

## Ngaji Rasa in the Islamic Boarding School Curriculum and Its Implications for Islamic Religious Education: An Analysis from the Perspective of Kyai

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### Abstract

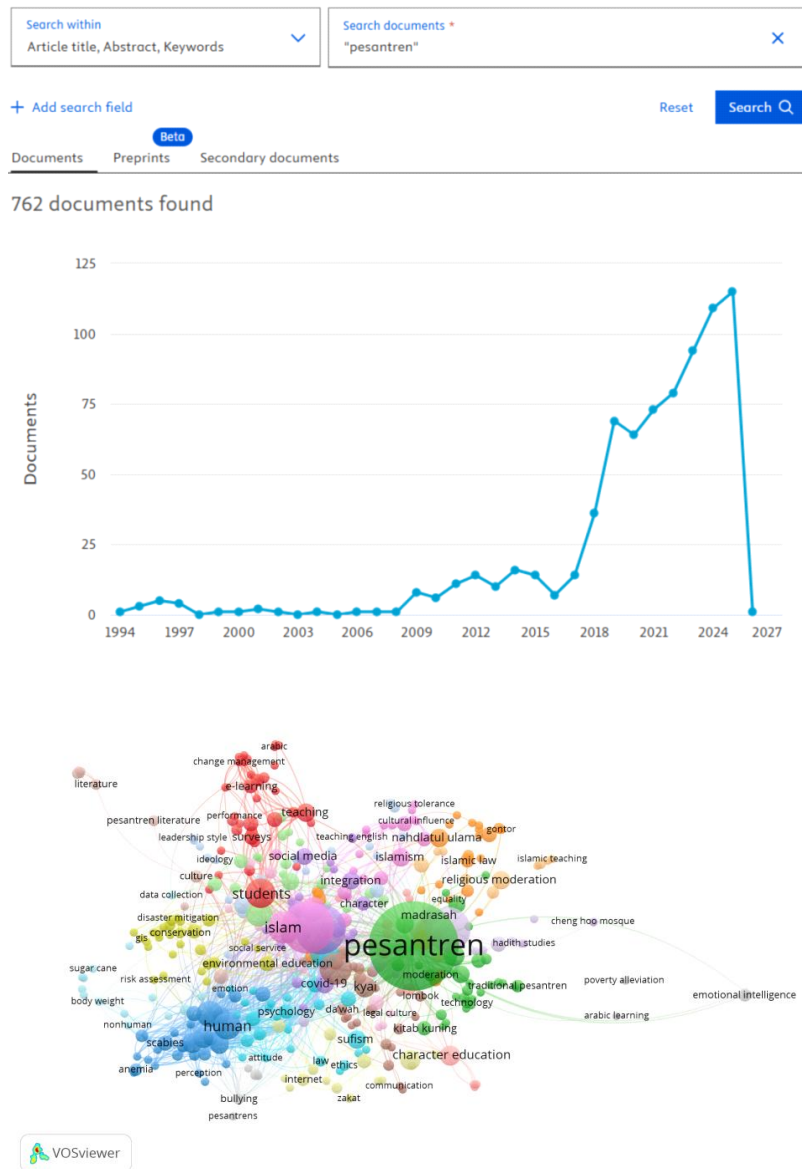
This study examines the *Ngaji Rasa* curriculum in Islamic boarding schools and its implications for Islamic Religious Education (IRE) from the perspective of *kyai*, against the backdrop of moral degradation in formal education environments that indicates cognitively oriented approaches in IRE have been ineffective in internalizing moral and spiritual values. As an inner development-based educational practice, *Ngaji Rasa* offers an alternative model grounded in life experiences, behavioral exemplars, and habituation. Using a qualitative phenomenological design, the study involves ten *kyai* from traditional Islamic boarding schools, with data collected through in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and documentation analysis. The findings show that *Ngaji Rasa* operates as an unwritten hidden curriculum that significantly shapes students' character formation through the exemplary conduct of the *kyai*, systematic habituation of values, and gradual spiritual experiences. This model contributes to fostering honesty, patience, humility, and social responsibility among students. The implications for Islamic Religious Education (PAI) include the development of experience-based learning, the strengthening of teacher role modeling, the cultivation of appropriate behavior, and the creation of a virtuous classroom atmosphere. Overall, this educational model bridges modern pedagogical theory with classical Islamic tradition, offering a holistic and transformative framework for religious education.

**Keywords:** *Ngaji Rasa*; Hidden Curriculum; Islamic Boarding Schools; Character Education; Islamic Religious Education

## INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of moral degradation in schools increasingly shows the urgency of religious education that not only focuses on knowledge but also involves feelings and the habit of practicing values (Berkowitz, Lickona, Nast, Schaeffer, & Bohlin, 2020; Nasrudin, Sandi, Alfian, & Fakhruddin, 2023; Prakoso, Firdaus, & Anwar, 2024). In Indonesia, cases of violence in education have risen dramatically: 573 incidents in 2024, nearly three times the number from last year. More worryingly, most of the perpetrators are teachers or school staff (Aranditio, 2024). Data from the National Commission for Child Protection in 2023 recorded 3,547 reports of child abuse, with most occurring in formal schools. This means that religious education has not succeeded in fostering students' morals, empathy, and spiritual awareness. Although the government has promoted the vision of Pancasila Students and strengthened character in the curriculum, the practice is still dominated by an intellectual approach, without a culture of role models and habit formation of values (Alawi, Sumpena, Supiana, & Zaqiah, 2022). Therefore, a model of religious education that truly shapes religious character is needed.

In this context, the pesantren tradition offers a different approach through the formation of values centered on direct experience (Amrullah, Murfi, Fauzi, & Basri, 2025). The character of santri is shaped through role models, discipline, and worship habits that are integrated into their daily lives (Subaidi, 2020). In Salafi Islamic boarding schools, the *Ngaji Rasa* education method has developed, emphasizing spiritual cultivation, spiritual reflection, and moral guidance that does not only rely on texts but also on experience and relationships with teachers (Wisnuwardani et al., 2024). Unfortunately, this practice is still rarely studied as part of the pesantren curriculum structure, even though its functioning is similar to the concept of the hidden curriculum in educational science. Therefore, studying the *Ngaji Rasa* curriculum is important for understanding the pesantren education system and contributing ideas for the development of Islamic Religious Education in schools, particularly in meeting the learning needs that touch on the moral, emotional, and spiritual aspects of students more holistically.



