

LEARNING ETHICS IN THE QUR'AN: A *TAFSĪR* *TARBAWĪ* STUDY OF THE MOSES–KHIDR NARRATIVE IN Q.S. AL-KAHF [18]: 65–82

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Abstract: The ethics of learning constitute an essential aspect of Islamic education—particularly within *pesantren* (Islamic boarding schools)—which demands a balance between the mastery of knowledge and the cultivation of character. The narrative of Prophet Moses and al-Khidr in Q.S. Al-Kahf [18]: 65–82 provides a Qur’anic basis for examining these dimensions of learning. This study aims to analyze the ethics of learning in the narrative and their relevance to contemporary *pesantren* education through a *tafsīr tarbawī* approach. This research employs a qualitative, library-based study, utilizing *Tafsīr Ibn Kathīr* by Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Munīr* by Wahbah al-Zuhaylī, and *Tafsīr al-Miṣbāḥ* by M. Quraish Shihab. The methodology incorporates comparative textual analysis and thematic content analysis, informed by the concept of *adab al-ta’allum* and Zimmerman’s self-regulated learning framework. The findings reveal three main points in the story of Moses and Khidr. First, the exegetical interpretations emphasize humility, patience, sincerity, and respect for teachers, while highlighting the theological distinction between al-Khidr’s divinely authorized actions and ordinary educational authority. Second, Moses’s determination, ethical questioning, and subsequent understanding illustrate learning processes that can be conceptually related to forethought, performance, and self-reflection without reducing Qur’anic teachings to psychological theory. Third, these values can inform *pesantren* education through guided Qur’anic interpretation, respectful dialogue, reflective journals, and formative assessment that encourages ethical reasoning and intellectual responsibility. This study contributes a conceptual framework integrating Qur’anic learning ethics, *adab al-ta’allum*, and self-regulated learning to strengthen ethical and reflective educational practices in contemporary *pesantren*.

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Keywords: Educational Values, Learning Ethics, Moses–Khidr Narrative, Pesantren Education, *Tafsir Tarbawī*.

Abstrak: Etika belajar menjadi aspek penting dalam pendidikan Islam, khususnya di pesantren, yang menuntut adanya keseimbangan antara penguasaan ilmu dan pembentukan karakter. Penelitian ini bertujuan menganalisis nilai-nilai etika belajar dalam kisah Nabi Musa dan Khidir pada Q.S. Al-Kahf [18]: 65–82 serta relevansinya terhadap pendidikan pesantren kontemporer melalui pendekatan *tafsir tarbawī*. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif berbasis studi pustaka dengan merujuk pada *Tafsir Ibn Kathīr* karya Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsir al-Munīr* karya Wahbah al-Zuhayli, dan *Tafsir al-Misbāh* karya M. Quraish Shihab. Metode yang diterapkan mencakup analisis tekstual komparatif dan analisis konten tematis, yang didukung oleh konsep *adab al-ta'allum* dan teori *self-regulated learning* Zimmerman. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan tiga temuan utama dalam kisah Musa dan Khidir. Pertama, kisah Musa dan Khidir mengandung nilai kerendahan hati, kesabaran, keikhlasan, penghormatan kepada guru, dan tanggung jawab moral dalam belajar. Kedua, proses pembelajaran Musa mencerminkan pentingnya perencanaan, pengendalian diri, dan refleksi, sedangkan tindakan luar biasa Khidir tidak dapat dijadikan pembenaran bagi praktik pendidikan pada umumnya. Ketiga, nilai-nilai tersebut relevan untuk penguatan pendidikan karakter santri melalui dialog etis, pembelajaran reflektif, dan penilaian formatif. Penelitian ini berkontribusi dengan menawarkan kerangka konseptual yang mengintegrasikan etika belajar Qur'ani, *adab al-ta'allum*, dan regulasi diri dalam belajar untuk memperkuat pendidikan pesantren yang berorientasi pada karakter dan tanggung jawab intelektual.

Kata-kata Kunci: Etika Belajar, Kisah Musa–Khidir, Nilai-Nilai Pendidikan, Pendidikan Pesantren, *Tafsir Tarbawī*.

Introduction

Learning ethics constitutes a fundamental foundation of Islamic education (Fuadhah 2024, 127–28), particularly within the context of *pesantren*, which emphasize character formation and the cultivation of noble morals (*akhlāq*) (Besari 2022, 17–36). Education is not merely oriented toward the transmission of knowledge but also toward fostering students' proper conduct (*adab*) toward their teachers, knowledge, and the learning process itself. Within the Islamic intellectual tradition, success in the pursuit of knowledge is strongly influenced by the ethical values cultivated from the very beginning of the learning journey (Triani et al. 2024). Therefore, fostering ethical learning attitudes among *santri* (students at Islamic boarding schools) is an indispensable component of the *pesantren* educational system. In this context, learning ethics should be understood not merely as prescribed behavioral rules but as an integral dimension of intellectual, moral, and spiritual development.

One of the Qur'anic narratives that offers profound insights into the ethics of learning is the story of Prophet Moses (Mūsā) and al-Khidr in Q.S. Al-Kahf [18]: 65–82 (Rahmawati 2016, 97–100). This narrative is far more than a historical account; it is rich with educational values, particularly concerning the relationship between teacher and learner. Prophet Moses, in his role as a learner, exemplifies a strong commitment to the pursuit of knowledge while simultaneously revealing human limitations, including impatience and incomplete understanding (Syaiqhu 2010, 55–59). Conversely, al-Khidr represents an educator whose distinctive

pedagogical approach challenges learners to recognize the limitations of immediate judgment and to develop a deeper understanding through experience and reflection (Hanifah et al. 2023, 88–102). The narrative thus raises an important educational question concerning how learners can maintain patience, humility, and ethical responsibility without suppressing intellectual curiosity and the desire to understand.

This narrative offers important lessons on how seekers of knowledge should prepare themselves spiritually and mentally to comprehend knowledge that transcends ordinary human perception. Humility, patience, and sincerity emerge as essential virtues that every *santri* should cultivate throughout the learning process (Ferihana and Rahmatullah 2023, 3627–47). These values remain relevant to contemporary *pesantren* education, particularly in relation to learning discipline, self-awareness, and ethical conduct toward educators. Rather than assuming a general decline in students' morality, existing empirical research offers a more specific basis for examining these educational concerns. A study investigating the relationship between the Islamic boarding school environment, the study of *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim*, self-awareness, and students' moral conduct toward teachers provides an empirical perspective on these issues (Nurhidayah and Choiri 2024, 609–21). The research suggests that ethical learning behavior is connected not only to religious instruction but also to educational environments and learners' self-awareness. Similarly, another study emphasized the significance of teachers' exemplary behavior in cultivating *adab* among *santri* (Ferihana and Rahmatullah 2023, 3627–47). These findings indicate that learning ethics can be examined as both normative educational values and observable aspects of educational practice. Nevertheless, the findings should be understood within their respective institutional contexts rather than generalized to all *pesantren*.

