

# Promoting Moral and Spiritual Transformation: The Role of *Pesantren Ramadan* Programs in Preventing and Addressing Bullying in Educational Settings

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## ABSTRACT

This study investigates the impact of the *Pesantren Ramadan* program on fostering empathy and reducing bullying in educational settings, addressing the need for values-based interventions in character education. The importance of examining this program lies in its potential to shape moral and spiritual character among students, which is crucial for creating a safer, more respectful school environment. A qualitative research approach was employed, involving observations of *Pesantren Ramadan* activities, in-depth interviews with a purposive sample of 10 teachers experienced in the program, and document analysis from schools implementing this initiative. Data were analyzed thematically using NVivo 12 software to identify key patterns and themes related to empathy and bullying behavior. The program combines worship activities and social events designed to cultivate empathy and social responsibility. Findings demonstrate that students who participate in the program show enhanced empathy towards peers and a noticeable reduction in bullying incidents, attributed to activities such as communal prayers, iftar sharing, and community service, which reinforce values of compassion, mutual respect, and support. Additionally, as part of the program's anti-bullying initiative, schools engage all members in a declaration against bullying, strengthening a collective commitment to respect and inclusion. The *Pesantren Ramadan* program, integrating both moral and spiritual activities, is shown to be an effective model for developing empathetic students and reducing bullying behavior. These findings suggest broader implications for educational policy and practice, offering a framework that could inspire similar values-based programs in other schools to enhance character education.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Bullying is a pervasive issue in educational settings worldwide, including in Indonesia, where it remains prevalent in both public and religious-based schools. This behavior can take various forms, including physical, verbal, social, and cyberbullying, each of which can severely impact the physical, emotional, and psychological well-being of students (Juvonen & Graham, 2014; Yuliana, Neviyarni, & Marlina, 2020). The effects of bullying are often long-lasting, potentially leading to mental health disorders, reduced academic performance, and social challenges that extend into adulthood (Prahardika, 2014). Despite the implementation of various anti-bullying programs, bullying remains a significant problem in Indonesian schools, indicating a need for more effective and culturally relevant interventions (Tosun, 2016; Vaillancourt et al., 2010). Many conventional anti-bullying programs focus primarily on behavior modification without deeply addressing the underlying moral and spiritual dimensions that may help sustain positive behavioral change. This gap suggests an opportunity for a more holistic approach to bullying prevention, particularly one that incorporates religious and character-building elements. Islamic education, with its emphasis on moral and spiritual values, offers a promising framework for addressing bullying. Programs that not only provide religious knowledge but also foster character development may help reduce bullying by instilling compassion, empathy, and social responsibility among students. Specifically, the *Pesantren Ramadan* program—a short-term, intensive Islamic learning experience held during the holy month of Ramadan—integrates worship and social activities that can promote empathy and discourage bullying behaviors (Efianingrum, Hanum, Cathrin, Maryani, & Wikandaru, 2023; Gao, Li, Wu, & Wang, 2023).

Bullying in educational environments is a deep and pervasive issue, with significant negative impacts on victims, such as reduced academic performance, mental health issues, and damaged social relationships. Research highlights the importance of understanding the factors that contribute to bullying behavior as a key to effective prevention (Pozzoli, Gini, & Vieno, 2012). School-based bullying prevention programs play a crucial role in reducing incidents of bullying, especially when these interventions incorporate moral and spiritual values that have been shown to reduce anxiety levels among teenage victims. By instilling these values, the *Pesantren Ramadan* program can function as both a preventative and therapeutic measure in reducing bullying in schools. Furthermore, prevention efforts can be enhanced by understanding the relationships between academic achievement, social support, and bullying behavior (Q. Xiong et al., 2020). Teachers' responses to bullying incidents are also crucial, as their actions can influence students' levels of moral disengagement (Campaert, Nocentini, & Menesini, 2017). A positive school environment that emphasizes personal values, reduces gender stereotypes, and fosters an anti-bullying climate is essential to prevent bullying and create a sense of security for all students (Bacchini, Esposito, Affuso, & Amodeo, 2021).

Bullying remains a prevalent issue across all educational environments, from elementary schools to universities, despite various anti-bullying programs being implemented. Many existing interventions are often short-term and fail to address the root causes of the problem, namely the lack of moral and spiritual values among students. Research has shown that school-based anti-bullying programs are vital in preventing conflicts among students, teachers, and parents, and in enhancing students' self-identity and healthy functioning (Lee, Kim, & Kim, 2015). However, the effectiveness of these programs can be limited by poor design and implementation (Cunningham et al., 2016). Successful intervention programs usually involve a whole-school approach, frequent bullying incident assessments, staff and parent involvement, leadership for program implementation, and integration of the program into the curriculum (Taneri, Özbek, & Akduman, 2021). Studies have highlighted the importance of developing anti-bullying programs with various components that include universal, selective, and indicated strategies to effectively address bullying (Bezerra et al., 2023). Furthermore, whole-school socio-ecological anti-bullying programs have been found effective in reducing bullying perpetration and victimization (Strohmeier, Stefanek, & Yanagida, 2023). The involvement of bystanders in anti-bullying interventions has also been emphasized as a key aspect of successful programs (Y. Xiong, 2023).