**Figure 1. Research Trends on Islamic Boarding Schools (Scopus Database)**

Scopus data showing 762 publications on Islamic boarding schools reveal a significant increase in research over the last three decades. Between 1994 and 2010, publications were still very low and sporadic, but since 2015 the trend has begun to increase, reaching a sharp spike between 2018 and 2024 with more than 100 articles per year. This development indicates that Islamic boarding schools have shifted from being a local research subject to becoming the center of global research attention, particularly on issues of Islamic education, religious moderation, social change, child protection, and institutional transformation. This increase also shows the growing academic recognition of Islamic boarding schools as dynamic, adaptive, and relevant educational institutions in the context

of modern challenges. The decline in figures in 2027 is not an indication of decline, but rather a technical consequence because that year has not yet been fully accounted for in the Scopus system (Masuwai, Zulkifli, & Hamzah, 2024).

The VOSviewer visualization shows that pesantren research in the Scopus database has developed into a very rich, multidisciplinary field of study connected to various global themes. The largest node on the map is the word "pesantren," which functions as the center of the network and is connected to several large clusters such as Islamic studies, character education, religious moderation, students, environmental education, and human psychology. The dominance of this node indicates that pesantren are treated not only as traditional educational institutions, but as socio-religious phenomena that have broad relevance in various modern disciplines. One of the large clusters is indicated by the green color connecting pesantren – kyai – kitab kuning – traditional pesantren – *Islamic law* – da'wah. This cluster indicates that classical research is still strong, highlighting the authority of the kyai, the yellow book curriculum, Islamic learning traditions, and the pesantren's distinctive scientific social relations. This cluster shows the continued international academic interest in the authentic character and traditions of the pesantren as Indonesian Islamic local wisdom.

Another cluster, colored purple and orange, shows themes of religious moderation, equality, Islamic teaching, cultural influence, and connections with organizations such as Nahdlatul Ulama. This shows that pesantren are increasingly seen as agents of religious moderation and guardians of social harmony. This topic has been very dominant since 2018, in line with the strengthening of the discourse on Islam Nusantara and the national religious moderation program, so that pesantren research has become part of global studies on peace, tolerance, and counter-extremism. Furthermore, the blue and sea green clusters reveal new topics such as *psychology, emotion, attitude, bullying, the internet, environmental education, social service*, and even health issues such as anemia, scabies, and risk assessment. This shows that pesantren research is becoming more multidimensional and intersects with issues of social health, digital literacy, ecology, and educational psychology. This type of research is an expansion of the research focus from "religious education" to a broader study of the welfare and development of children in pesantren environments.

Interestingly, the pink cluster connects *character education – communication – ethics – integration*, illustrating that Islamic boarding schools are widely studied as models of character education, especially after the development of character-based curricula in the national

education system. This focus is further reinforced by the emergence of the word "students" as another major node, which indicates a shift in attention from Islamic boarding schools as institutions in general to the learning dynamics, behavior, and development of their students. Overall, this map shows that pesantren research has moved from traditional studies to transformational studies involving contemporary themes such as religious moderation, social ecology, digital literacy, santri psychology, the role of kyai in educational leadership, and the integration of character values. Amidst this complexity, it appears that studies on pesantren curriculum, hidden curriculum, value internalization practices, and experience-based learning are still under-explored areas in the global network. Thus, research on Ngaji Rasa as a hidden curriculum and its implications for PAI is not only relevant but also fills a significant gap in the international research landscape on pesantren.

Academic studies on Islamic boarding schools in reputable international publications show increasingly dynamic developments, especially after 2020. Based on Figure 1, which maps 762 reputable articles based on the Scopus index, the direction of pesantren research still focuses on issues of institutional transformation, historical development, and social change, as seen in the studies by Isbah (2020) and Zarkasyi (2020), which discuss the transformation of the Salafi tradition towards modernization (Arroisi, Zarkasyi, Salim, & Taqiyuddin, 2022; Falikul Isbah, 2020). Another strong emerging trend is the study of spiritual leadership (Amrullah et al., 2025) institutional governance, and the transformation of pesantren management in the context of social change and globalization. The theme of kyai and nyai leadership also appears in the aspects of management and social empowerment through organizational studies and educational sociology approaches.

In addition, research highlighting the relevance of pesantren in contemporary issues such as religious moderation, tolerance, and character education has also increased (Lutfauziah, Al-Muhdhar, Suhadi, & Rohman, 2024; Mujahid, 2021). At the same time, a number of articles indicate an expansion of pesantren research into non-educational areas, such as eco-pesantren, community-based economic empowerment, pesantren architecture, cultural literacy, and issues of digitalization in Islamic education. However, of all these publications, only a small portion directly examines the pesantren curriculum, especially from a more in-depth perspective on how inner values, spirituality, and daily practices become part of *the hidden curriculum* that shapes the character of santri (Basri, Ibrahim, Yuspiani, U, & Sakka, 2025)..

The research gap is even more apparent when the focus is directed at the study of Sufi educational practices, the inner experiences of santri, and pedagogical mechanisms based on emotional training such as Ngaji Rasa. To date, no articles have been found that explicitly place Ngaji Rasa within the framework of the pesantren curriculum or analyze it as an academic entity with structure, stages, and pedagogical implications. Thus, this study aims to fill this gap through an in-depth analysis of the construction of the Ngaji Rasa curriculum from the perspective of kyai and its implications for the development of Islamic Religious Education that is more oriented towards the affective and spiritual dimensions of students.

Based on this background, this study is important to answer several key questions regarding the role of Ngaji Rasa in the pesantren curriculum framework. First, this study seeks to understand the kyai's perspective on the concept and structure of the pesantren curriculum as a whole. Second, the study examines the criteria that make Ngaji Rasa a *hidden curriculum*, especially because of its unwritten nature but strong influence on character building. Third, this study explores how Ngaji Rasa is implemented in the daily lives of santri through role modeling, habituation, and direct experience. Fourth, this study analyzes the extent to which Ngaji Rasa contributes to the character building of santri as a result of a natural process of spiritual education. Finally, this study explores the implications of the Ngaji Rasa concept for the development of PAI learning in schools, particularly how the values and mechanisms of feeling-based education can strengthen the affective and spiritual aspects of students.

