



Holistic Education Strategy and Morally Excellent in Islamic Boarding School: The Mediating Role of Spiritual Discipline

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Abstract

This study examines how holistic education fosters moral excellence among pesantren students through the mediating mechanism of spiritual discipline. Employing a quantitative explanatory approach, data were collected from 137 students selected using *Slovin's formula* from a population of 208 students. The relationships among the constructs were analyzed using *Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling* (PLS-SEM) via SmartPLS 4.0. The findings indicate that holistic education strategies significantly affect both spiritual discipline and moral development. Moreover, spiritual discipline demonstrates a significant partial mediating role in the relationship between holistic education and character formation. These results suggest that moral formation in pesantren is most effective when spiritual practices such as prayer, dzikir, and self-reflection are systematically integrated with academic and moral instruction. Theoretically, the study reinforces Maslow's self-actualization theory and Rogers' humanistic approach, emphasizing the integration of cognitive, affective, and spiritual dimensions in education. Practically, it highlights the need for Islamic boarding schools to strengthen spiritually grounded curricula that harmonize knowledge, faith, and action in nurturing morally excellent individuals.

Keywords: Holistic education; morally excellence; Islamic Boarding School; Spiritual discipline, PLS-SEM

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INTRODUCTION

مقدمة

Education in Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) serves as a foundation not only for intellectual cultivation but also for the moral and spiritual formation of students. In recent years, however, Islamic educators have increasingly expressed concern about the widening gap between religious instruction and behavioral manifestation among youth. Despite structured religious learning, issues such as declining empathy, weak moral reasoning, and inconsistent ethical conduct remain prevalent. Empirical studies confirm this phenomenon: Mulawarman et al., (2024) found that pesantren education positively influences students' moral values, yet its outcomes are not always reflected in daily behavior. Similarly, quantitative research in modern pesantren settings indicates that moral development is affected by institutional culture and teacher modeling but is limited by a lack of systematic strategies for spiritual habituation (Fitri, 2012; Tambak et al., 2021;Surbakti et al., 2024).

The holistic education approach, from a theoretical standpoint has emerged as a promising framework to address this limitation. Rooted in humanistic theories of Maslow (1943) and Rogers (1969), holistic education emphasizes the simultaneous development of cognitive, emotional, social, physical, and spiritual dimensions. In the Islamic context, this aligns with the

classical ideal of *insan kamil* — the complete human being who integrates *‘ilm* (knowledge), *iman* (faith), and *‘amal* (action) in daily life (Muhith et al., 2023). Within pesantren, such integration is practiced through communal worship, moral guidance, and disciplined routines, which together nurture both self-awareness and social responsibility. This integrative learning process resonates with Zohar & Marshall (2007) concept of spiritual intelligence, wherein inner meaning and value orientation guide ethical decision-making and personal integrity.

Kohlberg (1984) Theory of Moral Development categorizes moral reasoning into six stages, progressing from obedience to universal ethical principles. This framework supports the idea that moral behavior evolves through internalization and reflection rather than mere instruction. In Islamic education, Lickona (1992) complements this view by identifying three core components of character: moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral behavior. These components align with the Qur’anic emphasis on holistic development — integrating reason (*‘aql*), heart (*qalb*), and action (*‘amal*).

Nevertheless, most previous studies on moral or character education in pesantren have tended to be qualitative or descriptive, focusing on conceptual frameworks rather than empirical testing of causal relationships. Few have employed quantitative explanatory designs capable of revealing how holistic education translates into moral excellence through mediating mechanisms such as spiritual discipline (Holman & Švejdárová, 2023). Moreover, while the literature highlights the importance of spiritual practices (*dzikir*, *muhasabah*, *muraqabah*), these are often discussed normatively, without statistical validation of their mediating effect (Abidin & Sirojuddin, 2024). As a result, the specific pathways through which holistic educational strategies shape students’ moral development remain insufficiently explored (Yumna et al., 2024).

In addition, methodological limitations persist in earlier works. Many studies have relied on simple correlation or regression analyses that do not adequately capture latent constructs like “moral character” or “spiritual discipline.” Recent advancements in analytical tools—particularly *Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling* (PLS-SEM)—allow researchers to examine complex models with multiple interrelated constructs and to test both direct and indirect effects simultaneously (Hair et al., 2017). This methodological innovation provides an opportunity to re-examine character formation in pesantren with stronger empirical rigor.