Islamic education, with its focus on moral and spiritual values, offers a unique approach to character building that can be highly effective in reducing bullying behavior. Unlike secular approaches that primarily address behavioral aspects, Islamic education integrates religious knowledge with character development, fostering spiritual and mental transformation in students (Crothers, Kolbert, & Barker, 2006; Faqihuddin & Romadhon, 2023; Noboru et al., 2021). This holistic approach shapes students to embody self-awareness, empathy, and social responsibility, making them less likely to engage in bullying (Haryanto & Ngarifin, 2022; Sani & Maharani Ekowati, 2020; Sholehuddin, Mucharomah, Atqia, & Aini, 2023; Supriadi, Islamy, & Faqihuddin, 2023). Programs like *Pesantren Ramadan* exemplify this model, combining spiritual practices with social activities that instill empathy and a sense of community among participants. Despite numerous studies on anti-bullying initiatives, few have examined religious-based programs like *Pesantren Ramadan* and their impact on bullying prevention. This research seeks to address this gap, highlighting how *Pesantren Ramadan* can create a safer and more supportive school environment by promoting empathy and reducing bullying through spiritual and moral education. While numerous studies have focused on secular anti-bullying programs, limited research has explored the impact of religious-based interventions like the *Pesantren Ramadan* program. This gap highlights the need to investigate how religious programs that emphasize moral and spiritual values can contribute to bullying prevention. This study addresses this gap by providing empirical evidence on the effectiveness of *Pesantren Ramadan* in fostering empathy and reducing bullying behavior, showcasing the potential of Islamic education to create a more supportive and harmonious school environment.

This research aims to explore the role of the *Pesantren Ramadan* program in preventing and addressing bullying in educational settings by integrating moral and spiritual approaches. The study provides a novel contribution to the field in two main ways. First, it presents the *Pesantren Ramadan* program as a dual-function intervention, offering both preventative and curative measures against bullying through values-based education. Second, this research utilizes a qualitative approach with in-depth data analysis using NVivo 12 software, allowing for a detailed exploration of patterns and themes that reveal the program's impact on student behavior. This approach is particularly suited to capturing the nuanced effects of spiritual and moral transformation, making it possible to demonstrate that religious-based interventions can be effective and sustainable in combating bullying. The findings from this study could influence educational policy and program development in both religious and secular contexts by highlighting the potential of values-based education. Additionally, this research may serve as a foundation for similar programs across other educational institutions, promoting a holistic approach to bullying prevention that incorporates moral and spiritual values. By demonstrating the effectiveness of the *Pesantren Ramadan* program, this study emphasizes the importance of adopting educational practices that foster empathy, social responsibility, and mutual respect among students.

## 2. METHODS

This study employs a qualitative research design to deeply understand how the *Pesantren Ramadan* program can enhance empathy and reduce bullying behavior in schools. The qualitative approach was chosen because it allows researchers to explore the experiences, perceptions, and interpretations of the subjects in a more profound and contextual manner. In this context, the researchers focus on the phenomena occurring in the daily lives of students and teachers during the *Pesantren Ramadan* program. This design not only relies on numeric data but also on rich narratives and descriptions, providing a comprehensive picture of the program's effects on the moral and spiritual aspects of students (Creswell, 2015; Hermawan, Nugraha, & Faqihuddin, 2024).

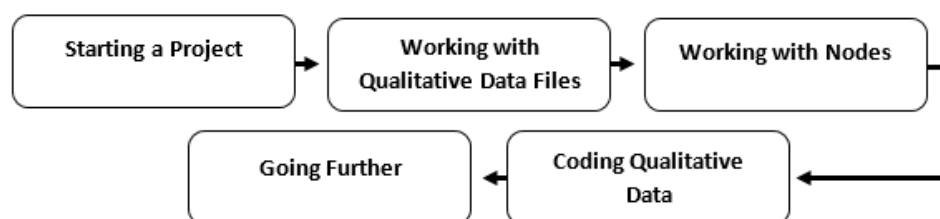
The subjects of this study are 10 teachers who are actively involved in the implementation of the *Pesantren Ramadan* program at their respective schools. These teachers were chosen through purposive sampling based on specific criteria, including a minimum of five years of teaching experience and direct involvement in designing, implementing, and evaluating the program. The participants include both program coordinators and supporting teachers to capture a range of perspectives on the program's impact. Selecting 10 teachers provides a sufficient sample size for this qualitative study, allowing for