The relationship between ethical conduct and learning behavior can also be examined through contemporary educational theory. Self-regulated learning is conceptualized as a cyclical process involving forethought, performance, and self-reflection (Zimmerman 2002, 64–70). This framework emphasizes learners' active involvement in setting goals, regulating their behavior, and evaluating their learning experiences. These dimensions provide a complementary perspective for examining the educational dynamics represented in the Mūsā–al-Khiḍr narrative, particularly the learner's commitment to seeking knowledge, the challenges of maintaining patience, and the development of reflective understanding. However, the application of this framework does not imply that Qur'anic ethical principles and contemporary psychological theories are identical. Instead, it allows for a conceptual comparison between two distinct intellectual traditions while preserving the normative and spiritual dimensions of Islamic learning ethics.

Accordingly, the *tafsir tarbawī* (educational interpretation of the Qur'an) approach is highly relevant for exploring the educational values embedded within

these verses. As an interpretive approach that examines the Qur'an through an educational lens, *tafsīr tarbawī* enables scholars not only to understand the literal meaning of the text but also to uncover its pedagogical values and practical implications for educational contexts (Mirza and Assyah 2025, 303). Through this approach, the narrative of Prophet Moses and al-Khiḍr can be examined through the interpretations of Ibn Kathīr, M. Quraish Shihab, and Wahbah al-Zuḥaylī. These exegetical works constitute the primary textual basis for identifying the educational and ethical meanings of the narrative, while the concepts of *adab al-ta'allum* and self-regulated learning provide complementary analytical perspectives for examining their contemporary relevance.

Previous studies have investigated the educational dimensions of the Mūsā–al-Khiḍr narrative through various approaches. The contextualization of Q.S. Al-Kahf [18]: 66–82 within contemporary education has been discussed in previous research (Rahmawati 2016, 90–108). The learning process represented in the encounter between Mūsā and al-Khiḍr has also been examined (Syaiḵhu 2010). Other studies explored the educational implications of the narrative, including educational objectives, teacher and learner characteristics, instructional methods, and educational media (Fauziah and Rizal 2019, 33–43). Its moral educational messages have also been analyzed through a prophetic perspective (Hanifah et al. 2023, 88–102). More recently, the values of seeking knowledge have been investigated through a comparative examination of *Tafsīr Ibn Kathīr* and al-Ghazālī's *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn* (Musaffa and Abidin 2025, 23–31). These studies demonstrate that the narrative has received substantial attention in Islamic educational scholarship, particularly in relation to the identification of moral values and pedagogical principles.

A related body of scholarship has addressed learning ethics and character formation within Islamic education. The effectiveness of Islamic boarding schools in developing students' character has been examined in previous research (Besari 2022, 17–36). The cultivation of *adab* through teachers' exemplary conduct has also been discussed (Ferihana and Rahmatullah 2023, 3627–47), while the concept of learning ethics in Q.S. Al-Mujādalah [58]: 11 has been examined through the interpretations of Indonesian Qur'anic scholars (Triani et al. 2024). Furthermore, the educational interpretation of the Qur'an in relation to moral development has been investigated (Mirza and Assyah 2025, 301–12). These studies demonstrate the importance of connecting Islamic ethical values with educational practices, although they differ in their textual objects, theoretical perspectives, and educational contexts.

Taken together, previous scholarship can be classified into three main orientations: studies examining educational values in the Mūsā–al-Khiḍr narrative, studies investigating ethical formation within Islamic educational institutions, and theoretical discussions of learning behavior. Although these studies provide

valuable insights, the literature examined here leaves room for a more systematic investigation of how Qur'anic learning ethics can be interpreted in relation to contemporary concepts of motivation, behavioral self-regulation, and reflective understanding. The research gap therefore concerns not the absence of studies on the educational values of the narrative, but the need for a more explicit conceptual relationship between exegetical interpretations, Islamic learning ethics, and contemporary educational theory.

Based on this gap, the present study proposes an analytical framework integrating *tafṣīr tarbawī*, *adab al-ta'allum*, and Zimmerman's theory of self-regulated learning. Its proposed novelty lies in developing a conceptual dialogue between Qur'anic learning ethics and contemporary theories of learning behavior while maintaining the distinct epistemological foundations of each framework. Rather than merely identifying values such as patience, humility, and respect, the study examines how these ethical principles may be understood in relation to learning intention, behavioral regulation, and reflective understanding. The contribution is therefore directed toward the recontextualization of Qur'anic learning ethics through a theoretically informed interpretation of the Mūsā-al-Khiḍr narrative.

Accordingly, this study aims to examine the ethical and pedagogical dimensions of the Mūsā-al-Khiḍr narrative in Q.S. Al-Kahf [18]: 65–82 through selected classical and contemporary Qur'anic commentaries. Specifically, the study addresses three interrelated questions: (1) What learning ethics are represented in the narrative according to the selected exegetical sources? (2) How can these ethical values be interpreted through *adab al-ta'allum* and Zimmerman's theory of self-regulated learning? (3) What conceptual implications do these interpretations offer for contemporary *pesantren* education? By addressing these questions, the study seeks to contribute to Qur'anic educational scholarship by offering a conceptual understanding of learning ethics that integrates spiritual responsibility, moral discipline, and reflective engagement with knowledge.

Narrative Structure and *Asbāb al-Nuzūl* of the Moses–Khiḍr Story (Q.S. Al-Kahf [18]: 65–82)

The story of Prophet Moses and Khiḍr in Q.S. Al-Kahf [18]: 65–82 forms part of the broader Qur'anic narratives (*qāṣaṣ al-Qur'ān*), which encompass not only historical accounts but also profound educational and spiritual messages. The narrative should nevertheless be distinguished from reports concerning the circumstances surrounding the revelation of Q.S. Al-Kahf [18] as a whole. Reports about questions posed to the Prophet Muhammad by the Quraysh, following consultation with Jewish scholars, concern the broader revelatory context and should not automatically be treated as a specific, independently established *sabab al-nuzūl* for verses 65–82 (Muhibudin et al. 2021, 82–83).

The distinction is methodologically important because the present study

examines the educational meaning of the Qur'anic narrative rather than reconstructing the historical circumstances of revelation. The relevant textual unit begins with the encounter between Moses and a servant upon whom Allah bestowed mercy and knowledge (Q.S. Al-Kahf [18]: 65). Nevertheless, verses 60–64 provide necessary narrative background by describing Moses's determination to reach the meeting place. Thus, the interpretation focuses on verses 65–82 while referring to verses 60–64, which clarify the development of the story (Aidriya 2021, 308–23).

From a narrative perspective, this account exhibits a distinctive structure that conveys profound insights into the methodology of learning and education. The narrative begins with Prophet Moses's determination to seek a servant of Allah who possessed knowledge beyond his own in a particular domain. It continues with Moses's journey alongside his companion, Yūsha' ibn Nūn (Joshua), their encounter with Khidr at the junction of the two seas, and three seemingly perplexing events that unfold during their companionship: the damaging of a boat, the killing of a young boy, and the reconstruction of a wall without requesting any compensation. Each of these incidents prompts Moses to question Khidr's actions, culminating in Khidr's explanation that they were carried out by divine instruction and based on knowledge granted by Allah that had not been revealed to Moses at that time (Yuliandi 2023, 50–60).

