

Internalizing Humanistic Values through Arabic Language Learning to Develop Students' Social Character in an Islamic Boarding School

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ABSTRACT

Character formation in Islamic boarding schools requires educational practices that address students' academic, emotional, and social needs. This study investigated the internalization of humanistic values through Arabic language learning and its implications for students' social character at MTs Wali Songo Putri Ngabar, Ponorogo. A qualitative single-case study was conducted using classroom observations, semi-structured interviews with 20 informants, and document analysis. Data were analyzed through condensation, thematic display, conclusion drawing, and verification, with trustworthiness ensured through triangulation. The findings revealed that humanistic values were internalized through physical comfort, psychological safety, social belonging, recognition, and self-actualization. Teachers facilitated this process by adapting instructional strategies, encouraging participation, providing constructive feedback, promoting collaboration, and appreciating students' efforts. These practices fostered independence, responsibility, honesty, discipline, cooperation, empathy, and self-confidence. Although supported by the pesantren environment, teachers, peers, and extracurricular activities, the process was challenged by adaptation difficulties, diverse backgrounds, unequal prior competence, negative peer influence, and limited facilities.

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INTRODUCTION

Character education has again become a major concern as students confront globalization, rapid technological development, and changing patterns of social relationships. Academic competence alone is insufficient to prepare adolescents to live cooperatively, respect differences, act responsibly, and maintain integrity. Within Islamic education, pesantren occupy a strategic position because learning takes place in an ecosystem that integrates classrooms, dormitories, habituation, role modeling, and

communal life. This holistic educational pattern provides substantial opportunities to cultivate character without separating it from everyday learning processes (Yusutria, Charles, Yuliana, & Yuherman, 2024)

Islamic junior secondary education is a crucial stage because students are entering adolescence and beginning to develop their identities, independence, and interpersonal skills. In pesantren-based madrasahs, Arabic language learning is not limited to vocabulary and grammatical structures. Arabic also serves as the language of Islamic sources, a medium of communication, and an integral part of the educational culture. Qur'anic verses, hadith, narratives, moral aphorisms (*mahfūzāt*), and communicative practice provide opportunities to develop empathy, responsibility, honesty, cooperation, and social concern (Humaedah, 2021; Laming et al., 2025).

Previous studies indicate that values can be integrated into Arabic language learning through instructional content, pedagogical interaction, habituation, and teacher modeling. Alwi et al. (2024) found that Arabic language teachers play an important role in cultivating character values through systematically planned instruction. Ahmadi and Saad (2024) emphasized that integrating tradition, *adab*, and instructional innovation can strengthen learning experiences in madrasahs. At the higher-education level, Hasyim et al. (2025) likewise demonstrated that Arabic language learning can contribute to religious character when linguistic objectives are combined with a value-oriented approach.

Nevertheless, Arabic language instruction often continues to prioritize grammatical accuracy and mastery of subject matter. An analysis of Arabic teaching materials for Islamic junior secondary schools indicates that the value dimension must be made more explicit so that learning does not remain at the level of knowledge alone (Aflisia et al., 2021). An excessively cognitive orientation may restrict opportunities for students to speak, cooperate, make decisions, and reflect on social experiences. Yet values cannot be internalized merely through verbal advice. They must be experienced in consistent relationships, consciously accepted, and enacted in behavior (Setyaningsih, 2022).

The humanistic approach provides a relevant framework for explaining this process. Humanistic education regards students as dignified persons with physical needs, a need for safety and belonging, a need for recognition, and the potential for growth. From an Islamic educational perspective, respect for human dignity does not imply unrestricted freedom; rather, it entails honoring students, developing their potential, and directing freedom toward moral responsibility (Damayanti et al., 2022; Sultani et al., 2023). Maslow's hierarchy of needs helps identify the conditions that enable students to participate optimally in learning, although these needs are not necessarily fulfilled in a rigid or sequential manner in real life (Maslow, 1943; Sunarya, 2022).

In Arabic language learning, a humanistic approach is evident when teachers create a safe environment for experimentation, treat errors as part of the learning process, listen to students' views, employ adaptive methods, and provide opportunities for self-actualization. Syafei (2023) argued that the principal implication of humanistic learning theory for Arabic instruction is the shift in the teacher's role from the primary source of information to a facilitator. Dialogic and participatory communication strategies have also been shown to support the internalization of moral and moderation values through authentic language interaction (Qomariyah, 2022; Qomariyah et al., 2022).

The development of social character is also associated with observational learning. Students observe how teachers respond to mistakes, offer recognition, resolve conflicts, and interact with all members of the class. The observed behavior is then retained, reproduced, and reinforced through social experience (Bandura, 1977). Character is therefore shaped not only by the content delivered but also by the quality of relationships and the consistency of behavioral models within the educational environment. Sustained role modeling is an effective approach to character education (Syakur et al., 2022; Nisa et al., 2025).