Based on the problem statement described above, this study aims to comprehensively examine the practice of Ngaji Rasa within the framework of the pesantren curriculum. Specifically, this study aims to describe how kyai interpret the pesantren curriculum, including the relationship between formal, non-formal, and *hidden curricula*. In addition, this study seeks to identify the criteria and forms of *hidden curriculum* manifested in the practice of Ngaji Rasa. This study also analyzes the mechanisms of implementing Ngaji Rasa in pesantren life through role modeling, habituation, and real experiences undergone by santri. Furthermore, this study explains the contribution of Ngaji Rasa to the character building and spiritual development of santri. Finally, this study formulates the conceptual and practical implications of these findings for the development of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) in schools, especially in order to strengthen the affective dimension and internalization of religious values in students.

## METHODS

This study uses a qualitative approach with a phenomenological design to deeply understand the experiences, meanings, and perspectives of the kyai regarding the pesantren curriculum and the practice of Ngaji Rasa as part of *the hidden curriculum*. The phenomenological approach was chosen because this study sought to explore subjective realities that cannot always be observed through quantitative methods, especially when it comes to inner experiences, values, and internalization processes that are not written down (Bhangu, Shagufta; Provost, Fabien; Caduff, 2023; Wahyuwani, Judrah, & Suriati, 2023).. With this approach, researchers attempt to capture the essence of the educational experience in Islamic boarding schools, as understood by the kyai as the central figure in the educational structure of Islamic boarding schools (Melnikova, 2022; Wahyuwani et al., 2023). The subjects of this study were ten kyai from salaf pesantren known for maintaining the Ngaji Rasa tradition and inner-based education. The kyai were selected using *purposive sampling*, considering their competence, experience in managing pesantren, and their direct involvement in shaping the educational culture in the pesantren (M. Ahmad & Wilkins, 2025). In addition to the kyai, the study also involved senior santri and pesantren administrators as supporting informants to obtain a more complete perspective. The presence of researchers in the field was not only to collect data, but also to observe the daily dynamics of the pesantren, the interactions between the kyai and santri, and the educational symbols that work behind the practice of Ngaji Rasa.

The research was conducted in 10 Islamic boarding schools, where geographically there are several boarding schools that implement *Ngaji Rasa* as an integral part of their learning activities. The ten pesantren selected for the study represent the characteristics of salaf pesantren that still strongly maintain the Ngaji Rasa tradition. The selection criteria include: (1) the pesantren must be at least 20 years old, (2) have a yellow book-based education system, (3) the kyai is a central figure in the care of santri, (4) implementing a boarding school (mukim) pattern, and (5) maintaining the tradition of manners and exemplary behavior as the basis for character education with a number of students ranging from 150 to 800 people. Although this study focuses on Salafi Islamic boarding schools, the findings can provide insight for modern Islamic boarding schools that want to integrate an inner experience-based approach into their education system.

**Table 1.** Research Subjects

No.	Name	Pesantren	Location	Code
1.	Kyai 1	Az-Ziyadah	Ciwaringin, Cirebon, West Java	K1
2.	Kyai 2	Syiarul Huda	Lembang, West Bandung, West Java	K2
3.	Kyai 3	Civilized People	Cibeunying Kalre, Bandung City, West Java	K3
4.	Kyai 4	As-Syuhada	Ciwaringin, Cirebon, West Java	K4
5.	Kyai 5	Hadiqoh Usyaqil Qur'an	Ciwaringin, Cirebon, West Java	K5
6.	Kyai 6	Miftahul Jannah An-Nuriyyah	Margahayu, Bandung Regency, West Java	K6
7.	Kyai 7	Badrul Ihsan	Mangkubumi, Tasikmalaya, West Java	K7
8.	Kyai 8	Sabilil Muttaqin	Talun, Cirebon, West Java	K8
9.	Kyai 9	Ar-Rohmaniyah	Cidadap, Bandung City, West Java	K9
10.	Kyai 10	Hidayatul Iman	Sukamena, Bandung, West Java	K10

Data collection techniques were carried out in three ways: in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and documentation studies. Semi-structured interviews were used to explore the kyai's views on the pesantren curriculum, the criteria for Ngaji Rasa as a *hidden curriculum*, and the mechanism for internalizing the values (Li et al., 2024). Participatory observation was conducted by participating in various santri activities such as ro'an, congregational prayers, pilgrimages, pesantren service activities, and spontaneous interactions that reflect Ngaji Rasa practices. The researchers conducted observations and field research over a period of one month. These observations were important because many aspects of Ngaji Rasa cannot be explained verbally by informants but are evident in daily practices. Meanwhile, the documentation study of the Ngaji Rasa method included an analysis of the books referred to in pesantren education, the pesantren activity schedule, the formal curriculum structure, and relevant records of santri guidance. The researcher conducted participatory observation with varying intensity: 3-5 days at each pesantren to observe the daily activities of the santri.

The data obtained was analyzed using Miles and Huberman's interactive analysis model, which includes data reduction, data presentation assisted by Nvivo 12 plus for comprehensive data presentation, and drawing conclusions (Arifin, Utama, Aryani, Prayitno, & Waston, 2023; Schwandt, 1996). In the reduction stage, interview and observation data were summarized and grouped into relevant categories, such as curriculum concepts, Ngaji Rasa practices, the process of internalizing values, and educational implications (Anggadwita, Dana, Ramadani, & Ramadan, 2021). In the data presentation stage, these categories were

organized into patterns and thematic themes to find relationships between variables. In the final stage, the researchers interpreted the findings to formulate the essence of the Ngaji Rasa process as a form of hidden curriculum and its implications for the development of PAI learning in schools.

