



Dynamics of Elementary School Children's Psychosocial Development in Islamic Boarding Schools: A Phenomenological Study

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ABSTRACT:

This study explores the dynamics of psychosocial development among elementary school children living in Islamic boarding schools using a phenomenological approach. Islamic boarding schools represent a distinctive educational environment that combines formal learning, religious instruction, and communal living, all of which influence children's emotional, social, and moral development. This study aims to understand how children experience, interpret, and adapt to their psychosocial development within the daily life of an Islamic boarding school. A qualitative phenomenological design was employed, with data collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and documentation involving students, teachers, and caregivers. The findings indicate that children's psychosocial development is shaped by intensive peer interactions, close emotional relationships with educators, structured daily routines, and the internalization of religious and moral values. These factors contribute to the development of emotional regulation, social responsibility, independence, and adaptability. However, the study also identifies challenges related to early emotional adjustment, such as feelings of homesickness and separation anxiety during the initial period of boarding school life. Overall, the study concludes that Islamic boarding schools provide a unique educational context that significantly supports psychosocial development when emotional guidance and child-centered care are consistently implemented. The findings offer practical insights for educators, parents, and policymakers in designing educational environments that balance academic learning, emotional well-being, and character formation in elementary education.

Keywords: Psychosocial Development; Elementary School Children; Islamic Boarding Schools; Phenomenological Study

ABSTRAK:

Penelitian ini mengkaji dinamika perkembangan psikososial anak usia sekolah dasar yang tinggal di pesantren dengan menggunakan pendekatan fenomenologis. Pesantren merupakan lingkungan pendidikan yang khas karena mengintegrasikan pembelajaran formal, pendidikan keagamaan, dan kehidupan komunal yang secara langsung memengaruhi perkembangan emosional, sosial, dan moral anak. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk memahami bagaimana anak-anak mengalami, memaknai, dan menyesuaikan perkembangan psikososial mereka dalam kehidupan sehari-hari di pesantren.

Penelitian ini menggunakan desain kualitatif fenomenologis dengan teknik pengumpulan data berupa wawancara mendalam, observasi partisipatif, dan studi dokumentasi yang melibatkan santri, guru, serta pengasuh pesantren. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa perkembangan psikososial anak dipengaruhi oleh interaksi teman sebaya yang intensif, hubungan emosional yang dekat dengan pendidik, rutinitas harian yang terstruktur, serta proses internalisasi nilai-nilai religius dan moral. Faktor-faktor tersebut mendorong berkembangnya pengendalian emosi, tanggung jawab sosial, kemandirian, dan kemampuan beradaptasi. Namun demikian, penelitian ini juga menemukan tantangan berupa penyesuaian emosional awal, seperti kerinduan terhadap keluarga dan kecemasan berpisah pada masa awal tinggal di pesantren. Secara keseluruhan, penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa pesantren menyediakan konteks pendidikan yang unik dan berkontribusi signifikan terhadap perkembangan psikososial anak apabila didukung oleh pendampingan emosional dan pendekatan pendidikan yang berpusat pada anak.

Kata Kunci: Perkembangan Psikososial; Anak Sekolah Dasar; Pesantren; Studi Fenomenologis

INTRODUCTION

The psychosocial development is a critical dimension of children's overall growth, influencing how they understand themselves, regulate emotions, interact with others, and navigate the social world. During the elementary school years, children experience significant developmental changes that shape empathy, cooperation, responsibility, and social awareness. These formative processes lay the foundation for children's emotional well-being and social competence in later stages of life.

From a developmental perspective, Erik Erikson's psychosocial theory identifies elementary school age as the stage of industry versus inferiority, during which children strive to demonstrate competence, gain recognition, and feel capable in academic and social contexts (Maree, 2022). Success in this stage fosters confidence and productivity, while failure may lead to feelings of inadequacy and low self-esteem (Lovett, 1986). Educational environments therefore play a decisive role in supporting or constraining children's psychosocial development during this period (Eccles, 1999).