The narrative can be organized into four interconnected stages. The first is the encounter and request for instruction (verses 65–66). The second is the negotiation of the learning relationship, particularly the conditions concerning patience and questioning (verses 67–70). The third consists of the three incidents and Moses's responses (verses 71–77). The fourth is the disclosure of explanations and the conclusion of their companionship (verses 78–82). This sequence makes it possible to analyze the narrative as an educational interaction without treating its extraordinary events as ordinary instructional activities.

This narrative structure illustrates the complex dynamics of the teacher–student relationship within the educational process. Moses is portrayed as a sincere and intellectually curious learner who is eager to understand but has not yet grasped the deeper wisdom underlying his teacher's actions. In contrast, Khidr exemplifies an educator who does not impart knowledge through immediate explanation but instead employs an approach resembling experiential learning, allowing lessons to emerge through meaningful experiences whose significance becomes clear only at the appropriate moment (Jawad 2015; Asfia 2021).

The term experiential learning, however, is employed here as a contemporary analytical comparison rather than as a direct description supplied by the Qur'anic text. Previous studies have already explored the narrative's educational methods and experiential dimensions (Fauziah and Rizal 2019, 33–43; Yulianti et al. 2023, 65–77). The distinctive concern of the present analysis is how the narrative relates

experience to ethical inquiry, intellectual humility, and the limits of educational authority.

The strength of this narrative also lies in its progressive structure, which portrays learning as a process of gradual development through experience. The three incidents represent successive stages of instruction that become increasingly complex and progressively test Moses's patience and understanding. This sequence ultimately leads to the narrative climax: the separation between Moses and Khidr, followed by the disclosure of the divine wisdom underlying Khidr's seemingly inexplicable actions.

Yet the progressive arrangement does not establish that every event represents a transferable teaching method. The Qur'anic account distinguishes the information initially available to Moses from the extraordinary knowledge granted to al-Khidr. The statement in verse 82 that al-Khidr did not act on his own initiative provides a necessary interpretive boundary. Accordingly, the educational significance of the narrative lies in the interaction between incomplete knowledge, ethical judgment, patience, and subsequent explanation, while the actions themselves remain specific to their divinely guided context.

Classical and Contemporary Exegetical Interpretations of Q.S. Al-Kahf [18]: 65–82

The narrative of Prophet Moses and Khidr in in Q.S. Al-Kahf [18]: 65–82 has attracted considerable attention from Qur'anic exegetes from the classical to the contemporary period. Classical commentators often emphasized themes of piety, obedience to Allah, and the limitations of human reason in comprehending divine wisdom and decree. Contemporary exegetes have also adopted contextual and multidisciplinary approaches, including *tafṣīr tarbawī* (educational exegesis), to uncover the pedagogical values embedded within this narrative (Dewi 2024, 73–80).

This distinction between classical and contemporary interpretation should not be understood as an absolute division. Classical commentaries also contain educational insights, while contemporary commentaries remain deeply connected to theological and textual traditions. The more productive comparison concerns the specific emphases, interpretive arguments, and educational implications found in each commentary. For this reason, the present study compares Ibn Kathīr, Wahbah al-Zuhaylī, and M. Quraish Shihab rather than treating classical and contemporary exegesis as mutually exclusive approaches.

In the classical exegetical tradition, particularly in *Tafṣīr Ibn Kathīr*, these verses are interpreted by emphasizing the exceptional nature of the divinely bestowed knowledge (*ʿilm ladunnī*) granted to Khidr, who is described as one of Allah's servants upon whom We bestowed mercy and to whom We imparted knowledge from Ourselves. Ibn Kathīr further relates this narrative to an authentic

prophetic tradition (*ḥadīth*) stating that Prophet Moses set out in search of Khidr after assuming that he was the most knowledgeable among humankind. This interpretation highlights the virtues of humility, sincerity, and intellectual openness in the pursuit of knowledge, as exemplified by Moses's willingness to learn from someone whom Allah had endowed with a different form of knowledge (Dimasyqi 2015, 552).

Ibn Kathīr's commentary on verse 66 is especially relevant to the ethics of learning because it emphasizes the gentle manner in which Moses requests permission to follow al-Khidr. This explanation grounds the educational value of respect in the wording and manner of the learner's request, not simply in later expectations of obedience (Dimasyqi 2015, 580–81). His discussion of verse 82, meanwhile, emphasizes that al-Khidr's extraordinary actions were not undertaken through independent personal judgment (Dimasyqi 2015, 576). Taken together, these interpretations support both the ethical responsibility of the learner and the exceptional theological character of the teacher's actions.

In *Tafsīr al-Munīr*, Wahbah al-Zuhaylī approaches these verses from legal, social, and ethical perspectives. His interpretation extends beyond the literal meaning of each event by relating the narrative to the fundamental principles of Islam, particularly the importance of acting in accordance with Allah's commands, even when such commands may appear incomprehensible from a purely human perspective. Al-Zuhaylī also emphasizes that the relationship between Moses and Khidr exemplifies the learner's commitment to following the teacher's guidance and the agreed conditions of learning, especially when confronted with lessons whose wisdom is not immediately apparent (Zuhaili 2016, 279–307). For the present study, this interpretation is relevant to the ethical dimensions of the learning agreement in verses 69–70 and the learner's difficulty in maintaining that agreement during the subsequent events. Nevertheless, adherence to legitimate guidance must be distinguished from unconditional obedience to ordinary teachers. The theological circumstances described in the narrative cannot be transferred without qualification to contemporary educational institutions.

Meanwhile, contemporary exegesis, such as *Tafsīr al-Miṣbāḥ* by M. Quraish Shihab, adopts a more communicative and pedagogical approach. Shihab interprets Moses's journey with Khidr as an educational process that requires patience, humility, and psychological readiness. His interpretation provides insights into the relationship between teacher and learner, particularly the role of experience in developing a deeper understanding of knowledge whose meaning is not immediately apparent (Shihab 2002, 92–111).

This educational reading provides a possible point of comparison with the relationship between initial interpretation and retrospective explanation in the Qur'anic narrative. The foregoing discussion of both classical and contemporary Qur'anic exegesis demonstrates that each approach makes a significant

contribution to understanding the narrative of Moses and Khidr. Classical *tafsir* provides a strong textual and theological foundation, whereas contemporary *tafsir* offers additional contextual and practical perspectives, particularly in relation to educational practices and the teacher–student relationship in the modern era.

The comparison suggests three analytical concerns that guide the subsequent discussion: the ethical manner in which knowledge is sought, the regulation of learner responses during uncertainty, and the distinction between legitimate educational authority and extraordinary divine authorization. These concerns provide a more precise foundation for examining the narrative through *tafsir tarbawī*, *adab al-ta'allum*, and self-regulated learning.

Moses and Khidr: A Teacher–Student Paradigm

The narrative of Moses and Khidr in Q.S. Al-Kahf [18]: 65–82 presents not only a spiritual journey but also a profound depiction of the dynamics of the teacher–learner relationship. From the perspective of *tafsir tarbawī*, the two figures can be understood as representations of the learner and the educator, each possessing distinct characteristics and roles within the educational process (Jawad 2015).