To ensure data validity, this study applied source triangulation, method triangulation, and *member checking* (Sciberras & Dingli, 2023). Triangulation was carried out by comparing interview data between clerics, matching observation results with verbal explanations from informants, and checking the consistency between field data and pesantren documents (Meydan & Akkaş, 2024). *Member checking* was conducted by asking the kyai to verify the transcripts and the researcher's initial interpretations to ensure the accuracy of the meanings produced (Marlina, Purwaningsih, Siagian, Hakim, & Maryati, 2024). In addition, the researchers also applied *reflexivity* to curb personal bias and maintain objectivity throughout the research. With this comprehensive approach and methodology, the study is expected to provide an in-depth description of the characteristics of Ngaji Rasa as *a hidden curriculum*, its internalization mechanisms within pesantren life, and its relevance in strengthening the affective and spiritual dimensions of PAI learning in schools.

## RESULTS

### Kyai's Perspective on the Pesantren Curriculum

**Table 2.** Word Frequency Query Results Nvivo12 (Results of interviews with 10 kyai)

Word	Length	Count	Weighted Percentage (%)
feeling	4	333	491
student	6	261	385
Quran recitation	5	236	348
curriculum	9	148	218
Islamic boarding school	9	128	189
science	4	77	114
kyai	4	76	112%
experience	10	68	100%
heart	4	65	96

Table 2 of the Word Frequency Query results shows that the word "rasa" occupies the most dominant position with the highest number of occurrences (333 times). The dominance of this word indicates that the core of the pesantren curriculum, according to the

kyai, is not in the cognitive or administrative aspects, but centers on the inner dimension, moral sensitivity, and heart cultivation. The high frequency of the word *rasa* reinforces the understanding that education in Islamic boarding schools is a process of shaping inner qualities, not merely a transfer of knowledge. This is in line with the traditions of Sufism and *adab* education, where *dzauq* (spiritual taste) is the main instrument for internalizing values. The word "santri" (student), which appears 261 times, shows that the curriculum is understood in a subjective-relational way, i.e., it is always associated with the life process experienced by the santri. For kyai, the curriculum is not merely material or a syllabus, but a journey of shaping the santri's personality through experience, interaction, and spiritual guidance. This shows that the focus of the pesantren curriculum is on the person being shaped, not the content being taught.

The word "ngaji," which appears 236 times, shows an emphasis that learning in the context of pesantren is not only the activity of reading books but also a process of self-formation through interaction with the teachings, teachers, and spiritual atmosphere of the pesantren. The appearance of this word confirms that ngaji is seen as a holistic activity: intellectual, spiritual, and emotional. The words "curriculum" (148 times) and "pesantren" (128 times) are in the middle, indicating that the kyai view the curriculum as something that is integrated with the whole life of the pesantren. This reinforces the view that the curriculum is not perceived as a formal document, but as a system of values, traditions, and a 24-hour culture lived by the santri. This pattern is consistent with the concept of a hidden-curriculum, where values are taught more through atmosphere, social environment, and role models than through verbal instruction.

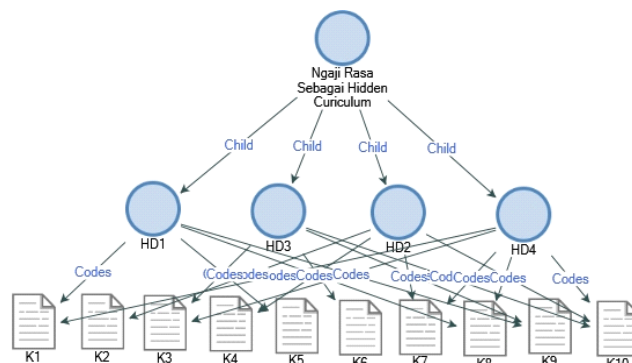
The appearance of the words "knowledge" (77), "kyai" (76), and "experience" (68) indicates the three main pillars in the way pesantren understand education: knowledge as a cognitive foundation; kyai as moral models and spiritual guides; and experience as a medium for internalizing values. This reinforces that pesantren education is based on a triangulated relationship between knowledge–teacher–experience, which distinguishes it from the formal school system that tends to emphasize the cognitive aspect. Finally, the word "heart" (65) emphasizes that pesantren education is oriented towards the formation of *qalb*, namely a gentle and sensitive inner consciousness. The high frequency of this word confirms that the pesantren curriculum focuses on the affective and spiritual realm (*tazkiyatun nafs*), not just the cognitive realm. Thus, the entire pattern of word frequency shows that the pesantren curriculum, from the kyai's perspective, is education based on inner experience, habituation



that regulates all the dynamics of life in the pesantren. The curriculum is not understood as a written document or lesson schedule, but as a way of life that encompasses customs, culture, habits, social relations, and religious practices (Yasin & Khasbulloh, 2022). Thus, the hidden curriculum is a core component of pesantren education and is not considered something hidden, but rather a natural part of everyday life. Words that appear with medium frequency, such as "experience," "habituation," "kyai," "kitab," "spiritual," "patience," "adab," "worship," and "role modeling" clarify the structure of the pesantren curriculum, which is based on three main layers: formal education through the kitab kuning, non-formal education through daily practices, and the hidden curriculum through the role modeling of the kyai and the spiritual atmosphere. The high frequency of the words "experience" and "habituation" indicates that the kyai place the learning process within the framework of experiential learning, where santri learn values through real practice, not through verbal delivery. This is in line with the concept of ta'dib in Islamic education, where the formation of manners is done through habituation and example, not instruction.

Interestingly, the appearance of the words "PAI," "learning," and "character" in the Word Frequency Query shows that the kyai not only comment on pesantren practices but also see the relevance of Ngaji Rasa to the context of formal education in schools. The kyai seem to recognize that the model of value internalization based on feeling can be a solution to the problem of PAI being too cognitive and lacking in affection. This confirms that Ngaji Rasa has the potential to be adapted as an experience-based pedagogical model in PAI, especially for strengthening manners, empathy, and sincerity (Mawardi & Ruhayah, 2022; Purnomo, Anantanyu, Saptaningtyas, & Mangunjaya, 2024). Overall, the results of the Word Frequency Query confirm that the kyai's insights into the pesantren curriculum are based on the paradigm of "inner experience-based education." In their view, the curriculum is not a set of materials, but an ecosystem of values acquired through experience, habit formation, manners, the pesantren atmosphere, and the kyai's exemplary behavior. This finding reinforces the argument that Ngaji Rasa acts as a hidden curriculum that works silently but has a significant influence on the character formation of santri, while also opening up great opportunities for adaptation in PAI learning in schools.