Schools function not only as institutions for academic learning but also as primary social environments where children develop responsibility, self-regulation, and social values (Nofriansyah et al., 2018; Nofriansyah et al., 2022; Riyadi et al., 2025; Nofriansyah et al., 2024; Meirani et al., 2026; Nofriansyah et al., 2025; Rahayu et al., 2025). This perspective is reinforced by studies emphasizing the integration of value-based literacy within school curricula as a foundation for holistic student development and the formation of responsibility and self-awareness from an early age (Wibowo, 2025). Peer interactions, relationships with teachers, and exposure to institutional norms shape children's self-concept and social integration (Roriye et al., 2023; Supriatna et al., 2025; Nofriansyah et al., 2024; Nofriansyah et al., 2025). Consequently, understanding psychosocial development within specific educational settings is essential for creating environments that promote emotional and social well-being.

In Indonesia, Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) represent a distinctive educational context that combines formal academic instruction with religious education and structured communal living (Hosaini et al., 2024). These institutions emphasize Islamic values, discipline, and moral formation while providing students with a highly regulated daily routine (Islamic et al., 2024). For elementary

school children, such an immersive environment offers developmental experiences that differ substantially from those found in secular public or private schools.

The pesantren environment encourages strong peer relationships, spiritual awareness, and close mentorship from teachers (ustadz) and religious leaders (kyai) (Rahmatullah et al., 2025). Children typically reside in dormitories and participate in collective routines, shared responsibilities, and continuous moral guidance (Such & Walker, 2004). These conditions can foster early independence, a sense of belonging, and the internalization of religious and cultural values (Maton & Wells, 1995).

From the perspective of social learning theory, children acquire behaviors, attitudes, and emotional responses through observation, imitation, and modeling (MacBlain, 2021). In pesantren settings, children are consistently exposed to role models such as teachers, senior students, and religious leaders, whose behaviors and values are likely to be internalized (Fajri & Munir, 2022). This process significantly influences moral reasoning, self-regulation, and interpersonal skills (Schütz & Koglin, 2023).

Bandura's concept of reciprocal determinism further explains that children's behavior, personal characteristics, and environment interact dynamically to shape psychosocial development (Woodcock & Tournaki, 2023). The pesantren environment with its structured discipline, collective worship, and communal norms provides a rich social context in which these interactions can be observed and understood.

In addition to social learning, moral development is a central aspect of psychosocial growth during elementary school years. Kohlberg's theory of moral development suggests that children at this age typically function at the pre-conventional or early conventional levels, where moral reasoning is shaped by obedience, punishment, and social approval (Puka, 1994; Utami, 2024). The pesantren environment, with its emphasis on ethical conduct and religious instruction, offers a context that may accelerate moral internalization (Guna et al., 2024).

Daily exposure to Islamic teachings, Qur'anic instruction, and religious practices such as prayer and fasting contributes to children's understanding of moral values beyond simple rule compliance (Koenig & Shohaib, 2014). Moral development in this context is shaped not only through cognitive processes but also through religious internalization and lived experience.

Despite the potential developmental benefits of pesantren education, the intensity of communal living may also present psychosocial challenges. Elementary school children may experience homesickness, limited privacy, emotional stress, and difficulties adapting to strict routines and rules. These challenges can influence emotional adjustment and social well-being if not adequately addressed by caregivers and educators. Empirical research on Islamic boarding schools has largely focused on adolescents or secondary-level students, particularly in relation to discipline, academic outcomes, and character education. As a result, limited attention has been given to the psychosocial experiences of younger children in pesantren environments, especially during the early formative years of elementary education (Zhong et al., 2024).

To address this limitation, a phenomenological approach offers a valuable methodological lens. Phenomenology emphasizes lived experience and allows researchers to explore how children perceive their environment, interpret social relationships, and make meaning of their emotional and spiritual development (Hogan & Greene, 2004; Magolda, 2009). This approach ensures that children's voices and perspectives are central to the analysis.

Examining psychosocial development in pesantren contexts also contributes to broader educational discourse by highlighting alternative models of character education and social learning that integrate spirituality, discipline, and communal life (Hasanah, 2025). Such insights are increasingly relevant as educational systems seek culturally responsive and holistic approaches to child development. As Indonesia continues to balance modernization and religious tradition, Islamic boarding schools remain influential in shaping future generations (Baihaqi, 2025). It is therefore important to assess how these institutions align traditional educational practices with contemporary theories of child development while retaining their religious identity.