in-depth exploration of diverse experiences while ensuring the ability to identify common themes and patterns. This sample size is adequate to capture the variability needed to understand the effectiveness of the program, as well as the challenges encountered during its implementation (Faqihuddin, 2024d). The study was conducted in a total of five middle schools and five high schools, all of which have implemented the *Pesantren Ramadan* program. These schools included a mix of public and religious institutions, providing a range of educational contexts that enrich the research findings. The selection of these diverse school types aimed to capture different perspectives on the program's impact across various educational settings. By incorporating insights from both middle and high school environments, the study was able to explore how the *Pesantren Ramadan* program influences students at different developmental stages, as well as how the program is adapted to suit the specific needs of each school type (Markula et al., 2023; Toft, Lindberg, & Hörberg, 2021).

**Table 1.** List of Respondents Participating in the Study

No	Participant ID	Category	Gender	Age
1	T1	Teacher	Male	56
2	T2	Teacher	Male	55
3	T3	Teacher	Male	33
4	T4	Teacher	Female	31
5	T5	Teacher	Male	43
6	T6	Teacher	Female	33
7	T7	Teacher	Male	29
8	T8	Teacher	Female	40
9	T9	Teacher	Male	35
10	T10	Teacher	Female	42

Research ethics were strictly maintained to ensure that participants felt comfortable and safe throughout the research process. Before conducting interviews and observations, researchers obtained written consent from all participants, and they were provided with complete information about the research objectives, procedures, and their rights, including the option to withdraw at any time without consequences. Data were collected through three primary methods: in-depth semi-structured interviews, observations, and document analysis. The semi-structured interviews, lasting approximately 45–60 minutes each, allowed participants to share their perceptions and experiences in a flexible format, while also enabling the researchers to explore specific topics related to the *Pesantren Ramadan* program. Observations focused on key activities within the program, such as group prayer, Quran recitation sessions, and social activities like shared meals, to understand how these interactions fostered empathy and other positive behaviors among students. Document analysis included reviewing program materials, activity reports, teacher reflections, and student feedback forms to gain a comprehensive understanding of the program's implementation and its impact on student behavior.



**Figure 1.** Workflow of Data Analysis Using NVivo Software AlYahmady & Al Abri (2013)

The research steps began with careful planning and preparation, including the development of interview instruments and observation guides tailored to capture relevant aspects of the *Pesantren Ramadan* program. Data collection was conducted through semi-structured interviews, detailed observations, and document analysis. After data collection, NVivo 12 software was used for systematic and in-depth data analysis. The analysis process started with transcribing the interviews and performing initial open coding to identify main themes. Using NVivo 12, the researchers applied a step-by-step coding process, beginning with line-by-line coding of interview transcripts to capture keywords and recurring ideas. This was followed by focused coding, which involved grouping similar codes and identifying broader thematic categories. Thematic visualization tools in NVivo, such as coding matrices and keyword searches, were then utilized to explore patterns and relationships within the data. These tools allowed the researchers to map connections between aspects of the *Pesantren Ramadan* program and observed impacts on empathy and bullying behavior among students. To ensure the validity of findings, data from interviews, observations, and documents were triangulated. Observations provided real-time insights into behaviors and interactions during program activities, while documents (such as program materials and activity reports) offered contextual background and reflections from previous implementations. This triangulation process enabled the researchers to cross-check and verify findings, with each data source complementing the others to build a comprehensive understanding of the program's effects. Finally, the themes that emerged were reviewed and validated through comparison with existing literature, and the results were interpreted to answer the research questions, offering practical recommendations for future implementations of the program (AlYahmady & Al Abri, 2013; Edwards-Jones, 2014; Miles & Huberman, 1994).

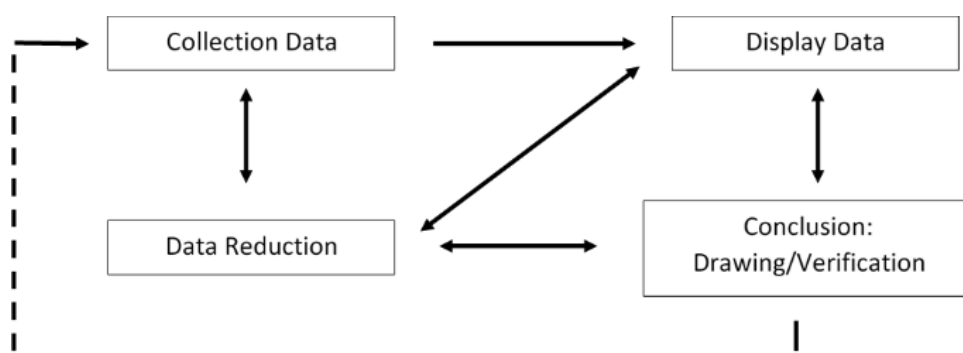


Figure 2. Data Analysis Diagram of the Miles and Huberman Framework Miles & Huberman (1994).

