, 2024); (Sholihah et al., 2024) and digital adaptation (R. F. Inayah & Fuadi, 2025) (Mustari et al., 2025), the hidden curriculum will remain a comparative advantage of pesantren in maintaining the originality of the character of students in the midst of globalization.

Conclusion

The Systematic Literature Review of studies from 2021 to 2026 confirms that the hidden curriculum in Islamic boarding schools serves as a vital and dynamic instrument for character education, peaking in scholarly interest between 2023 and 2024. The empirical evidence suggests that non-formal values are most effectively transmitted through kiai leadership, dormitory traditions, and organizational culture, which collectively foster essential traits such as religiosity, self-reliance, and discipline. These unwritten elements often surpass the formal curriculum in shaping a student's moral foundation, proving that the pesantren's social ecosystem is inherently designed for holistic character development.

However, the study also highlights a critical dialectic between traditional charismatic leadership and the challenges of digital disruption. The emergence of a "counter-hidden curriculum" from social media necessitates a shift from accidental character formation to a deliberate, "by-design" managerial approach that integrates digital literacy. Future research should address existing gaps through quantitative methodologies and studies on the "Cyber Hidden Curriculum." To remain relevant in the 21st century, it is recommended that pesantren formalize these unwritten practices through standardized parenting handbooks and digital character-monitoring instruments, bridging the gap between traditional spiritual authority and modern professional management.

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