Based on these considerations, this study aims to explore the psychosocial development of elementary school children in Islamic boarding schools through a phenomenological perspective. By examining children's lived experiences, emotional adjustment, social relationships, and moral development, this research seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of how pesantren environments shape psychosocial dynamics and to offer practical insights for improving educational and emotional support in faith-based schools.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative research design with a phenomenological approach aimed at exploring and understanding the lived experiences of elementary school children in Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) in relation to their psychosocial development. A qualitative method is appropriate because this research seeks to uncover deep meanings, emotional processes, and subjective interpretations that cannot be captured through statistical or numerical data (Fossey et al., 2002). Psychosocial experiences, particularly within religious and communal environments, require in-depth contextual understanding grounded in human experience. The phenomenological approach is selected because it focuses on describing and interpreting the essence of participants' lived experiences (Alase, 2017). Phenomenology emphasizes how individuals perceive and construct meaning from their realities (Calhoun et al., 2012). In this study, the approach facilitates an exploration of how children experience social interactions, emotional development, moral understanding, and identity formation within the pesantren setting. Throughout the research process, the researcher seeks to bracket personal assumptions and enter the participants' experiential world to capture their genuine feelings and perspectives regarding life in the boarding school.

The participants in this study consist of elementary school-aged children, generally between 7 and 12 years old, who have lived and studied in a pesantren for at least six months. This inclusion criterion ensures that participants have sufficient exposure to the pesantren environment to reflect meaningfully on their experiences. The number of participants ranges from five to ten, following the principle of data saturation, whereby data collection continues until no new themes or insights emerge. Participants are selected using purposive sampling to ensure that those involved possess rich and relevant experiences related to the research focus. Data collection is primarily conducted through in-depth, semi-structured interviews designed to encourage children to express their feelings, thoughts, and reflections freely. Interview questions are framed using age-appropriate language to ensure clarity and comfort. The interviews explore themes such as peer relationships, homesickness, religious activities, discipline, and personal growth. To enhance the credibility of the findings, data triangulation is applied through additional techniques, including participant observation and document analysis, such as teacher notes and pesantren activity logs.

In phenomenological research, the primary research instrument is the researcher, who must function as a sensitive and neutral facilitator throughout the study (Yüksel & Yıldırım, 2015). The researcher is required to listen empathetically, establish trust with child participants, and guide conversations without imposing personal assumptions or interpretations. Supporting tools such as interview guides, audio recorders, and field notes are utilized to assist the data collection process. Ethical sensitivity is essential when conducting research involving children, with particular attention given to participants' safety, autonomy, and emotional well-being. Data analysis follows established phenomenological procedures, such as those proposed by Colaizzi or Moustakas, beginning with the process of bracketing or epoché to minimize researcher bias. The analysis involves repeated readings of interview transcripts, identification of significant statements, formulation of meanings, and clustering of themes (Malterud, 2012). Emergent themes may include social bonding, religious identity, emotional adjustment, and self-discipline. A comprehensive narrative description is then developed to capture the essence of children's psychosocial development experiences within the pesantren context. Member checking may be conducted by involving participants in validating the interpretations.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the study, four criteria are applied: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Haq et al., 2023). Credibility is strengthened through prolonged engagement in the research setting, triangulation of data sources and methods, and participant validation. Transferability is supported by providing rich and detailed contextual descriptions, enabling readers to assess the applicability of the findings to other settings. Dependability is addressed through the maintenance of an audit trail documenting the research process, while confirmability is ensured by grounding interpretations firmly in participants' narratives. Ethical considerations are rigorously observed throughout the study. Informed consent is obtained from parents or guardians, and children are provided with age-appropriate explanations of the research and asked for their voluntary assent. Participants' anonymity and confidentiality are strictly maintained, and children are informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time. The researcher ensures a safe, respectful, and supportive environment during data collection, thereby safeguarding the dignity and autonomy of all participants.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In phenomenological research, findings are not presented in the form of numerical data or statistical measurements but are instead articulated through themes that emerge from participants' narratives and lived experiences. This study reveals the essence of the psychosocial experiences of elementary school children who live and study in Islamic boarding schools (pesantren), encompassing their social, emotional, moral, and spiritual dimensions (Fadhilah, 2022). The results are derived from an in-depth data analysis process that identifies key themes reflecting how children experience and interpret daily life within the pesantren environment.