### 3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The research results indicate that participation in the *Pesantren Ramadan* program significantly increases students' empathy. Teachers interviewed stated that after participating in the program's worship and social activities, students became more sensitive to the feelings and needs of their peers. For example, during activities such as sharing iftar meals and breaking fast with orphaned children, students are taught to feel the hardships experienced by the less fortunate. These activities encourage students to appreciate and understand others' feelings, reflected in an increase in supportive and respectful behaviors among them. In addition to increased empathy, the *Pesantren Ramadan* program has also proven effective in reducing bullying incidents at schools. Teachers reported a significant decrease in the number of bullying reports during and after the program's implementation. Students previously involved in bullying showed positive behavioral changes. They were more likely to engage in group activities and demonstrated more respectful behaviors toward their peers. This is supported by observations during the program's activities, where more harmonious and respectful interactions among students were evident.



concepts that participants associate with character education. Additionally, the clustering of certain keywords within the word cloud suggests shared perceptions among participants regarding the influence of programs like *Pesantren Ramadan* on fostering a supportive and respectful school environment. These frequently mentioned terms lay a foundation for further quantitative analysis, presented in Table 2, where the word frequency query conducted in NVivo 12 identifies the specific terms most recurrently used across the data, enabling a more in-depth examination of the underlying themes within the participants' discourse on empathy and moral education.

**Table 2.** Word Frequency Query in NVivo 12 showing the list of the top 10 most frequently appearing words in the data

No	Word	Translation	Length	Count	Weighted Percentage (%)
1	<i>Siswa</i>	Student	5	287	6.46
2	<i>Kegiatan</i>	Activities	8	141	3.17
3	<i>Program</i>	Program	7	129	2.90
4	<i>Ramadan</i>	Ramadan	7	114	2.57
5	<i>Pesantren</i>	Pesantren	9	113	2.54
6	<i>Nilai</i>	Value	5	64	1.44
7	<i>Sikap</i>	Attitude	5	62	1.40
8	<i>Empati</i>	Empathy	6	57	1.28
9	<i>Perilaku</i>	Behavior	8	56	1.26
10	<i>Perubahan</i>	Change	9	54	1.22

The analysis of the Word Frequency Query Result table highlights the ten most frequently occurring words within the context of this research. The term "Student" appeared 287 times, accounting for 6.46% of the weighted percentage, emphasizing that the main focus of this research is on students, who are crucial subjects in the efforts towards moral and spiritual transformation. The term "Activities" appeared 141 times with a weighted percentage of 3.17%, indicating that various activities within the *Pesantren Ramadan* program play a key role in this transformation process. Specifically, activities such as fasting and sharing iftar appear to foster empathy by encouraging students to experience and appreciate the challenges others face, which aligns with previous studies suggesting that values-based education fosters emotional intelligence and social responsibility (Syah, 2023). The term "Program," appearing 129 times (2.90%), highlights the importance of the structured design of the *Pesantren Ramadan* program, which integrates spiritual activities like Quran recitation and communal prayers. These activities are not only religious practices but also function as communal experiences that build a sense of togetherness and mutual respect among participants.

Furthermore, the terms "Value" and "Attitude," each appearing 64 (1.44%) and 62 times (1.40%), underscore the program's focus on instilling moral values and positive attitudes as primary indicators of transformation. This aligns with literature that emphasizes the role of character education in reducing bullying and promoting empathy (Haryanto & Ngarifin, 2022). Interestingly, activities such as Quran recitation were particularly noted by teachers as contributing to students' introspection and self-awareness, which in turn led to more respectful interactions. The terms "Empathy" and "Behavior" (57 times, 1.28%, and 56 times, 1.26%) reinforce the idea that fostering empathy and improving behavior are central goals of this program. The presence of the term "Change" (54 times, 1.22%) further indicates that the ultimate objective of the *Pesantren Ramadan* program is to enact positive behavioral changes that support bullying prevention (Purwanto, Firdaus, & Faqihuddin, 2024).

The increase in empathy and reduction in bullying observed in students demonstrates how spiritual activities and communal experiences can play a transformative role in moral education. This study extends existing knowledge by showing that religious-based programs, such as *Pesantren Ramadan*, offer an effective and sustainable approach to character development. As students engage in these activities, they not only reflect on their actions but also develop a greater sense of social responsibility and empathy. Overall, these findings contribute to the broader literature on empathy, bullying prevention, and moral education by highlighting how religious programs can complement secular approaches in fostering positive behavioral changes in educational environments.