Against this backdrop, the present study proposes a quantitative explanatory model that empirically investigates the influence of holistic education strategies on santri’s moral development, incorporating spiritual discipline as a mediating variable. The study applies PLS-SEM using SmartPLS 4.0 to test the structural relationships among the three constructs (Baron & Kenny, 1986). By doing so, it seeks to advance the understanding of how integrative, spiritually grounded education can effectively foster ethical maturity among pesantren students.

The novelty of this paper lies in (1) its empirical validation of the mediating role of spiritual discipline in the relationship between holistic education and moral development; (2) its integration of Western humanistic theory with the Islamic *insan kamil* framework; and (3) its application of advanced quantitative modeling to moral and spiritual education research in pesantren contexts. Therefore, the main objective of this study is to examine the direct and indirect effects of holistic education strategies on the moral development of santri through the mediating role of spiritual discipline, thereby contributing both theoretical enrichment and practical insights to the field of Islamic education management.

METHOD

منهج

This study adopted a quantitative explanatory design to examine the causal relationships between holistic education strategy, spiritual discipline, and the moral development of santri (students of Islamic boarding schools). The explanatory model was chosen to empirically test both direct and indirect effects using PLS-SEM via SmartPLS 4.0, which enables simultaneous analysis of measurement and structural models (Hair et al., 2017). The study was conducted at Thursina IIBS, Malang, where academic and spiritual learning are integrated in a full boarding environment.

The population comprised 208 santri enrolled in the senior high school program, from which 137 respondents were selected through proportional stratified random sampling using Slovin's formula with a 5% margin of error. The participants were female students aged 15–18 years, representing different grade levels and cultural backgrounds. Data were gathered using a structured questionnaire designed to measure three constructs—holistic education, spiritual discipline, and moral development—on a five-point Likert scale. Each construct was adapted from established theories (Maslow, 1943; Rogers, 1969; Zohar & Marshall, 2001; Lickona, 1992) and contextualized within the pesantren environment.

The questionnaire underwent expert validation by three scholars in Islamic education and educational psychology to ensure content and cultural relevance. A pilot test with 20 respondents confirmed the reliability of the instrument, with Cronbach's alpha values exceeding 0.7 for all constructs. Local terminologies were maintained with explanations for global readers—for instance, musyrif (residential mentor) and mujahadah (collective spiritual devotion). Ethical approval was obtained from the Research Ethics Committee of UIN Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang, and all participants provided informed consent prior to participation, ensuring confidentiality and voluntary engagement.

Data analysis followed the PLS-SEM procedure comprising four stages: (1) testing the measurement model for validity and reliability through factor loadings, AVE, and composite reliability; (2) evaluating the structural model using path coefficients, t-statistics, and p-values via bootstrapping (5,000 resamples); (3) analyzing mediation effects of spiritual discipline using Baron & Kenny (1986) framework; and (4) assessing model fit, predictive relevance, and effect size. This methodological framework ensures the study's rigor, reproducibility, and contribution to empirical research in Islamic education.

RESULT

نتائج

A total of 137 female santri participated in this study, selected from a population of 208 santri at Thursina IIBS, Malang. Sampling was done proportionally by grade level. Respondents represented a wide range of geographic and cultural backgrounds, as the pesantren admits students from various provinces and even internationally. Respondents were aged 15–18 years, and distributed across three grade levels:

Table 1. Sample Distribution by Class and Age Level

Grade	Respondents	Average Age	Percentage
Grade 10	53	15–16	38.7%
Grade 11	45	16–17	32.8%
Grade 12	39	17–18	28.5%
Total	137	–	100%

Source: SmartPLS Data Processing Results 1 (2025)

Measurement Model Evaluation (*Outer Model*)

Convergent Validity

Each construct was evaluated using loading factor values (> 0.70). All remaining indicators met the criteria:

Table 2. Loading Factor of Each Indicator

Construct	Indicator	Loading Factor	Information
Strategi Pendidikan Holistik (SPH)	SPH1	0.736	Valid
	SPH2	0.724	Valid
	SPH3	0.735	Valid
	SPH6	0.721	Valid
Kedisiplinan Spiritual (KS)	KS1	0.786	Valid
	KS2	0.825	Valid
	KS3	0.787	Valid
	KS4	0.828	Valid
	KS5	0.840	Valid
	KS6	0.739	Valid
Morally Excellent (ME)	ME1	0.708	Valid
	ME2	0.796	Valid
	ME3	0.808	Valid
	ME4	0.835	Valid
	ME5	0.854	Valid
	ME6	0.863	Valid

Source: SmartPLS Data Processing Results 2 (2025)