The analysis indicates that children's psychosocial development in pesantren settings is shaped by continuous social interaction, structured routines, religious practices, and close relationships with peers and educators. These elements collectively form a distinctive developmental context that influences children's emotional adjustment, social relationships, moral internalization, and identity formation. The findings are organized into four main themes that represent the core aspects of the children's lived experiences.

Emotional Adaptation in the Pesantren Environment

Emotional adaptation in the pesantren environment is a crucial aspect of psychosocial development, particularly for elementary school-aged children who are transitioning from a family-centered environment to a more communal and disciplined setting (Sa'diah et al., 2025). Children in pesantren often face initial emotional challenges, including homesickness and loneliness, which can be distressing during the early stages of adaptation (Febriantje & Amelasantje, 2025). These emotional responses are common among children who are separated from their primary caregivers for extended periods (Xu, 2006). The emotional strain of missing parents may lead to feelings of vulnerability, insecurity, and emotional distress, especially during the early stages of living in the pesantren (Agllias, 2018).

Homesickness is one of the most frequent emotional reactions experienced by children in pesantren settings (Sulastri et al., 2020). Being away from the comfort of their family, many children initially struggle with feelings of longing for their parents, family home, and familiar surroundings. This experience is particularly pronounced among children who enter pesantren at a younger age. Emotional distress related to homesickness can affect children's overall well-being, including their ability to concentrate on academic tasks and engage in social relationships. However, over time, many children develop coping strategies to manage these emotions, supported by the routine and structure of pesantren life.

Alongside homesickness, children may also experience feelings of isolation or loneliness. This emotional challenge arises from the absence of immediate family members and the need to establish new social relationships with peers and mentors within the pesantren. Loneliness may manifest as feelings of exclusion, particularly for children who are still unfamiliar with the social dynamics of the boarding school environment. As children begin to form friendships, their emotional experiences gradually shift, and peer relationships become an important source of emotional support (von Salisch, 2001). Camaraderie with peers provides emotional security and helps children cope with separation from their families.

Despite these emotional challenges, many children gradually develop a sense of independence and self-reliance as they adapt to life in the pesantren. The structured daily environment—including early rising, participation in prayers, and responsibility for personal routines—supports the development of essential life skills such as self-discipline, time management, and self-regulation. As children learn to navigate daily activities without direct parental supervision, they experience increasing autonomy and confidence. This transition marks a significant phase of emotional adaptation, during which children learn to rely on their own abilities in managing the demands of pesantren life.

The emotional adaptation process also involves the development of resilience. Children in pesantren encounter various challenges, ranging from academic demands to strict routines and institutional regulations (Rahmatullah et al., 2025). Over time, these challenges contribute to the strengthening of emotional resilience. Children learn to regulate their emotional responses to difficulties, including frustration caused by homesickness or stress related to academic expectations. With consistent exposure to challenges and support from peers and mentors, children gradually build coping skills that enhance emotional strength and stability.

Spiritual development within the pesantren environment further supports emotional adaptation. Regular engagement in religious practices such as prayer, fasting, and Qur'anic study provides children with a sense of comfort, meaning, and belonging (Abo-Zena & Hassan, 2024). Many children find emotional reassurance through their faith, which serves as a source of inner peace and psychological support. This spiritual connection helps children manage feelings of loneliness and homesickness, while also strengthening emotional resilience and promoting a sense of purpose in daily life.

In conclusion, although emotional adaptation in the pesantren environment can be challenging during the initial stages, it ultimately contributes to positive emotional development. Children experience a range of emotions—from homesickness and loneliness to growing independence and resilience. The structured and communal nature of pesantren life plays a vital role in facilitating these emotional changes. With consistent support from peers, mentors, and spiritual practices, children develop into more emotionally resilient and self-reliant individuals. The pesantren environment thus offers a unique and meaningful context for emotional growth, laying an important foundation for long-term psychosocial well-being.