Although Prophet Moses was a great prophet and the leader of the Children of Israel (*Banī Isrā'īl*), he is portrayed as a learner with a remarkable commitment to seeking knowledge. When informed that one of Allah's servants possessed a form of knowledge beyond his own, he declared his determination: "*I will not cease traveling until I reach the junction of the two seas, even if it takes me many years*" (Q.S. Al-Kahf [18]: 60). This attitude reflects humility and a steadfast commitment to the pursuit of knowledge—two essential qualities of an ideal learner. Nevertheless, throughout his journey with Khidr, Moses also reveals the limitations of a learner, particularly his impatience and his tendency to react to events that he could not immediately comprehend. This illustrates that the learning process requires not only enthusiasm and intellectual curiosity but also psychological preparedness, patience, and spiritual maturity (Fitrah 2019, 176–89; YZ et al. 2023, 205–12).

The educational significance of Moses's conduct is therefore twofold. His determination demonstrates active knowledge-seeking, while his subsequent responses reveal the difficulty of regulating judgment when confronted with unfamiliar circumstances. These dimensions can be examined through Zimmerman's distinction between forethought, performance, and self-reflection (Zimmerman 2002, 64–70). The framework is used as a complementary analytical perspective rather than as a replacement for the Qur'anic interpretation.

In contrast, Khidr is portrayed as a teacher endowed with divinely bestowed knowledge (*'ilm ladunni*), a form of knowledge that was not granted to Moses in the same manner. Khidr's character embodies wisdom, profound insight, and an unconventional pedagogical approach. From the outset of their encounter, he emphasizes the importance of patience and restraint in the learning process,

declaring, “*Indeed, you will never be able to remain patient with me*” (Q.S. Al-Kahf [18]: 67). These aspects of the narrative have been examined in studies of the Moses–Khidr interaction and the concept of divinely bestowed knowledge (Wahyudi 2023; Zahirulfath 2025).

The relationship is nevertheless more complex than an uncomplicated ideal of teacher authority. Moses agrees to a condition concerning the timing of questions, yet his objections arise from events with serious apparent moral consequences. The narrative thus brings educational trust into tension with ethical judgment. Any contemporary application must preserve the learner’s responsibility to evaluate actions and must not equate al-Khidr’s extraordinary divine knowledge with the authority of ordinary educators.

The relationship between Moses and Khidr provides important insights into educational interaction, despite the complexities and challenges that characterize their companionship. Moses demonstrates a willingness to learn and respond to Khidr’s explanations, while Khidr exercises authority through clearly established conditions and firm responses to the learner’s questions. Their interaction offers a basis for examining the importance of respectful communication, mutual understanding, and ethical responsibility within the teacher–learner relationship (Billah 2021; Abdusshomad 2018, 31–49; Tutuop and Sihotang 2023, 9613–29).

More precisely, the narrative provides a basis for examining the relationship between respectful communication, negotiated expectations, questioning, and the limits of understanding. The description of the encounter as a healthy educational relationship is therefore an interpretive conclusion rather than a direct empirical finding. It must be qualified by the exceptional theological status of the events, especially the killing of the young boy, which cannot serve as a pedagogical precedent.

Accordingly, Moses’s character reflects an exemplary learner who possesses a strong commitment to seeking knowledge while continuing to demonstrate the importance of cultivating *adab*. In contrast, Khidr represents an educator endowed with exceptional divine knowledge, whose interaction with Moses offers insights into patience, wisdom, and the conditions of learning. Together, their interaction provides a valuable source of reflection on Islamic educational ethics, particularly in fostering educational values among *santri* who aspire to become lifelong learners committed to both intellectual excellence and spiritual growth.

The broader implication, however, is not limited to *santri*. The narrative provides a conceptual basis for discussing learning ethics across educational contexts, while *pesantren* remains the institutional setting through which this study develops its practical recommendations. This distinction responds to the need to separate the general Qur’anic significance of learning ethics from its specific contextual application.

Moses as a Learner: Humility, Commitment to Seeking Knowledge, and Responses to the Unknown

Prophet Moses, as both a prophet and the bearer of a major divine law (*sharī'ah*), is portrayed in this narrative as exemplifying remarkable humility. Upon being informed that there was a servant of Allah, Khidr, who possessed knowledge that he himself did not have, Moses neither rejected this fact nor regarded himself as superior. Instead, he was determined to seek out Khidr and learn from him, saying: "*May I follow you so that you may teach me some of the right guidance of what you have been taught?*" (Q.S. Al-Kahf [18]: 66). This attitude reflects Moses's sincere commitment to the pursuit of knowledge and his recognition that Allah's knowledge is infinite and extends beyond the understanding of any individual, regardless of prophetic status or scholarly authority.

The wording of Moses's request is significant for understanding the ethical relationship between knowledge and authority. Ibn Kathīr interprets the request as an expression of gentleness and proper conduct in seeking instruction (Dimasyqi 2015, 580). Thus, the narrative does not present learning as the passive reception of knowledge. Moses takes the initiative to seek instruction while recognizing that the knowledge granted to him does not encompass everything known to another servant of Allah. This interpretation is consistent with earlier research identifying humility, determination, and respectful conduct among the educational values of the narrative (Fauziah and Rizal 2019, 33–43).

The distinction between knowledge and epistemic completeness also provides a basis for discussing intellectual humility. Intellectual humility involves acknowledging the limitations of one's knowledge while remaining open to further understanding. Moses's conduct illustrates that such humility need not undermine intellectual authority or personal initiative. Rather, recognition of incomplete knowledge becomes a reason for pursuing further learning. This perspective strengthens the concept of *adab al-ta'allum* by connecting humility with active knowledge-seeking rather than merely with outward deference.

From the perspective of self-regulated learning, Moses's determination can be compared with the forethought phase of the self-regulated learning process (Zimmerman 2002, 64–70). His decision to seek instruction reflects purposeful engagement and the formulation of a learning objective. However, this comparison remains conceptual: the theological significance of seeking divinely granted knowledge cannot be reduced to a modern psychological theory of motivation. The theoretical framework clarifies a dimension of learning behavior without replacing the normative meaning of the Qur'anic narrative.

Nevertheless, Moses also demonstrated immediate responses when confronted with events whose underlying reasons he did not yet understand. Throughout the three incidents that occurred during his journey with Khidr—the damaging of the boat, the killing of the young boy, and the restoration of the wall—Moses

repeatedly questioned and objected to Khidr's actions because their underlying wisdom had not yet been revealed to him. These responses illustrate the limitations of human understanding in comprehending divine wisdom and underscore the educational principle that not all knowledge can be immediately understood or explained. Furthermore, they demonstrate that learners, regardless of their level of knowledge or intellectual attainment, continue to require guidance, patience, and openness when encountering forms of knowledge that are unfamiliar or not yet fully comprehended (Mushodiq 2018, 69–97; Putri 2022, 87–103).