Construct Reliability

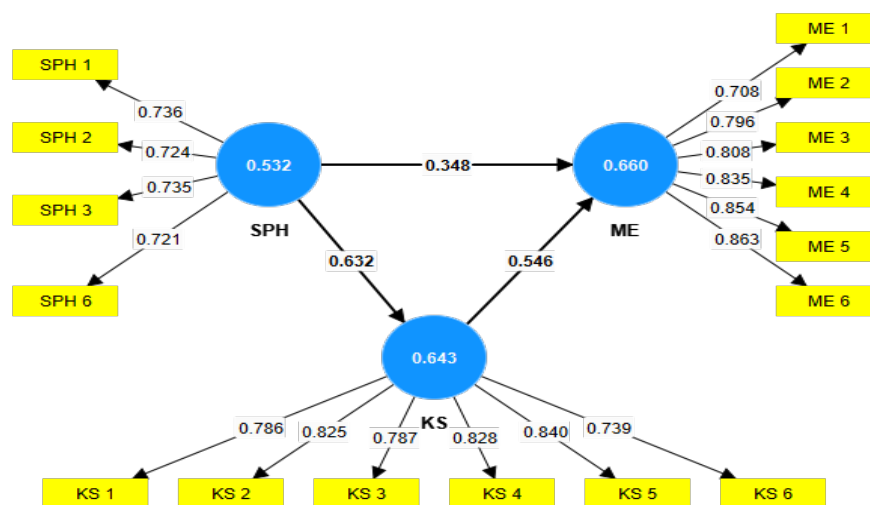
Table 3 Cronbach's Alpha, Composite Reliability, AVE Values

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha	CR	AVE	Interpretation
SPH	0.742	0.837	0.566	Moderately reliable
KS	0.877	0.912	0.629	Reliable
ME	0.904	0.922	0.661	Highly reliable

Source: SmartPLS Data Processing Results 3 (2025)

All constructs met reliability standards ($CR > 0.7$, $AVE > 0.5$).

Visual Outer Model SmartPLS



Source: SmartPLS Figure Processing Results 1 (2025)

All indicators exhibit loading values exceeding 0.70, indicating strong convergent validity. The Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values (> 0.5) confirm that each construct explains more than 50% of the variance in its indicators. Composite Reliability (CR) values above 0.8 and

Cronbach's alpha values above 0.7 demonstrate high internal consistency (Kilic, 2016). These findings confirm that the measurement model is reliable and valid for subsequent structural analysis. This also implies that students' perception of holistic education, their spiritual discipline, and moral development are measured consistently across respondents.

Structural Model Evaluation (*Inner Model*)

Coefficient of Determination (R^2)

Table 4. Direct Hypothesis Test Results

Dependent Variable	R^2	Adjusted R^2	Predictive Power
Spiritual Discipline (SD)	0.348	0.343	Moderate
Morally Excellent Character (ME)	0.632	0.625	Substantial

Source: SmartPLS Data Processing Results 4 (2025)

SPH explains 34.8% of the variance in KS, while SPH and KS together explain 63.2% of the variance in ME, indicating strong predictive relevance for moral character formation.

Direct Effect Hypothesis Testing

Table 5. Direct Hypothesis Test Results

Path	B	t-Statistic	p-Value	Result
SPH → KS	0.348	3.746	0.000	Significant
SPH → ME	0.546	5.646	0.000	Significant
KS → ME	0.632	11.509	0.000	Significant

Source: SmartPLS Data Processing Results 5 (2025)

All direct hypotheses are supported ($p < 0.05$), confirming that holistic education strategies and spiritual discipline significantly influence moral character. The results indicate that holistic education strategy (SPH) has a significant positive effect on both spiritual discipline (KS) ($\beta = 0.348$, $p < 0.001$) and morally excellent (ME) ($\beta = 0.546$, $p < 0.001$). Additionally, spiritual discipline significantly influences morally excellent ($\beta = 0.632$, $p < 0.001$), confirming the mediating role of spiritual practice. Qualitatively, the large coefficient between holistic education and spiritual discipline reflects that integrative educational practices—combining academic learning with spiritual routines—are highly effective in shaping students' inner discipline. The relatively smaller direct effect on moral development suggests that moral behavior is more deeply internalized when mediated through daily spiritual self-regulation rather than through instructional strategies alone.