Social Relations in an Islamic Boarding School (Pesantren)

Social relations in an Islamic boarding school (pesantren) constitute a fundamental aspect of children's psychosocial development (Sabiq, 2025). The pesantren environment is uniquely structured to foster both peer-to-peer relationships and mentor-mentee relationships between children and their teachers (ustadz). In the absence of their biological parents, children form close connections with peers and ustadz, who play significant roles in supporting their emotional and social growth. These relationships are central to children's daily lives and are crucial in shaping their sense of belonging, emotional well-being, and moral development.

Peer relationships in pesantren are particularly important because they provide opportunities for children to form friendships, engage in cooperative activities, and develop essential social skills. Living together in dormitories allows children to spend substantial time with their peers, leading to the formation of strong interpersonal bonds (Emond, 2014). These peer relationships become an important source of emotional support, helping children cope with challenges such as homesickness, loneliness, and feelings of insecurity. Shared routines and experiences—such as study sessions, prayers, and recreational activities—create common ground that strengthens social connections among children.

Living in a communal setting also requires children to learn how to share space, cooperate, and resolve conflicts constructively (Graves, 1992). This environment encourages collaborative problem-solving and mutual support, which are essential components of emotional and social development. Peer interactions in pesantren are generally structured, enabling children to navigate group dynamics, manage social expectations, and participate in collective activities. Over time, these interactions contribute significantly to children's sense of belonging and the formation of their social identity.

Alongside peer relationships, teachers (ustadz) play an equally important role in children's social and emotional development within the pesantren. Ustadz serve not only as figures of authority and instruction but also as sources of guidance and care, particularly for children who are living away

from home for the first time (Muzekki et al., 2024). Beyond their instructional roles, ustadz often function as substitute parental figures who provide emotional support, structure, and stability.

In the absence of biological parents, children frequently develop emotional attachments to their ustadz, seeking guidance, reassurance, and emotional security (Nasrin et al., 2025). These teachers provide a nurturing presence that is essential for children's adaptation to the structured and disciplined environment of the pesantren. Children look to their ustadz not only for academic or religious instruction but also for emotional reassurance, viewing them as reliable figures of care and protection.

The relationship between children and their ustadz is also characterized by mentorship (Supriadi et al., 2023). Ustadz do not merely transmit academic knowledge or religious teachings; they serve as role models for appropriate behavior, discipline, and ethical conduct. Through both formal instruction and informal interactions, ustadz guide children in navigating personal challenges and developing moral character. They help children understand their responsibilities within the pesantren and the broader community, instilling values such as self-discipline, respect, and integrity.

Emotional attachment to ustadz plays a crucial role in fostering resilience and self-esteem among children. The guidance and support provided by teachers help children cope with personal struggles, homesickness, and the challenges associated with adapting to pesantren life. As these attachments strengthen, children begin to internalize the positive values and behaviors modeled by their ustadz, contributing to their emotional and psychological development. Feeling emotionally secure allows children to engage more confidently with their environment.

The relationship between children and ustadz also emphasizes spiritual guidance. Religious teachings are deeply embedded in the daily life of the pesantren, and ustadz play a central role in instilling Islamic values through both instruction and example. These teachings are integrated into everyday social interactions, creating a moral framework that guides children's behavior. Through this process, children learn not only religious doctrines but also the practical application of values such as kindness, patience, empathy, and humility in daily life.

Furthermore, the interactions between peers and ustadz contribute to the development of social cohesion within the pesantren community. Children learn about collective responsibility, mutual respect, and cooperation as essential elements of communal living. These social lessons foster a supportive and nurturing environment that promotes emotional stability and well-being. The combined influence of peer relationships and mentorship from ustadz creates a social structure that supports children's emotional, social, and spiritual growth.

In conclusion, social relationships among peers and with ustadz play a critical role in children's emotional and social adaptation within pesantren environments. These relationships help children navigate the challenges of living away from their families while providing a strong foundation for emotional security, resilience, and moral development. Through meaningful peer interactions and supportive mentorship, children develop the social competence and emotional strength necessary for their overall psychosocial growth, ultimately shaping them into well-rounded and resilient individuals.