### Ngaji Rasa as a Hidden Curriculum



**Figure 3. Conceptual Map of Ngaji Rasa as a Hidden Curriculum**

Figure 3. A conceptual map compiled from the coding results of ten kyai shows a coherent thematic structure of how Ngaji Rasa is understood and implemented as a hidden curriculum in Islamic boarding schools. The map illustrates the relationship between the main theme, four conceptual categories (HD1–HD4), and informants who support each category. Overall, this chart confirms that Ngaji Rasa is not merely a spiritual activity, but a latent educational process that works without formal instruction and deeply shapes the character of santri. The central theme of "Ngaji Rasa as a Hidden Curriculum" emerged because all the data showed that Ngaji Rasa was not classified as part of the formal or non-formal curriculum. Kyai from various pesantren (K1–K10) consistently positioned Ngaji Rasa as an unwritten, unscheduled practice that forms the core of the santri's personality formation process. This shows that pesantren education is not only driven by material structures (kitab kuning), but also by hidden mechanisms that work through shared life experiences.

**Table 2.** Ngaji Rasa as hidden curriculum

Hidden Curriculum Category	Code	Informant
Unwritten and unscheduled	HD1	K1, K5, K8, K9
Occurred naturally based on customs and atmosphere	HD2	K2, K4, K7, K10,
Transmitted through the kyai-santri relationship	HD3	K3, K6, K9, K10
Shaping inner character (manners, feelings, and sincerity)	HD4	K1, K3, K7, K8, K10

In Table 2, the first category (HD1), supported by K1, K5, K8, and K9, shows that Ngaji Rasa is unwritten and unscheduled. Kyai in this category emphasize that there are no official rules, syllabi, or documents explaining what Ngaji Rasa is. Precisely because it is not formalized, the values of Ngaji Rasa are integrated into all santri activities. This unwritten

nature confirms the main characteristic of the hidden curriculum: education takes place without having to be explicitly stated. The second category (HD2), supported by K2, K4, K7, and K10, shows that Ngaji Rasa takes place naturally through customs, routines, and the atmosphere of the pesantren. Daily life, such as ro'an, khidmah, discipline in worship, patterns of interaction between santri, and the calm atmosphere of the pesantren serve as vehicles for the internalization of the values (Suresman, Faqihuddin, Jenuri, & Abdullah, 2025). Values are not taught verbally, but are felt through habit and social atmosphere. This finding reinforces the view that the hidden curriculum is a "living curriculum," not a written one.

The third category (HD3), supported by K3, K6, K9, and K10, emphasizes the mechanism of value transmission through the kyai-santri relationship. The kyai assert that most lessons are actually learned by santri through observing the attitudes, habits, and spiritual practices of the kyai. Role modeling is considered more effective than instruction. The respectful relationship built in the pesantren tradition creates a space for the internalization of values that is very strong (Manshur, 2020). At this point, *the hidden curriculum* works through the models of *learning by observing* and *learning by living with*. The last category (HD4), supported by K1, K3, K7, K8, and K10, shows that the entire Ngaji Rasa process culminates in the formation of inner character. The main values emphasized are manners, sincerity, patience, inner peace, and moral sensitivity. These findings show that Islamic boarding schools position spiritual and affective education as the main goal, not merely mastery of material knowledge (Saleh, 2025). This category also has the most supporters, confirming that all kyai view the formation of inner character as the essence of Ngaji Rasa.

This concept map shows the logical relationship between the four categories: unwritten nature (HD1) makes the process run naturally (HD2); this natural process is reinforced by examples in the kyai-santri relationship (HD3); and all of this leads to the formation of the santri's inner character (HD4). This flow proves that Ngaji Rasa acts as a hidden educational system that runs organically but has a transformative impact. The even support from all informants shows the consistency of findings across pesantren. The presence of K9 and K10 in various categories reflects the depth of their information, while the involvement of K1–K8 reinforces the validity that Ngaji Rasa is an established pedagogical practice in the salaf pesantren culture. Theoretically, this map reveals that the strength of pesantren education lies in the affective, spiritual, and relational dynamics in the daily lives of santri, not solely in formal learning. These findings have important implications

for the development of Islamic Education (PAI) in schools, particularly the need to integrate role modeling, habit formation, and classroom atmosphere creation as a form of modern hidden curriculum that strengthens students' character and spiritual dimensions (Zulfatmi, 2023).

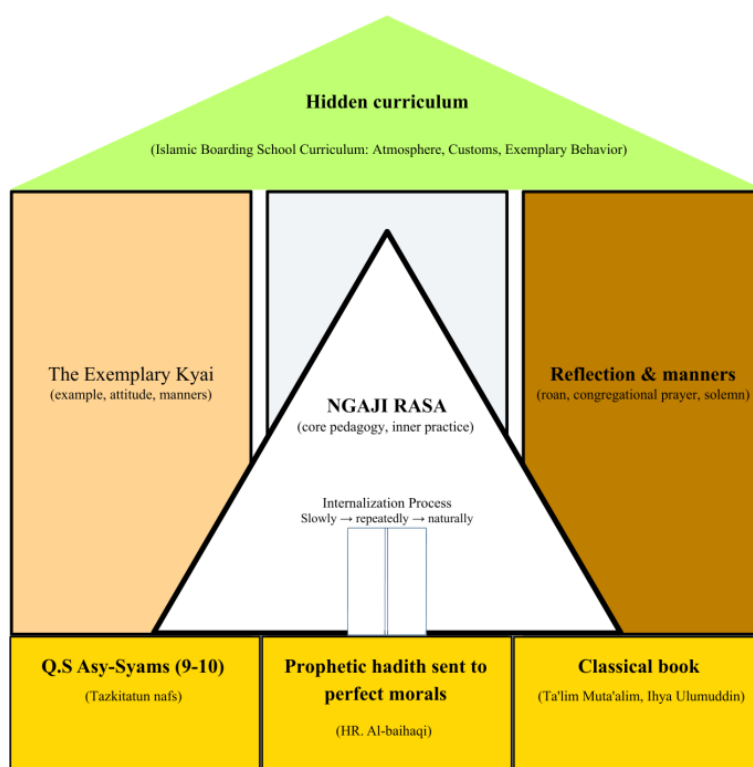
### **Implementation of Ngaji Rasa as a Hidden Curriculum in Islamic Boarding Schools**