### 3.2 Reduction of Bullying

This study found that participation in the *Pesantren Ramadan* program led to three key outcomes: 1) an increase in empathy among students, 2) a significant reduction in bullying incidents, and 3) the long-term internalization of moral and spiritual values. The *Pesantren Ramadan*, or Intensive Boarding School Program, is a short-term educational initiative typically organized during the holy month of Ramadan at boarding schools. This program aims to deepen Islamic values, enhance religious knowledge, and strengthen students' faith and piety toward Allah SWT. Activities within the *Pesantren Ramadan* often include studying the Quran, engaging in worship practices, and focusing on character development (Erdawati, Sain, & Siagian, 2020; Faqihuddin, Firmansyah, & Muflih, 2024; Maula & Fathani, 2022; Zaini, N, & Putri, 2020). Additionally, the program serves as a platform to enhance students' skills beyond religious learning, including entrepreneurship and social responsibility. By incorporating social values and environmental management activities, the *Pesantren Ramadan* program contributes to creating a community that is more socially responsible and environmentally conscious (Faqihuddin, 2024e; Mahfud, 2021; Maulida, Nursaniah, & Sari, 2024; Shohib & Narsim, 2023). The program also emphasizes developing students' independence and reducing reliance on external resources (Ilyasa, Rahardja, Firmansyah, Faqihuddin, & Muflih, 2024; Mukhlisin, 2024; Nasrullah et al., 2023). The holistic approach of the *Pesantren Ramadan* program—integrating religious teachings, character education, and practical skills development—equips students to be more open-minded, innovative, and adaptable to the demands of the modern world (Bakri, 2021; Sinta, Fahrudin, Faqihuddin, & Nurhuda, 2024; Zarkasyi, 2015; Zarkasyi, Mas'ud, Hidayatullah, & Khakim, 2024).

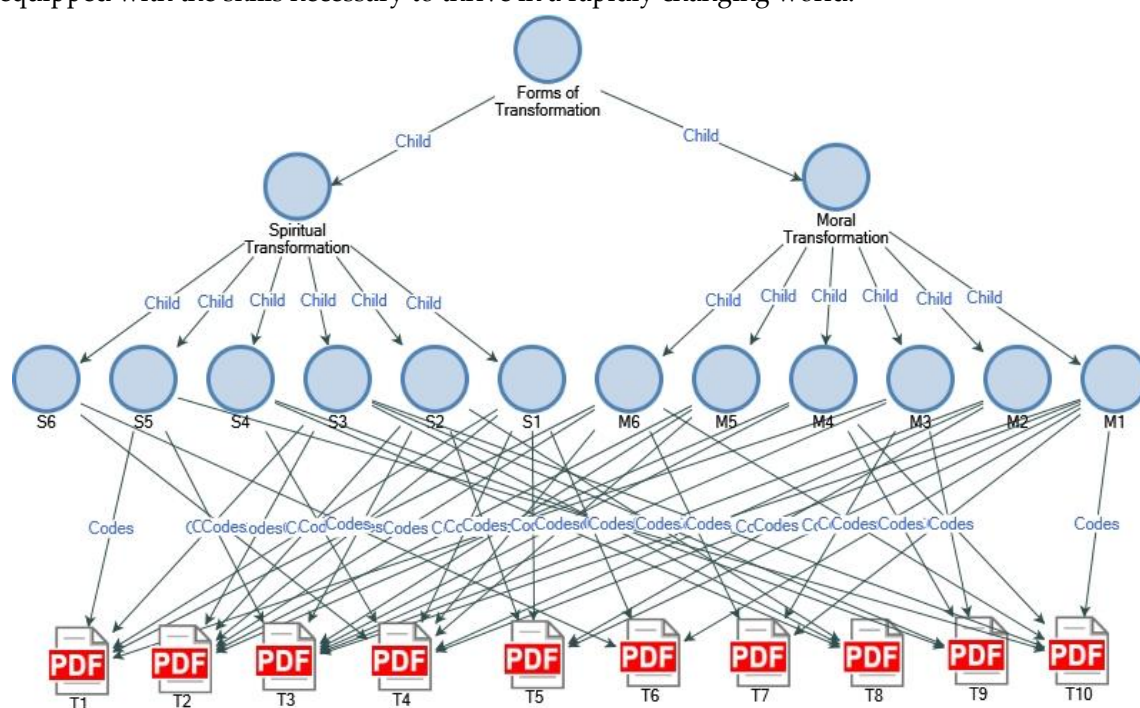
### 3.3 Moral and Spiritual Transformation