Nevertheless, Moses's objections should not be interpreted exclusively as evidence of impatience. His questions concerning the damaged boat and the killing of the young boy (Q.S. Al-Kahf [18]: 71, 74) arise from the apparent moral implications of those actions. The narrative therefore presents a tension between the commitment to observing an agreed learning procedure and the responsibility to evaluate conduct that appears ethically problematic. This tension is essential to educational interpretation because it prevents the concept of *adab* from being reduced to unquestioning obedience.

The concluding explanations in verses 79–82 disclose information that Moses did not possess during the events themselves. This distinction between initial judgment and subsequently available knowledge provides an interpretive basis for discussing reflective learning. Within the framework of self-regulated learning, the performance phase concerns the regulation of behavior during learning, whereas self-reflection concerns the evaluation of responses and outcomes (Zimmerman 2002, 64–70). The narrative may be brought into dialogue with these processes without assuming that it explicitly describes every stage of a modern psychological model.

Accordingly, the educational value of Moses's conduct lies in the interaction between intellectual humility, moral questioning, and reflective openness. An ethical learner should recognize the limits of existing knowledge without abandoning the responsibility of examining reasons and consequences. This interpretation extends previous studies of the narrative's educational values by examining how humility and questioning function together within the learning process (Fauziah and Rizal 2019, 33–43; Musaffa and Abidin 2025, 23–31).

Khidr as an Educator: Wisdom, Experiential Learning, and the Unveiling of Divine Wisdom

In this narrative, Khidr is portrayed as a wise and discerning educator who demonstrates an understanding of his learner's disposition. From the outset, he cautions Moses that he will not be able to remain patient in accompanying him (Q.S. Al-Kahf [18]: 67), thereby anticipating the challenges Moses may encounter in an unconventional learning experience. Rather than providing immediate explanations, Khidr allows Moses to witness a sequence of events before revealing

their underlying meanings. This narrative sequence can be understood through a perspective resembling experiential learning, in which experience, reflection, and subsequent explanation contribute to the development of understanding (Jawad 2015; Maimun 2017, 323–39).

The description of this approach as experiential learning requires analytical qualification. The Qur'anic narrative presents an agreement concerning the learning relationship (Q.S. Al-Kahf [18]: 69–70), a sequence of events that challenge Moses's initial understanding (verses 71–77), and retrospective explanations of those events (verses 79–82). These elements may be compared with experience-based learning, but the text does not explicitly formulate a modern pedagogical theory. Previous research has already identified experiential dimensions within the narrative (Yulianti et al. 2023, 65–77; Fauziah and Rizal 2019, 33–43). The present analysis therefore focuses on the ethical conditions surrounding experience and explanation rather than claiming that experiential learning is a newly discovered feature of the story.

The three incidents also demonstrate that experience alone is insufficient to produce understanding. Moses witnesses each event directly, yet the underlying circumstances remain inaccessible to him until al-Khiḍr provides further explanation. This sequence highlights the distinction between observing an action, interpreting its apparent meaning, and understanding the fuller context in which it occurred. Contemporary research on experiential learning similarly emphasizes the importance of instructional structure and reflection rather than treating direct experience as automatically educational (Duchatelet et al. 2024, 400–23).

Nevertheless, the theological nature of al-Khiḍr's knowledge places a decisive limit on contemporary pedagogical comparisons. In verse 82, al-Khiḍr states that his actions were not undertaken on his own initiative. Ibn Kathīr associates this statement with divine authorization rather than independent personal judgment (Dimasyqi 2015, 576). This explanation is crucial because it distinguishes the exceptional events of the narrative from the ordinary authority of teachers. In particular, the killing of the young boy cannot be treated as an educational method or invoked to justify harmful actions.

Khiḍr's actions, although seemingly controversial, are presented within the narrative as having underlying wisdom that becomes comprehensible through the explanations provided at the end of the journey. This narrative sequence offers a point of reflection on an important pedagogical principle: educators do not always need to provide complete explanations at the beginning of every learning activity. Instead, they may guide learners through structured experiences, inquiry, and critical reflection before facilitating a deeper understanding (Simarmata 2018, 72–82).

In contemporary education, the transferable principle concerns the relationship between structured inquiry and appropriate explanation. Teachers may encourage

learners to investigate a problem before presenting a conclusion, but instructional activities must remain safe, ethically justified, and responsive to learners' needs. The authority of ordinary educators cannot be equated with the divinely bestowed knowledge attributed to al-Khiḍr. This distinction preserves the theological specificity of the Qur'anic narrative while allowing its educational significance to be examined responsibly.

The educator's role can also be related to the development of self-regulated learning. Although self-regulated learning theory primarily describes processes undertaken by learners, educational guidance may support goal formulation, behavioral monitoring, and reflection (Zimmerman 2002, 64–70). In this sense, the narrative encourages reflection on how teachers establish expectations, respond to learners' difficulties, and facilitate understanding. It does not justify treating teacher authority as beyond questioning or ethical accountability.

Thus, al-Khiḍr's educational significance lies not in the direct imitation of his extraordinary actions, but in the narrative's presentation of guidance, uncertainty, and retrospective explanation. This interpretation brings the exegetical account into dialogue with contemporary learning theory while preserving the distinction between divine knowledge and ordinary pedagogical practice.

Educational Values: Patience, Obedience, Sincerity, Reverence for the Teacher, and Learning from What is Not Immediately Understood

The narrative of Moses and Khiḍr embodies a rich array of educational values that remain highly relevant to contemporary educational practice, particularly in the formation of students' character within *pesantren*. Among these values, patience emerges as a central virtue, repeatedly emphasized throughout the dialogue between Moses and Khiḍr. In the educational context, patience is an essential quality for both learners and educators, as the process of acquiring knowledge is often gradual, demanding, and not always immediately comprehensible (Wahiddin 2021; Mulasi et al. 2023, 180–95). The significance of patience becomes clearer when Q.S. Al-Kahf [18]: 67–68 is read in relation to the subsequent events. Al-Khiḍr anticipates that Moses will find it difficult to remain patient with matters whose full explanation he does not possess. Patience therefore concerns not merely outward restraint but the challenge of responding to uncertainty. Earlier educational interpretations have similarly identified patience as a central value in the narrative (Fauziah and Rizal 2019, 33–43; Yulianti et al. 2023, 65–77).

In conceptual dialogue with self-regulated learning, patience can be associated with sustained engagement and behavioral monitoring during demanding learning activities (Zimmerman 2002, 64–70). Nevertheless, the ethical meaning of patience cannot be reduced to silence or the suspension of judgment. Moses's questions show that patience and moral concern may come into tension when a learner encounters actions that appear objectionable. This relationship suggests

that patience should be understood as the capacity to regulate responses while remaining attentive to ethical considerations. Within educational practice, such regulation enables learners to approach unfamiliar knowledge with openness without abandoning their responsibility to question actions that raise legitimate moral concerns.