The implementation of Ngaji Rasa in the lives of santri occurs through mechanisms unique to pesantren: exemplary behavior, habituation, direct experience, and internalization that takes place slowly and naturally, such as in activities such as congregational prayer, sorogan, helping the kyai in the fields, roan, pilgrimage, Takhasus, Dzikir, and even the creative economy of the santri. Kyai do not teach Ngaji Rasa through lectures or verbal instructions, but rather through daily actions that are observed and imitated by santri. The kyai's exemplary behavior in speaking, walking, reprimanding, welcoming guests, or praying with devotion becomes a lesson that is more influential than theory. This pattern of relationship allows santri to feel the value before they can explain it cognitively (Abitolkha, 2022).



**Figure 4.** Sorogan, dzikir, pilgrimage, congregational prayer, and roan activities as implementations of Ngaji Rasa.

Habituation is also an important tool in Ngaji Rasa. Figure 4 illustrates activities such as ro'an, congregational prayer, night recitation, pilgrimage, and tirakat are not merely religious routines, but spiritual exercises that cultivate patience, discipline, humility, and togetherness. These habits shape the santri's habitus so that they live their religious lives consistently without coercion (Ayubi & Masruri, 2025). The values of Ngaji Rasa become even more deeply rooted when santri are directly involved in activities such as serving guests of the kyai, taking care of the boarding school kitchen, community service, helping in the fields, or carrying out social tasks (Subaidi, 2020). These experiences teach sincerity, responsibility, and humility in a real way, not just as concepts.



**Figure 5. The 'Rumah Ngaji Rasa' Model as a Pedagogical Framework**

Figure 5. The "Rumah Ngaji Rasa" Model illustrates that the practice of Ngaji Rasa is built on a strong theological foundation consisting of the teachings of the Qur'an, hadith, and classical literature such as *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim* and *Ihya' Ulumuddin*, which emphasize the purification of the soul and the formation of character. On top of this foundation stands the main structure of the educational process, namely the exemplary behavior of the kyai, the habits and manners of the santri, and daily life experiences that form the walls of the house as a space for the internalization of the values of ". The core of this structure is Ngaji Rasa, an inner pedagogical practice that works slowly, repeatedly, and naturally through interaction,

atmosphere, and pesantren traditions. The entire process is then sheltered by the roof of *the hidden curriculum*, an unwritten curriculum that emerges from the atmosphere, customs, and exemplary behavior in pesantren life, which serves as the overarching framework for the holistic character formation of santri holistik (Centeno & de la Paz Grebe, 2021).

The practice of Ngaji Rasa cannot be separated from a strong theological foundation in Islam. Kyai generally refer to QS. Asy-Syams verses 9–10 about the purity of the soul (tazkiyatun nafs), which forms the basis that true education is education that purifies and nurtures the heart (Agus Hasan Saputra, Hermawan, & Priatna, 2024). The Prophet's hadith, "I was sent to perfect morals," legitimizes that moral education and character building are the main goals of Islamic education, higher than mere mastery of knowledge (Khan et al., 2021). In addition, kyai often refer to classical texts such as *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim*, *Ihya' Ulumuddin*, literature on student-teacher etiquette, and Sufi texts, which emphasize the importance of developing sensitivity, etiquette, and sincerity (Atikah Salma Hidayati et al., 2024). This overall theological foundation shows that Ngaji Rasa is not a new innovation, but rather a continuation of a long tradition of spiritual education in Islam. These findings show that Ngaji Rasa is an experiential education model that runs organically, involving all aspects of pesantren life, and is capable of shaping the character and moral sensitivity of santri. These implementation patterns also provide a concrete picture of how *the hidden curriculum* works effectively in the pesantren tradition.

The process of internalizing Ngaji Rasa takes place gradually, repeatedly, and never coercively. The kyai say that "rasa" cannot be taught in a single moment, but grows slowly through the atmosphere of the pesantren, which is full of manners, simplicity, and mutual respect. This atmosphere creates a psychological space conducive for santri to absorb values without pressure (Oldham & McLoughlin, 2025). This internalization occurs through what the kyai refer to as "inner experiences that are lived," namely experiences that cannot always be put into words, but are felt and shape the moral orientation of santri from within. In practice, the spiritual journey of santri in undergoing Ngaji Rasa varies. Although all santri are involved in the process of shaping their feelings, the levels are not the same. Senior santri usually receive greater responsibilities because they are considered to have spiritual maturity; they become role models for new santri and are often given tasks that demand greater responsibility and sincerity (Paul, Brennan, & Behjat, 2022). Conversely, new students are mostly in the observation stage, learning to "feel" the atmosphere of the boarding school and imitating the behavior of their seniors. Character education is ultimately very personal

and varied: each student experiences a unique inner journey according to their sensitivity, closeness to the kyai, and the experiences they have undergone.

## **DISCUSSION**

### **The Contribution of Ngaji Rasa to Character Education**

Ngaji Rasa contributes greatly to the character education of santri through the cultivation of inner values that are difficult to achieve through a cognitive approach alone. Through daily activities that take place slowly and repeatedly, santri learn to build sincerity in doing good without expecting anything in return and without demanding recognition (Nasrudin et al., 2023). This sincerity arises not from an understanding of definitions, but from direct experiences of serving, helping, or working together without always having to be seen or praised (Amiruddin, Baharuddin, Takbir, & Setialaksana, 2023). In this process, santri are trained to manage their intentions, purify their goals, and connect every action with a spiritual orientation.