The Internalization of Religious and Moral Values

The internalization of religious and moral values constitutes one of the central aspects of child development in pesantren (Islamic boarding schools) (Yanto et al., 2025). Within this environment, children are exposed to a structured lifestyle that emphasizes religious practices, discipline, and ethical values rooted in Islamic teachings. The pesantren provides a distinctive context in which these values are not only taught but deeply embedded in students' daily lives, thereby shaping their character and moral development (Sarwadi & Raihan, 2025). This process extends beyond cognitive understanding of religious teachings and involves the integration of these values into children's behavior, actions, and decision-making processes.

At the core of pesantren life are religious practices such as daily prayers, fasting during Ramadan, Qur'anic recitation, and participation in religious discussions. These practices are systematically incorporated into children's daily schedules and are carried out consistently, creating an environment in which religious commitment becomes an integral part of everyday life. Through repeated engagement in these activities, children internalize spiritual discipline that shapes their relationship with God and strengthens their sense of moral responsibility. Over time, these religious rituals become embedded in children's identity and worldview, fostering a deep and enduring connection with their faith.

Discipline represents another essential component of moral development within the pesantren environment. The structured and often rigorous daily schedule—which includes early rising, regular worship, study sessions, and adherence to institutional rules—plays a significant role in cultivating self-control and responsibility. Through this disciplined routine, children learn the importance of time management, consistency, and accountability. Discipline in pesantren is not solely oriented toward obedience but is intended to foster an internal sense of responsibility and awareness of the moral consequences of one's actions in both spiritual and social contexts.

The ethical values promoted in pesantren are deeply grounded in Islamic teachings and emphasize virtues such as honesty, respect, humility, kindness, patience, and integrity. These values are conveyed not only through formal instruction but also through the daily behavior of teachers (ustadz) and senior members of the pesantren community, who serve as moral exemplars (Mujahid, 2021). By observing and interacting with their teachers, children learn how ethical principles are applied in everyday situations, which supports the internalization of moral values through modeling and imitation.

Peer interactions further reinforce the internalization of religious and moral values. Living in close proximity with peers provides children with continuous opportunities for social learning. Through daily interactions, children practice the values they learn from teachers in real-life contexts, such as showing kindness, cooperation, and respect toward others. Conflicts that arise among peers also become meaningful learning moments, allowing children to apply Islamic principles of conflict resolution, forgiveness, and reconciliation in their social relationships.

In addition to formal instruction, storytelling and religious discourse play a significant role in transmitting moral values. Ustadz frequently share stories from the Qur'an, the Hadith, and the lives of Islamic scholars and saints, which contain rich moral lessons and ethical guidance. Through repeated exposure to these narratives, children internalize moral principles and learn to apply them in their daily lives. Storytelling also strengthens children's connection to Islamic history and tradition, further reinforcing their religious identity.

Communal living constitutes another key element in the internalization of moral values. Daily activities such as sharing meals, studying together, praying collectively, and participating in communal responsibilities promote solidarity and a sense of collective accountability. Children learn that their actions affect the broader community and that moral conduct is not only an individual obligation but also a shared responsibility. This communal ethos strengthens the moral fabric of pesantren life and encourages children to prioritize cooperation and social harmony.

Practices of reflection also play an important role in children's moral development. Moments of prayer, contemplation, and quiet reflection encourage children to evaluate their actions and their relationship with God (Hafidh 'Aziz & Hidayah, 2024). Through regular self-reflection, children develop a sense of self-accountability and moral awareness, which guides their ethical decision-making. This reflective process supports the development of conscience and fosters a continuous commitment to moral and spiritual growth. As children mature within the pesantren environment, they gradually integrate religious knowledge with moral behavior. The values internalized through daily practice and social interaction influence their personal choices, relationships, and conduct. Children come to understand morality not merely as compliance with external rules or avoidance of punishment, but as an intrinsic component of their spiritual and social identity.

In conclusion, the internalization of religious and moral values in the pesantren environment is a multifaceted process that profoundly shapes children's character and behavior. Through consistent religious practices, disciplined routines, ethical role modeling by teachers, peer interactions, and reflective activities, children develop a strong moral foundation. This process supports not only spiritual growth but also social competence and psychosocial development. The values internalized during childhood continue to guide children's behavior and decision-making as they grow, contributing to their development as responsible, ethical, and spiritually grounded individuals.