Previous studies have addressed character education through Arabic, humanistic approaches, and pesantren education. However, research specifically examining the internalization of humanistic values in Arabic language learning at a girls' pesantren-based Islamic junior secondary school remains limited. This study focuses on MTs Wali Songo Putri Ngabar, Ponorogo, an institution that integrates madrasah and pesantren curricula and habituates students to the use of Arabic in both learning and daily life. The study aims to: (1) analyze the internalization of humanistic values through the planning and implementation of Arabic language instruction and the teacher's role as a facilitator; and (2) explain its implications for students' social character, together with the supporting and inhibiting factors.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative approach with a single-case study design. The case-study design was selected because the internalization of values was examined within a clearly bounded context: Arabic language learning at MTs Wali Songo Putri Ngabar during the 2026/2027 academic year. This approach enabled an in-depth exploration of the experiences, interactions, routines, and meanings that developed in classroom and pesantren settings (Creswell, 2013). Informants were selected purposively on the basis of their direct involvement in teaching and student development. The 20 informants comprised one school principal, five Arabic language teachers, four homeroom teachers, three female dormitory mentors (*murabbiyah*), six students representing different grade levels, and one parent. This diversity provided complementary perspectives on instructional planning, classroom practice, dormitory life, behavioral change, and family support.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and document analysis. Observations focused on lesson openings, teachers' responses to students' physical and emotional conditions, communication patterns, group work, forms of recognition, the use of Arabic, and social interaction in classrooms and dormitories. The documents examined included *i'dad* (lesson preparation plans), teaching materials, homeroom reports, disciplinary records, language regulations, activity archives, and other institutional documents. Analysis began during data collection and followed an interactive model: the data were selected and condensed, organized into thematic displays, compared across sources, and progressively interpreted through conclusion drawing and verification (Miles et al., 2014). The field themes were then interpreted using Maslow's humanistic needs framework and Bandura's social learning theory. Trustworthiness was strengthened through source, method, and time triangulation, repeated examination of field notes, and cross-checking among interview, observation, and documentary evidence.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Internalization of Humanistic Values through Five Dimensions of Student Needs

The findings indicate that humanistic values were not internalized as a separate or supplementary subject. Instead, values emerged through the ways teachers designed instruction, responded to students' conditions, managed interaction, and created opportunities for personal development. Five recurring patterns were identified: attention to physical comfort, psychological safety, social belonging, recognition, and self-actualization. These interrelated patterns formed a learning climate conducive to the acceptance and enactment of values.

First, attention to physiological needs was evident from the planning stage. Teachers prepared *i'dad* that specified the content, objectives, and instructional methods, and then adapted their strategies to classroom conditions. When students appeared tired, sleepy, or unable to concentrate, teachers used icebreakers, songs, word-guessing activities, light physical movement, or changes in instructional

method to re-engage the class. Teachers also greeted students and asked about their condition, including their sleeping habits, and allowed them to wash their faces or perform ablution. These practices show that physical readiness was treated as a prerequisite for engagement rather than merely as a matter of discipline.

Attention to physical needs was not yet fully supported by equitable facilities. Some classrooms were hot and some seating was uncomfortable, while instructional technology was not available in every room. These conditions could reduce concentration, particularly during the final lessons of the day. Nevertheless, some limitations were offset by an intensive language environment: *dirāsah Islāmiyyah* subjects were taught in Arabic, and students routinely used foreign languages in *pesantren* life. The findings demonstrate that learning comfort depends on the interaction among facilities, teachers' strategies, and institutional culture.

Second, psychological safety was established by normalizing errors as part of learning. Teachers avoided humiliating criticism, listened to students' answers in full, and provided corrections respectfully. Classroom rules discouraged students from ridiculing their peers' mistakes. When students could not answer correctly or pronounce Arabic vocabulary accurately, teachers provided models, encouragement, and opportunities for self-correction. Such an environment reduced language anxiety and fostered the courage to participate.

Psychological safety was also reinforced through the mentoring system. Homeroom teachers and dormitory mentors monitored personal difficulties, attendance, study activities, and communication with parents. The availability of consultation channels gave students a space in which to report uncomfortable experiences. This approach is consistent with the humanistic principle that acceptance and psychological security facilitate active participation (Sultani et al., 2023; Syafei, 2023).

Third, social needs were addressed through warm and participatory relationships. Teachers greeted students personally, moved around the classroom, asked more questions, listened to students' views, and involved all learners. Group work functioned not only as a means of completing tasks but also as a context for sharing roles, assisting peers, and experiencing membership in a community. Dormitory life extended this process beyond class hours through everyday language use, shared activities, and daily routines.