Second, obedience is exemplified by Moses's willingness to accompany Khidr despite not fully understanding the rationale behind his teacher's actions. This reflects the importance of trust in legitimate educational guidance, particularly in the pursuit of knowledge that involves spiritual insight and personal development (Gunawan and Rantika 2025, 1–11). However, obedience must be interpreted within the theological context of the narrative. The learning agreement between Moses and al-Khidr does not establish unconditional authority for ordinary teachers. The extraordinary actions are explicitly distinguished from independent personal judgment in Q.S. Al-Kahf [18]: 82. Accordingly, the educational implication is responsible adherence to legitimate guidance, accompanied by recognition of the ethical limits of educational authority (Dimasyqi 2015, 576).

Third, sincerity constitutes the foundation of Moses's motivation for learning. His journey can be understood as an expression of a genuine desire to acquire knowledge rather than the pursuit of recognition or personal status. Within the tradition of *adab al-ta'allum*, sincerity (*ikhblās*) concerns the ethical orientation of seeking and using knowledge. This value may be brought into dialogue with purposeful learning goals, although religious sincerity and psychological motivation are not equivalent concepts. The significance of this distinction is that Islamic learning ethics address not only whether learners persist in educational tasks but also the moral purposes toward which their learning is directed. In the context of *pesantren*, sincerity therefore provides a normative foundation for understanding the pursuit of knowledge as an intellectual and spiritual responsibility rather than merely an instrument for personal achievement.

Fourth, reverence for the teacher (*ta'ẓīm*) is evident in Moses's conduct. Although he questioned Khidr's actions on several occasions, his initial request to learn demonstrates respectful communication and recognition of his teacher's knowledge. The wording of Moses's request in Q.S. Al-Kahf [18]: 66 provides a particularly important basis for this value. Ibn Kathīr interprets the request as an example of gentleness in seeking instruction (Dimasyqi 2015, 580–81). This suggests that reverence is expressed through respectful communication and recognition of legitimate expertise rather than through the elimination of critical inquiry. The distinction is important because a learner may ask substantive questions without necessarily displaying disrespect. The relationship between respect and ethical conduct is also relevant to contemporary *pesantren* research. A previous study examined the relationships among the boarding school environment, instruction in *Ta'līm al-Muta'allim*, self-awareness, and moral conduct toward teachers

(Nurhidayah and Choiri 2024, 609–21). This study supports the importance of examining educational ethics within institutional and instructional contexts rather than treating ethical behavior solely as an individual disposition. Nevertheless, its empirical findings cannot be used to establish that unquestioning obedience is a necessary condition of respectful learning.

Finally, this narrative demonstrates that learners may encounter knowledge and experiences whose full significance is not immediately apparent. Such experiences invite intellectual humility (*tawāduʿ*), patience, and openness to deeper understanding, while preserving the responsibility to evaluate actions within their proper ethical and theological contexts. Collectively, these educational values provide a framework for character formation, encouraging students in *pesantren* to develop intellectual competence, spiritual maturity, and ethical responsibility. The relationship between humility and reflective learning also suggests that learners should recognize the limitations of their immediate interpretations and remain willing to reconsider their understanding when additional information becomes available. This perspective connects the ethical dimensions of the narrative with broader educational concerns regarding responsible inquiry and the development of reflective judgment.

The educational values identified in the narrative can therefore be organized into five interconnected dimensions: purposeful intention, intellectual humility, patience in inquiry, respectful critical engagement, and reflective evaluation. These dimensions clarify how the values function within learning rather than merely presenting them as a list of virtues. In this synthesis, *tafsīr tarbawī* grounds the interpretation in the Qurʾanic text, *adab al-taʿallum* clarifies the normative responsibilities of learners and educators, and self-regulated learning provides a complementary perspective on the processes of goal-directed engagement and reflection (Zimmerman 2002, 64–70). Through this integrated perspective, the educational values of the Moses–Khidr narrative can be understood not only as moral teachings but also as a conceptual foundation for examining ethical learning behavior in contemporary Islamic educational institutions.

The Urgency of Reconstructing Learning Ethics in the Spiritual and Emotional Dimensions

Contemporary educational settings, including *pesantren*, face the continuing task of integrating intellectual development, ethical formation, and spiritual maturity. Rather than assuming that *pesantren* generally prioritize cognitive achievement at the expense of moral education, this study treats such integration as an educational objective requiring deliberate curricular and pedagogical attention. Existing studies of Islamic learning ethics, character formation, and educational institutions provide a basis for examining how institutional environments and educational practices contribute to moral development (Bashori 2017, 47–60; Ferihana and Rahmatullah 2023, 3627–47; Nurhidayah and Choiri 2024, 609–21).

This perspective emphasizes the importance of understanding Islamic education as a process that develops intellectual competence alongside moral responsibility and spiritual awareness.

While cognitive competence remains essential to education, cognitive development alone cannot foster learners' holistic formation. The narrative of Moses and Khidr shows that learning is a comprehensive process that includes intellectual growth alongside spiritual and emotional development. Despite his prophetic status, Moses encountered situations that tested his patience, humility, and willingness to recognize the limits of his understanding. These qualities extend beyond intellectual capability to the cultivation of ethical awareness and spiritual maturity. The narrative therefore suggests that meaningful learning requires the refinement of one's character alongside the acquisition of knowledge. This relationship becomes evident in the narrative sequence: Moses begins with a purposeful commitment to learning (Q.S. Al-Kahf [18]: 66), encounters events that challenge his existing understanding (verses 71–77), and receives explanations that disclose information previously unavailable to him (verses 79–82). This sequence suggests that intellectual engagement, emotional regulation, and reflective understanding are interconnected educational processes. Previous studies have identified experiential engagement and character formation as important educational implications of the narrative (Fauziah and Rizal 2019, 33–43; Yulianti et al. 2023, 65–77).

Accordingly, the ethics of learning in Islam should not be confined to cognitive attainment but should also incorporate sincerity of intention (*ikhhlās*), patience in confronting uncertainty and the limitations of one's knowledge, and profound respect for both the learning process and the teacher. These ethical values constitute essential elements of spiritual formation and character development, thereby reinforcing the Islamic educational ideal of nurturing individuals who are intellectually competent, spiritually grounded, and morally responsible. In contemporary *pesantren* education, this perspective encourages a renewed emphasis on the integration of knowledge acquisition and ethical cultivation. Mastery of classical Islamic texts or theoretical knowledge alone does not automatically ensure the development of learning ethics; *santri* must also cultivate intellectual humility, patience, sincerity (*ikhhlās*), and a genuine commitment to the learning process. These virtues are consistent with the tradition of *adab*-based education within Islamic boarding schools (Rahmawati et al. 2025).

The contribution of the present analysis lies in connecting these ethical values to identifiable learning processes. Purposeful intention informs the orientation of learning goals; patience supports sustained engagement; intellectual humility encourages recognition of incomplete understanding; respectful questioning supports responsible inquiry; and reflection enables learners to reconsider initial interpretations. These relationships can be examined through the complementary

perspective of self-regulated learning, particularly its phases of forethought, performance, and self-reflection (Zimmerman 2002, 64–70). Through this conceptual relationship, the educational values of the Moses–Khidr narrative can be understood not merely as abstract moral principles but also as a framework for examining the ethical dimensions of learning behavior. Nevertheless, the application of self-regulated learning theory remains an analytical comparison rather than an assertion that contemporary psychological concepts are explicitly formulated within the Qur’anic narrative.