The Development of Identity and Independence

The development of identity and independence represents a critical aspect of psychosocial growth during childhood, and the pesantren environment provides a unique context for fostering both (Azzam & Leany, 2024). Living away from home at a relatively young age requires children to navigate daily life with reduced direct parental involvement. Through this process, children begin to construct their self-concept, assume new responsibilities, and develop confidence in their ability to function independently within a structured community. The disciplined and communal nature of the pesantren offers multiple opportunities for children to explore their capabilities and develop a clearer sense of personal identity.

One of the earliest indicators of increasing independence in the pesantren is children's ability to manage basic daily tasks without immediate parental support. Children learn to wake up independently, attend prayers punctually, maintain personal hygiene, organize study materials, and follow daily schedules on their own. Although these activities may appear routine, they form the foundation of self-reliance. As children become more competent in managing their daily responsibilities, they experience greater autonomy, which contributes to enhanced self-esteem and self-efficacy.

The pesantren environment also cultivates a strong sense of personal responsibility. Children are frequently assigned specific roles or tasks within the dormitory or school community, such as

participating in cleaning duties, organizing group activities, or leading prayers (Nasruddin, 2025). These responsibilities, while modest, foster a sense of ownership and accountability. Successfully fulfilling such duties enhances organizational skills and reinforces children's perception that they are meaningful contributors to the community, thereby strengthening both independence and social maturity.

Over time, children in pesantren settings develop increased self-confidence as they experience success across various domains, including academic achievement, memorization of Qur'anic verses, leadership in group activities, and conflict resolution among peers (Sari et al., 2025). Encouragement and recognition from ustadz and peers play an essential role in reinforcing these accomplishments. Repeated success in tasks that initially seemed challenging fosters a belief in personal competence and perseverance, which is central to the formation of a positive and stable identity.

Living in a pesantren also exposes children to diverse peer interactions that support the development of interpersonal skills and self-awareness. Through social engagement, children gain insight into their own strengths, preferences, emotions, and limitations. These experiences help children define who they are in relation to others, which is a crucial component of identity formation. Navigating social dynamics and resolving interpersonal conflicts further enhance emotional regulation and empathy, contributing to a more integrated sense of self.

The role of ustadz in shaping children's identity is particularly significant. As mentors and spiritual guides, ustadz provide consistent moral, emotional, and behavioral guidance (Khumairah et al., 2023). They assist children in interpreting their experiences, reflecting on their actions, and understanding their roles within the broader religious and social community. Through this mentorship, children begin to perceive themselves as members of a faith-based community that upholds shared values and collective responsibility. Consequently, identity development occurs not only at an individual level but also within a religious and communal framework.

Religious teachings and practices further contribute to the formation of children's identity and independence. Through regular engagement in Islamic rituals, values, and sacred texts, children come to understand themselves as Muslims not merely by designation but through lived practice and reflection (McCreery et al., 2007). This spiritual grounding provides a source of inner strength and moral clarity, supporting children's ability to make decisions guided by internalized principles rather than external pressure.

An additional dimension of identity development involves the internalization of discipline and self-regulation. The structured lifestyle of the pesantren helps children recognize the importance of consistency, perseverance, and impulse control. Over time, these habits become internalized and shape children's character. The capacity to regulate behavior independently, without constant supervision, reflects a higher level of psychological maturity and autonomy.

The transition from dependence to self-reliance occurs gradually and is marked by subtle yet meaningful milestones. For instance, children who initially relied heavily on others for emotional reassurance may begin to manage feelings of homesickness independently. Similarly, students who once required frequent reminders to complete tasks may start setting personal goals and monitoring their own progress (Dobronyi et al., 2019). These developments serve as important indicators of identity consolidation and increasing independence.

From a theoretical perspective, Erik Erikson's psychosocial theory—particularly the stage of industry versus inferiority—offers valuable insight into children's experiences in the pesantren. Children who successfully adapt emotionally and behaviorally demonstrate a growing sense of competence and accomplishment. The structured pesantren environment, which emphasizes discipline, responsibility, and achievement, supports the development of industry by enabling children to experience success and recognition (Utama, 2025). Although some children initially experience feelings of pressure or inferiority due to strict rules and demanding routines, consistent support from peers and ustadz helps many overcome these challenges. As children learn to manage responsibilities and cope with difficulties, they gradually develop resilience and confidence. These experiences align with Erikson's assertion that positive social interaction and recognition are essential for healthy identity formation.