The *Pesantren Ramadan* program is designed to facilitate both moral and spiritual transformation in students, addressing the need for character education that emphasizes ethical and spiritual development. Moral transformation is achieved through a profound change in values, attitudes, and behaviors, shifting from less ethical conduct to actions aligned with principles of honesty, integrity, empathy, and social responsibility. This process is supported by activities such as Ramadan fasting, sharing iftar, and social service, which provide opportunities for students to practice these values in real-life situations. Similarly, spiritual transformation involves a deepening of students' awareness of existence, meaning, and purpose, moving from a materialistic worldview to one that emphasizes relationships with sacred concepts, such as God and spiritual values. Through practices like congregational prayers, Quran recitation, and communal remembrance (*dzikir*), students are encouraged to develop a stronger sense of faith and spiritual insight. Moreover, the *Pesantren Ramadan* program contributes to community empowerment and the integration of Islamic values across various educational domains, promoting social responsibility and environmental consciousness among students. Despite challenges like the Covid-19 pandemic, schools have adapted by implementing virtual *Pesantren Ramadan* programs, which underscores the program's resilience and flexibility. This multifaceted approach not only enhances religious knowledge and spiritual commitment but also prepares students with the social and entrepreneurial skills needed to succeed in a rapidly evolving world. Through the blending of traditional Islamic teachings and modern educational practices, the *Pesantren Ramadan* program plays a crucial role in shaping well-rounded, spiritually aware, and socially responsible individuals.

**Table 3.** Mapping of Transformation Types in Pesantren Ramadan Activities

No	Type of Transformation	Description	Code	Activities	Code	Participants
1	Moral	Moral transformation is a profound process of change in an individual's values, attitudes, and behaviors related to morality and ethics. It involves a shift from less ethical behavior to behavior that aligns with moral principles such as honesty, integrity, empathy, and social responsibility.	M	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Ramadan Fasting</li> <li>2. Sharing Iftar</li> <li>3. Iftar Gathering</li> <li>4. Social Service</li> <li>5. Eid Clothing for Orphans</li> <li>6. Ramadan-related Competitions</li> </ol>	M1 M2 M3 M4 M5 M6	T3, T4, T5, T6, T7, T10 T3, T4, T5 T1, T3, T7, T9 T2, T3, T9, T10 T2, T3, T4 T1, T2, T4, T7, T10
2	Spiritual	Spiritual transformation is a profound process of change in an individual's spiritual awareness and experience. It involves a shift from a limited or materialistic worldview to a broader understanding of existence, meaning, and life purpose. This process includes enhancing relationships with something considered sacred, such as God, the universe, or certain spiritual values.	S	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Fasting</li> <li>2. Congregational Prayers</li> <li>3. Recitation of the Quran (Tadarus)</li> <li>4. Islamic Lectures and Studies</li> <li>5. Joint Prayer</li> <li>6. Communal Remembrance (Dzikir)</li> </ol>	S1 S2 S3 S4 S5 S6	T1, T2, T4, T5, T6 T2, T3, T5, T7, T8 T1, T2, T8, T9, T10 T4, T7, T8, T9 T1, T3, T10 T4, T6

Further, the Pesantren Ramadan program plays a significant role in promoting community empowerment, social entrepreneurship, and the integration of Islamic values into various aspects of education (Fahrudin, Abdullah, & Faqihuddin, 2024; Muflih, GS, Rohmatulloh, & Padjrin, 2022). Despite the Covid-19 pandemic, educational institutions have adapted by implementing virtual Pesantren Ramadan programs to ensure the continuity of education and religious practices (Faqihuddin, 2024a; Faqihuddin & Subakti, 2022; Mubarak & Nafsiyah, 2022). This adaptation demonstrates the resilience and flexibility of boarding schools in providing meaningful educational experiences even during crises. The Pesantren Ramadan or Intensive Boarding School Program is a multifaceted educational initiative that not only deepens religious knowledge and values but also instills social responsibility, environmental awareness, and entrepreneurship skills among students. By integrating traditional Islamic teachings with modern educational practices, these programs play a crucial role in shaping well-rounded individuals who are not only knowledgeable in their faith but also equipped with the skills necessary to thrive in a rapidly changing world.