Fourth, recognition was given for the learning process, courage, honesty, and sustained effort, rather than solely for correct answers. Teachers used Arabic expressions such as "*mumtāz*," "*jayyid jiddan*," "*aḥsantum*," and "*ṭayyib*," together with applause, points, or small rewards. Students reported feeling proud when they answered correctly and still feeling valued when their answers were inaccurate. Proportionate recognition helped foster the belief that ability can develop through effort.

Fifth, self-actualization was facilitated through opportunities to perform and develop individual interests. In addition to language activities, the *pesantren* provided Qur'an memorization, master-of-ceremonies training, *da'iyah* competitions, sports, arts, Qur'anic recitation, archery, horse riding, and Talent Day. Students gained opportunities to identify their strengths and make visible contributions. Participation in competitions or specific organizational roles made them feel needed and capable. Such self-actualization was connected to Arabic language learning because speaking ability, courage, discipline, and responsibility were applied across these activities.

Table 1. Dimensions of Humanistic Value Internalization in Arabic Language Learning

Dimension	Learning practices	Values/character tendencies
Physical comfort	I'dad, checking students' condition, ice breaking, movement, method adjustment, and attention to classroom comfort.	Readiness, self-care, learning discipline
Psychological safety	Mistakes are normalized; feedback is polite; ridicule is prevented; individual assistance is available.	Courage, openness, mutual respect
Social belonging	Personal greetings, listening, equal participation, group work, and everyday language interaction.	Cooperation, empathy, solidarity, communication
Recognition	Praise in Arabic, applause, points, small rewards, and appreciation of effort and honesty.	Confidence, persistence, respect for achievement
Self-actualization	Opportunities to perform, compete, organize activities, and develop language, art, religious, and sport talents.	Independence, responsibility, creativity, future orientation

Table 1 shows that the internalization process operated through layered experiences. Physical needs and psychological safety enabled participation; social relationships and recognition strengthened belonging; and self-actualization directed students toward the development of their potential. This pattern supports Maslow's view that human needs influence motivation and development. However, the findings also indicate that the five needs frequently operated simultaneously rather than as a strictly linear sequence (Maslow, 1943; Sunarya, 2022).

Implications for the Development of Students' Social Character

The internalization of humanistic values was associated with observable changes in students' learning and dormitory life. The most prominent traits were independence, responsibility, honesty, discipline, cooperation, empathy, and self-confidence. These changes did not occur immediately. New students needed time to adjust to schedules, rules, academic demands, and life away from their families. Following the adaptation period, they began to manage personal needs, maintain orderliness, understand schedules, and complete responsibilities without constant instruction.

In the learning context, responsibility and honesty were reflected in completing assignments, reducing cheating, and submitting work more consistently. In daily interaction, students assisted peers who had not understood the material, spontaneously corrected the use of Arabic vocabulary, carried out classroom duties, and maintained cleanliness collectively. Parents also observed that these independent habits were transferred to the home environment, for example, by cleaning and organizing without being asked.

Self-confidence developed through opportunities to answer questions, perform, and receive recognition. Teachers' appreciation created experiences of success that were not dependent solely on final grades. Students learned that the courage to attempt a task was itself part of competence. This is

especially important in language learning, where fear of making mistakes often becomes a major obstacle. When the classroom provides psychological safety, speaking practice simultaneously becomes an exercise in courage, communication, and respect for others.

These findings extend those of Alwi et al. (2024), who showed that character internalization through Arabic can occur through guidance, integration with instructional content, learning processes, and habituation. At MTs Wali Songo Putri Ngabar, values were cultivated not only through lesson content but also through attention to students' needs and the social ecology of the pesantren. The results are also consistent with Qomariyah et al. (2022), who identified participatory communication as a pathway for strengthening moral values, and with Ahmadi and Saad (2024), who highlighted the importance of integrating adab into instructional practice.

The development of social character can also be interpreted through social learning theory. Teachers who were friendly, patient, fair, and unwilling to humiliate students provided observable models of conduct. Students subsequently reproduced these patterns when assisting or correcting peers. Reinforcement through praise, opportunities to participate, and social acceptance encouraged positive behaviors to be repeated. Character was therefore not merely the result of moral knowledge but was formed through observation, practice, and reinforcement within a consistent environment (Bandura, 1977; Syakur et al., 2022).

Teachers as Facilitators and Social Models

Teachers in this study performed three complementary functions. First, they designed the conditions for learning. I'dad was used to determine content and strategies, but implementation was not rigid. Teachers adjusted methods when students were tired, unfocused, or in need of individual assistance. This flexibility indicates that humanistic planning does not mean the absence of structure; rather, it entails a structure that is responsive to actual needs.