Additionally, Ngaji Rasa cultivates patience and humility through practices that challenge the ego, such as khidmah, kitchen duties, working in the fields, or serving guests. Patience is not instilled through lectures, but through the experience of facing the intense rhythm of the pesantren, exhausting work, and rules that require santri to postpone personal desires for the common good (Taja, Hakim, & Faqihuddin, 2025). Meanwhile, humility grows from closeness to the kyai, who sets an example of a simple life, and from the habit of living together without a noticeable social hierarchy (Suyadi, 2022). This environment encourages students to learn to be humble and respect others in real actions, not just in theory.

Ngaji Rasa also shapes togetherness and responsibility as part of the santri's social character. Congregational activities, ro'an, mutual cooperation, or collective tasks create a sense of belonging to the pesantren community. This togetherness trains the santri's sensitivity to the needs of others, their ability to work together, and their understanding that morality is not only a personal matter but also a social one. At the same time, every task and responsibility given, especially to senior santri, becomes a space for growing responsibility and self-confidence. Santri learn that responsibility is not just an order from their guardians, but part of a moral identity that must be carried out with the awareness (Mboutchouang Kountchou, Haruna, & Tadzong Mouafo, 2025) .

Ngaji Rasa makes a fundamental contribution to character education because it works on the core of moral formation: the realm of feelings and the inner self. This is in line with Thomas Lickona's idea that character education must include three dimensions: moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action (Akmal Rijal, Aceng Kosasih, & Encep Syarief Nurdin, 2023; Thomas Lickona, 1991). In Ngaji Rasa, these three dimensions work together. Students not only learn the concepts of sincerity, patience, or humility, but also feel them through daily experiences and practice them in real activities. For example, sincerity is not taught verbally, but is cultivated through selfless service. Within Lickona's framework, Ngaji Rasa successfully touches on the realms of "moral feeling" and "moral action" in a powerful way, thereby forming values that are truly internalized, not merely understood cognitively.

Furthermore, this educational model is very much in line with the concept of *at-ta'lim at-tajribi* (experience-based education) in the Islamic tradition (Syahidin, 2022). Classical scholars such as al-Ghazali and al-Zarnuji emphasized that manners and morals are not formed solely through memorization, but through *tajribah*, namely direct experience, routine habits, and the process of self-training (*riyādhah al-nafs*) (Suhendi, Suresman, & Kosasih, 2020; Taja et al., 2025). Ngaji Rasa reflects this principle of *tajribi*, because all learning takes place through inner experiences that arise from the example set by the *kyai*, daily interactions, and activities that involve the body and heart, such as *ro'an*, *khidmah*, taking care of guests, or working in the fields. Thus, Ngaji Rasa revives the Islamic pedagogical tradition that makes experience the primary means of character formation.

From the perspective Experiential Learning theory David Kolb, (1971), Ngaji Rasa also fulfills the four stages of the learning cycle:

- a. Concrete Experience → santri experience real activities (service, congregation, *ro'an*).
- b. Reflective Observation → students reflect on the meaning of their actions, often through guidance from teachers or inner reflection.
- c. Abstract Conceptualization → values such as patience, humility, and responsibility are understood not as theory, but as inner awareness.
- d. Active Experimentation → these values are tested again in subsequent daily activities.

This model proves that character education is effective when students experience, reflect on, understand, and then repeatedly apply values through the process of , which occurs naturally in Ngaji Rasa. Its main strength lies in its character as *a hidden curriculum*, as

explained by Obaid, Abidin, Samsuddin, Kadir, & Baharuddin, (2024). *The hidden curriculum* does not work through formal structures or syllabi, but through atmosphere, habits, relationships, manners, and real examples. The example set by the kyai is the strongest element in this hidden curriculum, because values such as simplicity, patience, or responsibility are not conveyed through words, but are practiced directly every day in front of the students. Similarly, the pesantren's habits of eating together, praying in congregation, and doing community service are instruments of the hidden curriculum that shape character through social and emotional experiences.

Overall, Ngaji Rasa's contribution to character education is significant because it touches the deepest layers of the parenting process: feelings, experiences, reflection, and role models. By combining the *tajribi* principle in Islam, theory (1991) on moral *feeling–action*, Kolb's learning cycle, and the power of *the hidden curriculum*, Ngaji Rasa forms a pedagogical model that not only builds character theoretically but also shapes character through a holistic and continuous life experience.

### **Implications of Ngaji Rasa for PAI Learning in Schools**

The results of the study indicate that the principles of Ngaji Rasa have strong and relevant implications for strengthening PAI learning in schools, especially in the context of experience-based character development (Najla Kamilia Marwa, Udin Supriadi, 2017). PAI learning can adopt an *experiential Islamic learning* approach, which is an educational model that places experience as the main source of internalization of values in Al Zarnūjī's discussion (Huda, Yusuf, Azmi Jasmi, & Nasir Zakaria, 2016). This is in line with David Kolb, (1971), *Experiential Learning* cycle, which emphasizes the importance of concrete experience, reflection, conceptualization, and experimentation as a unified learning process. In the school context, this can be realized through worship practices, community service projects, or social experiences that allow students to feel values such as sincerity, empathy, and responsibility before understanding them theoretically (Mokh. Iman Firmansyah, 2021). This process is also in line with the tradition of *at-ta'lim at-tajribi* in Islam, which emphasizes that morals only grow through habits, self-training, and repeated spiritual experiences (Syahidin, 2022).. Thus, PAI based on experiential offers a more authentic and profound character-building mechanism compared to learning that focuses solely on memorizing concepts.

In addition, teacher role modeling is an important aspect that needs to be integrated into PAI. Similar to the role of kyai in Islamic boarding schools, PAI teachers in schools act

as *moral exemplars* who display civilized, honest, patient, and disciplined behavior. Thomas Lickona's character education theory emphasizes that character cannot be formed solely through teaching, but through behavioral models that students observe in their daily lives (Rahmawati et al., 2021). It is the exemplary role of teachers that shapes the dimension of "*moral feeling*" that emotionally motivates students to imitate, in line with Al-Ghazali's explanation in his book *Ihya Ulumuddin* (Syahrizal, 2021; Taja, Nurdin, Kosasih, & Suresman, 2022). In the context of Ngaji Rasa, the role of the kyai as a role model is able to create a conducive atmosphere for moral learning; similarly, PAI teachers need to be figures who radiate values through consistent practice and personal integrity (Jenuri, Faqihuddin, Suresman, Abdullah, & Fahrudin, 2025). When teachers display attitudes of gentleness, fairness, respect, and humility, students experience these values directly and make them part of their daily behavior.