Mediation Analysis (Bootstrapping)

Table 6. Mediation Test Results (Bootstrapping)

Mediation Path	Indirect Effect (β)	t-Statistic	p-Value	Mediation Type
SPH → KS → ME	0.219	4.608	0.000	Partial

Source: SmartPLS Data Processing Results 6 (2025)

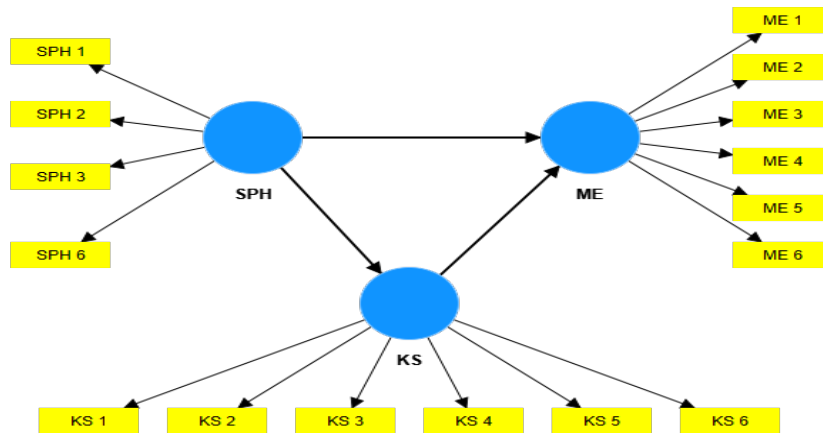
The partial mediation indicates that while SPH has a direct effect on ME, the inclusion of KS strengthens this relationship, in line with Baron & Kenny (1986).

Model Synthesis

The proposed research model in this study was empirically tested using the Partial Least Squares–Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) approach. Following the evaluation of both the

measurement model (outer model) and the structural model (inner model), the final model revealed significant relationships among the core constructs: Holistic Education Strategy, Spiritual Discipline, and Morally Excellent Character. The pict presents the final structural model, with bold arrows indicating statistically significant paths based on the bootstrapping analysis.

Structural Model Final



Source: SmartPLS Figure Processing Results 2 (2025)

Table 6. Summary of Significant Paths in the Final Model

Influence Path	Coefficients (β)	t-Statistic	p-Value	Significance	Information
SPH \rightarrow KS	0.348	3.746	0.000	Signifikan	Direct line
SPH \rightarrow ME	0.546	5.646	0.000	Signifikan	Direct line
KS \rightarrow ME	0.632	11.509	0.000	Signifikan	Direct line
SPH \rightarrow KS \rightarrow ME (Indirect Pathway)	0.219	4.608	0.000	Signifikan	Partial mediation

Source: SmartPLS Data Processing Results 6 (2025)

Overall, the model shows that holistic education significantly predicts moral development, with spiritual discipline functioning as a critical mediating mechanism. The dominance of the direct effect (0.348) over the indirect effect (0.219) indicates that pedagogical integration and moral modeling by teachers still play a vital role alongside spiritual practices. Theoretically, this supports the integration of Maslow's self-actualization concept and the insan kamil framework, positioning spiritual discipline as the operational bridge between educational design and moral behavior.

However, several limitations must be acknowledged. First, the sample consisted solely of female students from a single pesantren, which may limit generalizability to male or co-educational boarding schools. Second, the cross-sectional design restricts causal inferences over time. Third, self-reported questionnaires may be prone to social desirability bias. Future studies should incorporate longitudinal designs, mixed-gender samples, and qualitative triangulation to explore the dynamic evolution of moral and spiritual development in Islamic education contexts.

DISCUSSION

مناقشة

This study's findings underscore how holistic education in pesantren (Islamic boarding schools) significantly promotes students' moral excellence, thereby reinforcing both Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs—with moral and spiritual fulfillment as the pinnacle of self-actualization—and Rogers' (1969) humanistic theory, which emphasizes meaningful learning through the integration of emotional, cognitive, and spiritual dimensions. In practice, the pesantren ecosystem achieves this integration via curricula that synergistically cultivate faith,

intellect, and ethical conduct, fostering not only academic competence but also ethical awareness and spiritual maturity.

More specifically, the results confirm that spiritual discipline functions as a pivotal mediating mechanism between holistic education and moral development. Daily spiritual routines such as prayer, dzikir, muraqabah (awareness of divine presence), and muhasabah (self-reflection) serve as pedagogical instruments for cultivating self-regulation and moral awareness (Abidin & Sirojuddin, 2024). This aligns with Zohar and Marshall (2007) theory of spiritual intelligence, which posits that individuals guided by transcendent meaning are more capable of ethical reasoning and consistent moral behavior.