Therefore, an educational approach that integrates spiritual and emotional dimensions alongside intellectual development is important for nurturing well-rounded learners. Such an approach aims to strengthen cognitive competence while encouraging inner tranquility, moral integrity, and emotional maturity. Ultimately, it may support the development of *santri* who possess strong character and are capable of contributing positively to their communities, thereby reflecting the broader objectives of Islamic education. These outcomes, however, should be understood as educational aspirations rather than empirically established effects of the proposed model. The present study is based on textual and conceptual analysis. Its contribution is to identify a possible framework for integrating Qur’anic learning ethics into educational objectives and practices, while the effectiveness of particular interventions remains a question for subsequent empirical research.

Implementing the Educational Values of the Moses–Khidr Narrative in Pesantren Education

The educational values embodied in the narrative of Moses and Khidr remain relevant to contemporary *pesantren* education, particularly in the formation of students’ character and learning ethics. First, appreciation for the learning process constitutes a fundamental value that should be cultivated among *santri* from the earliest stages of their education. Moses’s journey, characterized by determination, perseverance, and challenges encountered during his companionship with Khidr, illustrates that the pursuit of knowledge requires commitment, patience, and continuous self-discipline rather than an exclusive focus on immediate results. This perspective encourages *santri* to appreciate learning as a gradual process of intellectual and spiritual development (Pratiwi 2023; Muluk and Ar 2024, 118–30). In educational practice, this principle can be translated into a structured learning sequence. Before studying a text, students may formulate learning objectives and identify questions requiring investigation. During the learning process, they may monitor their understanding, document difficulties, and seek clarification. After completing the lesson, they may evaluate their initial interpretations and reflect on how their understanding has changed. These activities correspond conceptually to the phases of forethought, performance, and self-reflection in self-regulated learning (Zimmerman 2002, 64–70).

Second, learners should be encouraged to recognize the limitations of human

reason and the importance of intellectual humility. In educational environments increasingly influenced by digital access to information, students need to distinguish rapid information retrieval from carefully developed understanding. This concern does not imply that digital technology necessarily undermines *adab* or that digitally engaged *santri* generally lack patience. Rather, the educational challenge lies in cultivating critical evaluation and reflective understanding when information is readily available. Within Islamic scholarship, particularly in matters concerning wisdom (*hikmah*) and spiritual insight, understanding may require sustained reflection, contemplation, and engagement with knowledge rather than immediate intellectual comprehension. This perspective highlights the importance of epistemic humility and recognition of the limitations of human understanding (Amin 2018, 79–92; Sakti 2020). A practical application involves comparative *tafsir* activities focusing on Q.S. Al-Kahf [18]: 65–82. Students may identify the ethical issues presented in Moses's request for instruction and his responses to the three incidents, then compare the interpretations of Ibn Kathīr, al-Zuhaylī, and M. Quraish Shihab. Through this activity, students are encouraged to distinguish theological, ethical, and educational emphases, support their interpretations with textual evidence, and acknowledge questions that remain unresolved. Intellectual humility thus becomes an active scholarly practice rather than a demand for passive acceptance.

Third, the narrative provides a basis for examining trust and respect within the teacher–learner relationship. In this context, *santri* should be encouraged to cultivate *ḥusn al-ẓann* (positive regard) and *ta'ẓīm* (respect) toward their teachers. These attitudes should not be understood merely as outward expressions of obedience but as recognition of the educator's responsibility to guide the learning process and facilitate the acquisition of knowledge. Respectful educational relationships can support intellectual development, spiritual discipline, and moral responsibility (Rosyidin 2021, 35–65; Khoirunnisa et al. 2023, 467–75). Nevertheless, the educational authority of ordinary teachers must remain subject to ethical responsibility and accountability. The extraordinary divine authorization described in Q.S. Al-Kahf [18]: 82 cannot be presumed to belong to contemporary educators. Accordingly, a learning environment informed by the narrative should provide opportunities for respectful questioning, clarification, and critical examination. Teachers should distinguish legitimate disagreement from disrespect and must not use the narrative to justify harmful or coercive practices.

These principles can be translated into four interconnected components of curriculum implementation. First, learning outcomes should explicitly incorporate ethical reasoning, respectful communication, and reflective judgment alongside cognitive competence. Second, instructional activities may include *halaqah*, guided Qur'anic interpretation, case-based discussions, and reflective journals. Third, educators should model patience, fairness, and openness to legitimate questions,

thereby demonstrating the ethical qualities expected of learners. Fourth, formative assessment should examine observable learning practices, including persistence, textual reasoning, respectful participation, and reflective engagement. Together, these components provide a possible framework for integrating Qur'anic learning ethics into instructional planning, classroom interaction, and assessment practices within *pesantren* education.

For example, students may be asked to compare the apparent moral implications of the three incidents in the Moses–Khidr narrative with the explanations provided in verses 79–82. They may then prepare a written reflection identifying what information was initially unavailable to Moses, why he questioned Khidr's actions, and why the exceptional divine context cannot be transferred directly to ordinary teaching practices. Through guided discussion, students can evaluate the relationship between incomplete knowledge, ethical judgment, and subsequent explanation. Teachers may assess the quality of textual reasoning, reflective understanding, and respectful argumentation without assigning numerical scores to the sincerity of students' inner faith. This approach allows learning ethics to be examined through observable educational practices while maintaining the distinction between external behavior and internal spiritual states.

The proposed model builds upon previous studies that have identified educational values and experiential dimensions within the Moses–al-Khidr narrative (Fauziah and Rizal 2019, 33–43; Yulianti et al. 2023, 65–77). Its distinctive contribution lies in translating ethical principles into learning objectives, instructional activities, and observable assessment indicators while preserving the exegetical and theological boundaries of the narrative. By integrating *tafsir tarbawi*, *adab al-ta'allum*, and self-regulated learning as complementary analytical perspectives, this study offers a conceptual framework for contextualizing Qur'anic learning ethics within contemporary *pesantren* education. Nevertheless, the model remains a conceptual proposal rather than an empirically tested intervention, and its practical effectiveness requires further investigation in educational settings.

Reconstructing Santri Character as Ethical Learners: Challenges and Strategies

Reconstructing *santri* characters as ethical learners presents significant challenges in the context of contemporary education. One potential challenge is an outcome-oriented approach to learning in which immediate achievement is valued more highly than sustained inquiry and reflection. Where such an orientation occurs, it may weaken opportunities to cultivate patience, diligence, and continuous self-improvement. However, this study does not assume that such tendencies characterize *pesantren* education generally, as their presence and extent require empirical investigation within particular educational institutions. Previous discussions of Islamic boarding school education and its development provide a broader context for understanding the challenges of maintaining character

formation alongside educational advancement (Fajrul 2022, 287–301).