Bandura's social learning theory is also reflected in the pesantren's social dynamics. Children learn not only through direct instruction but also through observation and imitation of ustadz, senior students, and peers. Moral conduct, religious practices, and interpersonal behaviors modeled by these figures provide concrete examples for children to emulate. Through observational learning and vicarious reinforcement, children internalize social norms, ethical values, and self-regulatory behaviors (I'ana et al., 2024; Wicaksono et al., 2024).

Kohlberg's theory of moral development further explains children's evolving moral reasoning within the pesantren. Initially, many children operate at a pre-conventional level, guided by obedience and avoidance of punishment. However, the immersive religious environment encourages progression toward conventional and post-conventional reasoning, where moral decisions are guided by internalized ethical principles (Alhamuddin et al., 2025). These values are reinforced not only through religious instruction but also through daily practice. As children reflect on their actions and are encouraged to understand the deeper meaning behind Islamic teachings, their moral development becomes more autonomous and grounded in a personal commitment to spiritual ideals. Research at Pondok Pesantren Modern Muhammadiyah Boarding School Yogyakarta focused on character education and the internalization of values such as honesty, responsibility, and tolerance. The study found that students progressed from understanding morality based on obedience and punishment to embracing ethical principles as personal commitments. This transition mirrors Kohlberg's stages of moral development, where individuals move from conventional to post-conventional levels of moral reasoning.

Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory further illuminates how the pesantren environment shapes child development through the interaction of various social systems. As a microsystem, the pesantren is the immediate context where children live, learn, and form relationships. This system has a direct and profound impact on their emotional, social, and moral development. The consistent structure, supportive mentorship, and shared religious values foster a sense of belonging and security.

At the same time, the macrosystem—comprising the broader cultural and religious values of Islam—intersects with the daily experiences of children in pesantren. The Islamic worldview, which emphasizes submission to God, compassion, and communal responsibility, permeates every aspect of life in the pesantren. This alignment between microsystem and macrosystem creates a coherent and supportive developmental context, allowing children to integrate personal, social, and spiritual identities in a harmonious way. A study at Pondok Pesantren Tahfidz Anak Yanbu'ul Qur'an in

Kebumen examined the cognitive and psychosocial development of young students memorizing the Qur'an (Zahroh, 2022). The alignment between these systems creates a coherent and supportive context for identity formation and independence.

In conclusion, the pesantren serves as a formative environment for the development of identity and independence among children. Through daily routines, social responsibilities, religious practices, and mentoring relationships, children develop self-awareness, confidence, and autonomy. These experiences shape not only their personal identities but also their roles within the religious and social fabric of the pesantren community. Ultimately, children emerge as more self-reliant, resilient, and morally grounded individuals, equipped with psychosocial competencies that will support them throughout their lives.

CONCLUSION

Based on the comprehensive analysis and integration of theoretical frameworks and empirical findings, this study demonstrates that the pesantren environment plays a significant role in supporting the holistic psychosocial development of elementary school children. The distinctive structure of pesantren life facilitates emotional adaptation, the formation of strong social relationships, the internalization of moral and religious values, and the development of personal identity and independence. These developmental processes align closely with Erikson's psychosocial theory, Bandura's social learning theory, Kohlberg's moral development theory, and Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, confirming that pesantren function not only as religious and educational institutions but also as nurturing environments for character and personality development.

Furthermore, the findings indicate that children in pesantren settings develop resilience in coping with emotional challenges, acquire positive behavioral patterns through role modeling, and progress in moral reasoning through consistent exposure to ethical and spiritual guidance. The interaction between the pesantren's immediate social environment and the broader cultural-religious context also supports the formation of a strong Islamic identity and a sense of belonging. These results highlight the value of pesantren as dynamic and responsive educational ecosystems that shape children's development in culturally and spiritually meaningful ways. Therefore, future educational strategies and policies should continue to recognize and strengthen the developmental potential of pesantren to ensure that such environments remain supportive, inclusive, and growth-oriented for all students.

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