**Figure 4.** Project Map on NVIVO 12 showing the mapping of research respondents and various types of transformations.

The table and figure above illustrate two types of transformations—moral and spiritual—along with the activities associated with each. Moral transformation refers to significant changes in an individual's values, attitudes, and behaviors, aligning them with principles such as honesty, integrity, empathy, and social responsibility. These values are cultivated through activities such as fasting during Ramadan, sharing iftar, participating in communal iftar, social service, providing Eid clothing for orphans, and other Ramadan-related preparations. These activities are designed to instill moral values through daily practices, emphasizing ethical growth during the holy month. The word frequency analysis conducted with NVivo highlights terms like "student," "empathy," and "activities" as some of the most frequently mentioned words in this study, providing further insight into the central themes. For instance, "student" appeared frequently because the main objective of the *Pesantren Ramadan* program is to foster moral and spiritual development in students, who are the primary focus of the program. The high frequency of the word "empathy" indicates that building empathy is one of the program's core outcomes, achieved through shared experiences like communal meals and acts of social service, which help students understand and appreciate the perspectives and hardships of others. Similarly, the prominence of the word "activities" underscores the role of structured, meaningful

activities in the transformation process. Each activity in the *Pesantren Ramadan* program is purposefully designed to foster either moral or spiritual growth, reinforcing the values of empathy, compassion, and social responsibility. By engaging in these activities, students not only learn but internalize these values, suggesting that the frequency of these terms reflects the central role of daily practices in achieving the program's transformative goals. This analysis supports the qualitative findings by highlighting the importance of active participation and experiential learning in promoting moral and spiritual transformation (Faqihuddin, Ilyasa, et al., 2024).

### 3.4 Challenges

Meanwhile, spiritual transformation is a profound change in an individual's spiritual awareness and experience. This process involves shifting from a limited or materialistic worldview to a broader understanding of existence, meaning, and life purpose. It also includes strengthening relationships with things considered sacred, such as God, the universe, or certain spiritual values. Activities supporting spiritual transformation include fasting, congregational prayers, Quran recitation, Islamic lectures and studies, joint prayers, and communal remembrance (dzikir). These activities aim to deepen spiritual understanding and experience through worship practices and religious education. Overall, this table highlights the importance of programs in Islamic boarding schools during Ramadan in fostering moral and spiritual changes, as well as serving as preventive and remedial measures against bullying in educational environments. Although the program has shown positive impacts, there are some challenges that deserve attention to provide a balanced perspective. One primary challenge is the time constraint, as the *Pesantren Ramadan* program is conducted within the limited period of Ramadan. This limited time can restrict the depth of spiritual experience that participants can achieve. Additionally, students from unsupportive family environments may struggle to internalize the values taught. A home environment that does not reinforce or even contradicts the program's values may impede character development once the program is over. To address these challenges, the *Pesantren Ramadan* program could consider offering post-Ramadan support in the form of follow-up activities outside the holy month. These could include regular gatherings to reinforce the values learned or engagement with community initiatives that support students' moral and spiritual growth. Moreover, actively involving families in the program—through information sessions or shared activities that include parents—could strengthen home support for the internalization of the values taught. By highlighting these challenges and offering potential solutions, this section provides valuable insights for future program improvements and assists other schools that may wish to implement a similar approach (Faqihuddin, Muflih, Syarifudin, Romadhon, & Al-Ayyubi, 2024).

### 3.5 Implications for Character Education

Bullying in educational settings is a significant issue that can have long-term impacts on individuals, including reduced self-esteem, anxiety, depression, and other mental health issues (Faqihuddin, 2024b; Faqihuddin & Nugraha, 2023; Wolke & Lereya, 2015). Programs like *Pesantren Ramadan* have been recognized for their role in strengthening character education and instilling religious values among students, which contribute to bullying prevention by fostering empathy, respect, and social responsibility (Faqihuddin, Romadhon, & Muflih, 2024; Muflih et al., 2022). These programs aim not only to impart knowledge but also to enhance students' morality, spiritual values, and honest behavior (Fahrudin, Islamy, Faqihuddin, Parhan, & Kamaludin, 2024; Rodliyah, Djamhuri, & Prihatiningtias, 2021). *Pesantren* institutions, as traditional Islamic boarding schools, have historically played a crucial role in providing spiritual and moral guidance. The traditional curriculum in these institutions nurtures religious and cultural values within the community, supporting the holistic development of students (Habibi, Wahyuni, Saepurrohman, Zaqiah, & Supiana, 2024; Supriadi, Faqihuddin, & Islamy, 2024). Addressing bullying in schools requires a multi-stakeholder approach involving teachers, parents, students, mental health professionals, and policymakers (Faqihuddin, Muflih, & Syarifudin, 2024; Shayo & Lawala, 2019). Integrating moral education into both the curriculum and cultural activities has been proven to be an effective approach to bullying prevention (Faqihuddin, 2024c; Noboru et al., 2021).