The second challenge arises from the rapid expansion of digital technology and social media, which provides broader access to information while requiring learners to develop responsible information-evaluation practices, reflective habits, and appropriate communication. Digital technology should not be regarded as inherently incompatible with *adab*-based education. Rather, its educational implications depend on how digital resources are utilized and whether students are encouraged to examine the credibility, context, and limitations of information. The Moses–al-Khidr narrative provides a conceptual basis for discussing the risks of premature judgment. Moses responds to events according to the information initially available to him, while the concluding explanations disclose circumstances that transform his understanding. Applied cautiously to contemporary education, this principle encourages students to verify information, examine supporting evidence, and remain open to correction. Nevertheless, this comparison does not imply that ordinary educators possess hidden divine knowledge or that apparently harmful actions should be accepted without critical examination.

The third challenge concerns a reductionist understanding of knowledge that confines educational achievement to examination results, certification, or academic credentials. Such an instrumental orientation risks obscuring the broader purposes of learning in Islam, including worship (*ʿibādah*), spiritual refinement, moral responsibility, and the lifelong pursuit of wisdom. Consequently, reconstructing *santri* character requires more than curricular reform; it also involves strengthening educational values that integrate intellectual excellence with spiritual depth and ethical integrity. Addressing these challenges requires a structured and sustained approach to character education that connects normative Islamic teachings with observable educational practices.

Within the *pesantren* context, several strategic initiatives can be proposed. First, the cultivation of *adab* should begin at the earliest stages of *santri* education through structured activities such as *majelis adab* (ethical formation sessions) and *halaqah* (Islamic study circles) focusing on learning ethics. These activities may support the cultivation of moral awareness and spiritual values as integral dimensions of the educational experience. Previous research on character formation in Islamic boarding schools provides a relevant foundation for this approach (Harisa and Fitriyah 2025, 4819–29). To make these activities more operational, *majelis adab* and *halaqah* may incorporate discussions of educational cases involving respectful disagreement, conflicting interpretations, responsible use of digital information, and perseverance during difficult learning tasks. Students may be encouraged to formulate reasoned responses using Qurʾanic passages and relevant exegetical interpretations, while teachers provide feedback on textual reasoning, respectful communication, and openness to reconsidering initial judgments.

Second, exemplary role modeling by *ustaz* and *kiai* should be strengthened

because educators serve not only as transmitters of knowledge but also as examples of ethical conduct, intellectual integrity, and spiritual responsibility. Their attitudes and everyday behavior can contribute to shaping the character and learning dispositions of *santri*. Research on teacher professionalism and exemplary conduct provides a conceptual foundation for understanding this educational responsibility (Pratikno 2018). In practice, educators should demonstrate humility by acknowledging uncertainty when appropriate, explaining instructional decisions, responding respectfully to students' questions, and maintaining consistency between ethical principles and everyday conduct. These practices translate teacher exemplarity into observable educational behavior and distinguish legitimate pedagogical authority from demands for unquestioning obedience. The importance of exemplary conduct in cultivating *adab* among *santri* has also been discussed in previous research (Ferihana and Rahmatullah 2023, 3627–47).

Third, educational values derived from the Qur'an should be systematically integrated into the curriculum so that learning promotes intellectual achievement alongside spiritual formation, emotional maturity, and moral responsibility. This integration reflects the holistic objectives of Islamic education by connecting cognitive, affective, and spiritual dimensions of learning (Mirza and Wahyudi 2025, 255–60). A possible curriculum design would connect each ethical value with a corresponding learning activity and observable indicator. Patience may be cultivated through sustained textual investigation and assessed through learning persistence, while intellectual humility may be developed through comparative interpretation and acknowledgment of evidential limitations. Respectful inquiry may be practiced through structured dialogue, whereas reflective understanding may be documented through learning journals. These activities can be examined through the complementary perspective of self-regulated learning, particularly its emphasis on goal formulation, behavioral regulation, and reflection (Zimmerman 2002, 64–70), while their normative foundations remain rooted in Qur'anic teachings and *adab al-ta'allum*.

Finally, *pesantren* should cultivate a learning culture that values the educational process alongside its outcomes. Emphasizing perseverance, reflective inquiry, and continuous self-improvement may encourage *santri* to understand learning as a process of intellectual, ethical, and spiritual development rather than merely a means of obtaining academic credentials. Through these strategies, *santri* are expected to develop not only competence in Islamic knowledge but also the ethical dispositions necessary to contribute responsibly to their communities. The proposed reconstruction should therefore be understood as an effort to contextualize established Islamic learning ethics within contemporary educational processes rather than a rejection of *pesantren* traditions. Its contribution lies in connecting exegetically grounded ethical principles with purposeful learning, respectful inquiry, behavioral regulation, and reflective evaluation. Nevertheless,

the proposed strategies remain conceptual recommendations, and further field-based research is necessary to examine their feasibility and effectiveness within particular *pesantren* institutions.

Conclusion

The narrative of Prophet Moses and Khidr in Q.S. Al-Kahf [18]: 65–82 offers profound insights into the ethics of learning that remain highly relevant to contemporary *santri* education. Through a *tafsir tarbawī* approach, this study reveals that the Islamic concept of learning extends beyond the acquisition of knowledge to encompass the cultivation of *adab*, patience, sincerity (*ikhlas*), and deep respect for teachers. Moses, as the learner, exemplifies an earnest commitment to the pursuit of knowledge while demonstrating that intellectual aspiration must be accompanied by spiritual refinement and character development. Conversely, Khidr, as the teacher, embodies the qualities of a wise educator who employs experiential learning as a pedagogical approach to nurture deeper understanding and moral maturity. However, Moses's questions also reflect ethical awareness rather than merely impatience, while Khidr's extraordinary actions must be understood within their specific context of divine authorization and cannot be directly adopted as ordinary educational practices. Furthermore, the integration of *adab al-ta'allum* and Zimmerman's self-regulated learning framework highlights the relationship between purposeful learning, behavioral regulation, and reflective understanding without equating Qur'anic ethical teachings with modern psychological theory.

These educational values hold significant implications for the *pesantren* educational system. Their integration into teaching and learning practices can contribute to the development of *santri* who are not only intellectually competent but also spiritually grounded, ethically responsible, and endowed with noble character. In practical terms, these values may be incorporated through guided Qur'anic interpretation, reflective learning journals, respectful teacher–student dialogue, and formative assessments that emphasize perseverance, ethical reasoning, and self-reflection. Consequently, the narrative of Moses and Khidr provides a relevant Qur'anic framework for strengthening *adab*-based education and fostering the holistic formation of learners capable of responding to the moral and educational challenges of contemporary society.

Nevertheless, this study has several limitations. As a library-based and conceptual study, its findings are derived from textual analysis of selected classical and contemporary Qur'anic commentaries rather than direct observation of educational practices in *pesantren*. Furthermore, the proposed integration of Qur'anic learning ethics and self-regulated learning has not been empirically examined, limiting conclusions about its practical effectiveness across different educational settings. Future research is therefore recommended to conduct qualitative field studies in *pesantren* to investigate how teachers and *santri*

understand and practice these ethical values. In addition, classroom-based action research or mixed-methods studies could evaluate the implementation of reflective journals, guided discussions, and self-regulated learning strategies in fostering students' patience, intellectual humility, respectful questioning, and ethical learning behavior. Such investigations would provide empirical evidence to further develop and refine the conceptual framework proposed in this study.

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