The habit of good manners is also an important implication that can be applied in PAI learning (Sriwahyuni & Fakhruddin, 2025). Similar to the routine of pesantren *khidmah*, table manners, and speaking manners, schools can build moral habits through simple and consistent routines, such as greeting others, maintaining order in the classroom, maintaining cleanliness, being punctual, and good manners in speaking and interacting (Dian & Aceng, 2019; Mungaran, Hermawan, & Fakhruddin, 2023). Such habits serve as a *hidden curriculum* in the school context, namely an unwritten curriculum that shapes attitudes and character more effectively than formal commands (Ahmad, 2023; Fakhruddin, Anwar, & Fajar Islamy, 2025). Through consistent habits, moral values become automatic actions, not coercion (Aburaera, Rahmat, & Fakhruddin, 2024; Nasrudin & Fakhruddin, 2024). This *hidden curriculum* is the most important bridge between formally taught moral concepts and the natural internalization of values.

In addition to habit formation, PAI in schools can adopt the principle of *khidmah* through empathy-based social tasks (Asror Yusuf & Taufiq, 2020). The Ngaji Rasa practice places social experiences such as serving guests, helping in the kitchen, or working in the fields as formative experiences. In schools, this concept can be translated through social service activities, visits to orphanages, sharing programs, environmental service work, or community service projects (Setiawatri & Kosasih, 2019; Sinta, Fahrudin, Faqihuddin, & Nurhuda, 2024). Activities like these not only stimulate empathy but also strengthen moral reflection skills when accompanied by value discussions or reflective journals (Adrian, Supriadi, & Anwar, 2023). Thus, the value of social concern is no longer just a concept but

becomes a tangible experience that can be felt, reflected upon, and practiced again in students' lives.

A civilized classroom atmosphere is also a key implication that can be learned from Islamic boarding schools. In Ngaji Rasa, an atmosphere of calm, good manners, and respectful attitudes play a major role in shaping the character of students (Jusubaidi, Lindgren, Mujahidin, & Rofiq, 2024). In schools, the creation of a civilized classroom atmosphere can be achieved through the regulation of respectful interactions, the practice of non-violent conflict resolution, and the creation of an emotionally safe classroom space. A positive learning environment facilitates the internalization of values because students learn not only from the material, but also from the way the class regulates harmonious interactions. From the perspective of hidden curriculum theory, the classroom atmosphere is an "invisible teacher" that shapes moral behavior more strongly than formal instruction.

Overall, the implications of Ngaji Rasa for PAI in schools emphasize the need to place affective aspects at the core of learning, rather than as an addition. The application of spiritual reflection, value dialogue, non-theoretical tasks, and daily etiquette exercises allows the values of sincerity, discipline, responsibility, and empathy to grow through real and emotional experiences. By adopting the principles of Ngaji Rasa, namely experience, exemplary behavior, habit formation, atmosphere, and reflection, PAI can move from cognitive learning to holistic and transformative character education. This approach also bridges modern theories such as Kolb and Lickona with the *tajribi*-based Islamic pedagogical heritage, giving rise to a more humane, profound, and relevant model of religious learning for the lives of today's students.

## CONCLUSION

This study concludes that Ngaji Rasa is a model of character education based on inner experience that functions as *a hidden curriculum* in salaf pesantren. From the kyai's perspective, the pesantren curriculum not only includes the formal structure of learning the yellow book, but also hidden dimensions that take place through role modeling, habit formation, and the atmosphere of pesantren life. Ngaji Rasa fulfills the four main criteria of *the hidden curriculum*: it is unwritten and unscheduled, takes place naturally based on customs and atmosphere, is transmitted through the kyai-santri relationship, and shapes inner character, which includes manners, feelings, and sincerity.

The implementation of Ngaji Rasa takes place through the mechanism of kyai role models as *moral exemplars*, the habit of values through daily activities such as ro'an, khidmah, and congregational prayers, as well as direct experiences that involve the physical and spiritual dimensions of santri. The process of internalizing values is gradual, repetitive, and personal, creating a profound transformation of character. The contribution of Ngaji Rasa to character education is significant because it is able to foster sincerity, patience, humility, togetherness, and social responsibility through experiences that are felt directly, not just learned cognitively. Theoretically, Ngaji Rasa integrates the principle of *at-ta'lim at-tajribi* in classical Islamic tradition with Thomas Lickona's character education theory and David Kolb's *Experiential Learning*. This model proves that character education is effective when it touches on three dimensions simultaneously: *moral knowing*, *moral feeling*, and *moral action*, which occur simultaneously in pesantren life. The strength of Ngaji Rasa lies in its ability to shape character through holistic experiences that involve all aspects of the santri's life, rather than through formal instruction that is separate from practice.

The implications of this research for the development of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) in schools are very strategic. First, PAI needs to adopt an *experiential Islamic learning* approach that places experience as the main source of value internalization, not just theoretical learning. Second, teacher role modeling must be an integral part of PAI learning, where teachers act as figures who radiate values through consistent attitudes and behavior. Third, the habit of good manners in daily school activities needs to be developed as a form of *hidden curriculum* that shapes character naturally. Fourth, PAI learning can integrate social service projects and empathy-based activities to foster social awareness and responsibility. Fifth, creating a civilized, emotionally safe, and respectful classroom atmosphere is a prerequisite for the internalization of religious values.

This study recommends that the PAI curriculum in schools should not only be oriented towards cognitive achievement, but also strengthen the affective and spiritual dimensions through real experiences, value reflection, and the formation of a school culture based on exemplary role models. The Ngaji Rasa model can be adapted in the form of pesantren-based character building programs, training for PAI teachers on experience-based pedagogy, and the development of learning modules that integrate spiritual reflection and the practice of values. Thus, PAI learning can move from a knowledge transfer paradigm towards holistic, profound, and sustainable character transformation, in line with the vision of forming Pancasila Students who are virtuous and believe in God Almighty.

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