Meanwhile, spiritual transformation is a profound change in an individual's spiritual awareness and experience, shifting from a limited or materialistic worldview to a broader understanding of existence, meaning, and life purpose. Activities supporting this transformation—such as fasting, congregational prayers, Quran recitation, Islamic lectures, joint prayers, and dzikir—aim to deepen students' spiritual understanding through both worship practices and religious education. These activities reinforce values that discourage bullying by promoting compassion and a stronger sense of community. Furthermore, spiritual activities help students internalize a sense of higher purpose, which can foster respect and understanding toward others, thus contributing to a safer school environment. Despite these positive outcomes, some challenges merit attention to provide a balanced view. One primary challenge is the limited time frame, as the Pesantren Ramadan program is conducted solely within the month of Ramadan. This short duration may restrict the depth of spiritual experiences and the level of value internalization students can achieve. Additionally, students from less supportive family environments may struggle to maintain the values taught once they return home, especially if those environments do not reinforce—or even contradict—the program's teachings (De Luca, Nocentini, & Menesini, 2019; Subakti, Faqihuddin, Ilyasa, & Muflih, 2024).

To address these challenges, the Pesantren Ramadan program could consider implementing follow-up support and activities beyond the month of Ramadan. These might include regular post-program gatherings to reinforce learned values or involve students in community projects that emphasize moral and social growth. Additionally, involving families more actively in the program through orientation sessions, workshops, or family-inclusive activities could enhance parental support and provide a more consistent value framework for students outside of school. By addressing these challenges and suggesting potential solutions, this section provides insights into areas for improvement and practical recommendations for schools seeking to implement similar programs. These adjustments would strengthen the program's overall effectiveness and ensure a more lasting impact on students' moral and spiritual development, contributing to a more supportive and empathetic educational environment (Faqihuddin, 2017; Gaffney, Farrington, & Ttofi, 2019).

To enhance the effectiveness of the *Pesantren Ramadan* program and similar character education initiatives, schools and teachers can implement several strategic steps. First, parental and family involvement should be increased to ensure the values taught during the program are internalized once students return home. This can be achieved by organizing orientation sessions and workshops for parents before and after the program, where they are briefed on the program's core values. Additionally, involving families in events such as joint prayers or sharing sessions can strengthen home support for the program's objectives. Second, to help students retain the values learned, schools can design monthly follow-up programs beyond Ramadan, which may include regular gatherings, community service activities, or spiritual mentoring sessions that reinforce the values imparted during the program. Moreover, the *Pesantren Ramadan* program can be made more effective when combined with extracurricular activities that support similar values. For instance, students can participate in volunteer groups or environmental clubs that allow them to practice empathy and social responsibility in broader contexts. Teachers also play a vital role in the program's success, so training teachers to enhance their character education skills is a beneficial step. This training can include strategies for addressing bullying, methods for integrating moral values into daily lessons, and effective interventions for managing student conflicts (Faqihuddin & Sinta, 2024; Ruhayat, Saepudin, Syafrin, & Handrianto, 2024).

In addition, schools can develop interactive activity modules that are relevant to students' everyday lives to help them internalize values more deeply. These modules can include role-playing, case studies, and group discussions designed to cultivate empathy, understanding, and problem-solving skills. To ensure long-term sustainability and effectiveness, schools should also conduct regular evaluations of the program using surveys, interviews, and observations to measure changes in students' attitudes and behavior. This data can help schools identify areas for improvement and design more effective approaches for future iterations of the program. Addressing key challenges, such as the limited duration of the program and unsupportive family environments, requires a holistic approach

involving schools, families, and the community. By implementing these strategies, the *Pesantren Ramadan* program can become more effective in strengthening students' moral and spiritual development and contribute to creating a more positive and supportive school environment on an ongoing basis.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

This study shows that the *Pesantren Ramadan* program significantly enhances students' empathy and reduces bullying by engaging them in worship and social activities that foster moral and spiritual growth. Activities like communal prayers, fasting, and community service allow students to experience values such as compassion and social responsibility firsthand. For instance, sharing iftar meals with the less fortunate helps students understand empathy and respect. Teachers play a vital role, as their active participation inspires students to adopt these values in daily life, highlighting the importance of a holistic, experience-based approach to character education. Teachers' quality and commitment are thus key to the program's effectiveness, and ongoing training in teaching values and classroom management is essential for the program's long-term success. Despite its benefits, the program faces challenges, including time constraints during Ramadan and the academic workload on both students and teachers. Addressing these issues could involve follow-up sessions post-Ramadan and incorporating character education throughout the school year. Additional community support may also help create a supportive environment. The *Pesantren Ramadan* program offers valuable insights for educational policy and can serve as a model for character education aimed at empathy-building and bullying prevention. Future policies could fund such programs, promoting holistic, values-based education. Further research, especially longitudinal studies, is needed to assess the program's long-term impact on student behavior. Overall, this study underscores the importance of character education programs in fostering empathy and preventing bullying, helping schools nurture compassionate, socially responsible students and build a harmonious community.

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