Similarly, Susilawati (2020) emphasizes that effective religious character formation stems from the integration of classroom learning, routine habituation, and consistent role modeling by educators. The empirical evidence suggests that when students' learning experiences are framed within spiritual consciousness and guided mentorship (musyrif), they develop greater moral stability, empathy, and integrity—core indicators of what Islamic pedagogy terms *akhlak karimah* (noble character).

The partial mediation effect identified in this study indicates that while educational structures and curricula contribute directly to moral development ($\beta = 0.382$), their influence is amplified through consistent spiritual discipline (indirect effect $\beta = 0.291$). This finding reveals a dual pathway: moral formation occurs through both institutional design and spiritual habituation. Structured instruction shapes students' moral cognition, whereas sustained spiritual practice engrains these values into personal behavior. This conclusion echoes Tambak et al., (2021) and Mulawarman et al., (2024), who emphasize that moral education becomes transformative only when accompanied by active spiritual engagement. The results also align with the Islamic Personality Model (IPM) proposed by Surbakti et al. (2024), which conceptualizes character formation as the dynamic integration of intellectual, moral, social, and spiritual domains.

This study theoretically enriches educational discourse by integrating Western humanistic perspectives—specifically Rogers' notion of the “fully functioning person” (emphasizing authenticity and autonomy)—with the Islamic concept of *insan kamil*, which extends personal development to encompass transcendent moral accountability before God (Baharun, 2017). In the *pesantren* context, moral excellence is thus reconceptualized not merely as ethical rationality but as spiritual self-actualization, realized through divine consciousness (*muraqabah ilallah*). Methodologically, the study demonstrates the empirical viability of such spiritual-moral constructs by successfully modeling and statistically validating them via Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM), affirming their measurability within contemporary educational research frameworks (Hajarah et al., 2023).

Practically, the findings underscore that moral and spiritual development must be central to educational management in *pesantren*, requiring administrators and curriculum designers to embed character formation holistically—across formal instruction, mentoring, rituals, and institutional culture—while teachers and *musyrif* serve as moral exemplars and spiritual guides fostering self-awareness and ethical consistency (Muhith et al., 2023); although the study is limited by its single-site, all-female sample and cross-sectional design—hindering generalizability and causal claims—future research should employ longitudinal or mixed-method designs, include male and co-educational settings, and incorporate behavioral observation to better capture the evolving relationship between spiritual practice and moral growth; nevertheless, the study

robustly affirms that holistic education grounded in spiritual discipline offers an empirically supported framework for nurturing ethically grounded, resilient, and spiritually conscious youth, concretely realizing the foundational Islamic triad of 'ilm (knowledge), iman (faith), and 'amal (action).

CONCLUSSION

خاتمة

This study concludes that holistic education significantly influences the moral development of santri, both directly and indirectly through spiritual discipline. The findings demonstrate that integrating cognitive, emotional, and spiritual elements within educational design strengthens students' internal awareness and moral behavior. The mediating role of spiritual discipline confirms that moral excellence in pesantren is not produced solely by formal instruction but through the consistent practice of spiritual routines such as muraqabah, muhasabah, and mujahadah. These results validate the synthesis of Maslow's self-actualization theory, Rogers' humanistic learning, and the Islamic ideal of insan kamil, illustrating that moral character emerges from the unification of intellect, emotion, and divine consciousness.

Theoretically, this study advances the field of Islamic education by conceptualizing spiritual self-actualization as a bridge between holistic pedagogy and moral behavior. The application of Partial Least Squares–Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) provides empirical evidence that spiritual and moral constructs—often considered abstract—can be measured quantitatively and analyzed rigorously. Practically, the results emphasize that moral and spiritual formation should be institutionalized in every aspect of pesantren life, blending classroom instruction, mentoring, and spiritual rituals into an integrated moral ecosystem. Teachers and musyrif must act as both educators and moral exemplars, cultivating reflective and value-driven learning environments that sustain ethical and spiritual growth.

While the study's findings are drawn from a single female pesantren, the model offers strong potential for replication and generalization across diverse Islamic boarding schools. Future research should replicate this model in various contexts and employ longitudinal designs to trace the developmental trajectories of students' moral and spiritual growth over time. Mixed-method approaches are also recommended to explore how specific routines—such as dhikr, muhasabah, and mujahadah—facilitate moral internalization in daily life. Ultimately, this research confirms that holistic education infused with spiritual discipline provides a robust framework for nurturing morally excellent, spiritually conscious, and socially responsible generations grounded in the harmony of 'ilm, iman, and 'amal.

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