Second, teachers facilitated relationships. They created space for questions, listened to answers, moved around the classroom, provided equal opportunities, and guided group work. Dialogic relationships reduced psychological distance without eliminating pedagogical authority. This finding reinforces Syafei's (2023) argument that humanistic Arabic language instruction requires teachers who facilitate students' development rather than merely transmit linguistic rules. A similar approach is evident in strategies for internalizing moderation through communication and the Arabic language curriculum (Qomariyah, 2022).

Third, teachers served as social models. The ways in which they corrected mistakes, offered recognition, and treated students communicated values more powerfully than verbal advice alone. Consistent modeling connected the cognitive, affective, and behavioral domains. Nisa et al. (2025) emphasized that character strengthening requires instructional strategies that integrate habituation, modeling, and participation. Accordingly, Arabic language teachers need not only linguistic competence but also relational sensitivity and the ability to manage psychologically safe classrooms.

Supporting and Inhibiting Factors

The internalization process was strengthened by three groups of factors. First, the structured pesantren environment provided continuous mentoring by kiai, female teachers, homeroom teachers, and dormitory mentors. Regular activities, residential life, and limited exposure to external influences created continuity between values discussed in the classroom and everyday habits. This model of pesantren education demonstrates that character is shaped by the combined operation of institutional philosophy, programs, and environment (Yusutria et al., 2024).

Second, support from teachers, peers, and parents strengthened motivation. The Arabic-language environment encouraged students to practice continuously and learn from one another. When peers corrected errors respectfully, mistakes became a shared learning resource. Support from parents and

caregivers also helped students navigate the adaptation period. Third, extracurricular activities and competitions provided concrete opportunities to develop talent, courage, sportsmanship, responsibility, and cooperation.

Four principal barriers were also identified. First, students experienced difficulty adjusting to rules, intensive schedules, memorization targets, new peers, and separation from their families. Second, negative peer influence included ridiculing pronunciation errors, encouraging inattention, and promoting social comparison. Such behavior could undermine psychological safety and self-confidence. Third, differences in cultural background, family communication patterns, and economic circumstances could produce misunderstandings, feelings of inferiority, or conflict. Fourth, technological facilities, classroom comfort, and learning resources were uneven; students also differed in prior competence and interest in Arabic.

These barriers indicate that a humanistic approach cannot depend solely on teachers' goodwill. The madrasah requires supportive policies, including a stronger anti-bullying culture, orientation and adaptation programs for new students, enrichment and remedial instruction, improved ventilation and classroom facilities, and the use of technology that remains consistent with pesantren regulations. Such systemic integration is necessary to ensure that opportunities for development are not limited to students who enter with stronger language competence or social support.

Table 2. Supporting and Inhibiting Factors in the Internalization Process

Supporting factors	Inhibiting factors
Structured boarding-school environment and continuous mentoring	Initial adaptation to rules, schedules, and separation from family
Support from teachers, peers, parents, and daily Arabic-language culture	Ridicule, low peer motivation, and social comparison
Extracurricular activities, competitions, and opportunities to perform	Cultural, emotional, economic, and prior-competence differences
Integrated religious and language learning	Uneven facilities, limited technology, schedule conflicts, and varying interest in Arabic

Conceptually, the study's principal contribution is its explanation that humanistic value internalization through Arabic language learning operates simultaneously at three levels: instructional content, pedagogical relationships, and the pesantren ecology. Content provides moral messages; pedagogical relationships transform these messages into experiences of being valued and acting responsibly; and the pesantren ecology provides opportunities for repetition. These three levels explain how language learning can function as character education when linguistic, social, and moral objectives are designed in an integrated manner.

CONCLUSION

The internalization of humanistic values through Arabic language learning at MTs Wali Songo Putri Ngabar occurred through the creation of learning conditions that addressed physical comfort, psychological safety, belonging, recognition, and self-actualization. Teachers functioned as designers of adaptive instruction, facilitators of dialogic relationships, and social models. Humanistic values were not merely conveyed through instructional materials but were experienced through respectful correction, opportunities for participation, group work, recognition of effort, and spaces for talent development. The implications were evident in the development of independence, responsibility,

honesty, discipline, cooperation, empathy, communication skills, and self-confidence. The pesantren environment, support from teachers and peers, parental involvement, and extracurricular activities strengthened the process. Conversely, initial adaptation, negative peer influence, differences in background, uneven prior competence, and limited facilities could inhibit internalization. The madrasah is advised to incorporate indicators of humanistic needs and social character into i'dad, strengthen a classroom culture that does not humiliate students for making mistakes, provide mentoring programs for new students and beginners in Arabic, and gradually improve learning comfort and media. Future research should employ multisite or longitudinal designs to examine the sustainability of character development across educational transitions and variations in practice among different pesantren settings.

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