

Constructing Moral Expectations and Social Recognition: A Qualitative Case Study of *Santri* and *Non-Santri* in Jogowono

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Abstract

Religious education can create moral expectations toward individuals associated with Islamic educational institutions, but educational identity does not necessarily determine how their conduct is evaluated in community life. This study examines how five selected informants in Jogowono perceived the *akhlak* (Islamic moral character) of *santri* and *non-santri*, identifies the factors informing those perceptions, and analyzes their social construction using Berger and Luckmann's framework. The study employed a qualitative case study design. Data were collected from two community leaders, one *kiai*, one *santri*, and one *non-santri* through semi-structured interviews, moderate participant observation, and document analysis. The data were coded thematically and interpreted through the processes of externalization, objectivation, and internalization. The findings show that *santri* identity generated higher initial moral expectations because it was associated with more intensive religious education. However, the informants accorded moral recognition primarily on the basis of observable conduct, including respectful communication, responsibility, cooperation, social concern, and participation in religious and community activities. Their evaluations were informed by religious education, family environment, social environment, and lived social interaction. Externalization occurred through participation in communal practices, objectivation through the formation of shared expectations surrounding *santri* identity, and internalization through individuals' acceptance or negotiation of those expectations. The study provides a context-specific distinction between moral expectations attached to religious educational identity and social recognition earned through everyday conduct. Its findings represent the perspectives of the five informants and do not establish that either educational background produces superior moral character.

Keywords: *Akhlak; Moral Expectations; Pesantren; Social Construction; Social Recognition*

A. Introduction

In Islamic education, *akhlak* (Islamic moral character) concerns the embodiment of religious and ethical values in everyday conduct rather than the acquisition of religious knowledge alone. Character formation therefore involves not only instruction but also the social environments in which individuals learn,

practice, and receive recognition for particular forms of conduct (Ainissyifa 2014). In Indonesia, *pesantren* (Islamic boarding schools) constitute important settings for religious learning and socialization, combining formal instruction with communal routines, relationships with religious teachers, and participation in an institutional culture (Dhofier 2011; Pohl 2006). Historical and comparative scholarship likewise describes *pesantren* as diverse institutions that combine religious transmission with broader educational and social functions (Hefner 2009; Srimulyani 2007; Tan 2014).

Studies of *pesantren* have shown that their educational practices can shape students' dispositions through discipline, habituation, shared activities, and continuous interaction. These processes connect religious learning with students' conduct and social identities (Lukens-Bull 2001; Nilan 2009; Mujahid 2021). Research on character education in Indonesian *pesantren* has similarly emphasized institutional values, exemplary leadership, and routine practices as mechanisms for forming the character of *santri*—students of Islamic boarding schools (Romdoni and Malihah 2020). Other Indonesian case studies identify institutional culture, religious practice, discipline, and community participation as interconnected settings for character formation (Rohdiana, Suhartono, and Marlina 2023; Shafwan and Abdullah 2024; Zuhriy 2011). Rozikin and Astutik (2021) similarly emphasize the implementation of character education through daily *pesantren* practices. Together, these studies clarify how character education operates within *pesantren*, but institutional formation does not by itself explain how the moral character associated with *santri* status is interpreted outside the institution.

Communities are not passive recipients of the perceived outcomes of religious education. Through everyday interaction, community members observe conduct, assign social meanings, and establish expectations regarding who should be regarded as morally trustworthy. Studies have examined the broader social and civic roles of *pesantren* (Pohl 2006; Raihani 2012), while social-construction research has explained how values associated with *santri* may become shared realities through interaction and institutional practice (Syarifuddin, Huda, and Zuhdi 2021). Research on multicultural practice and learning communities further shows that values cultivated in *pesantren* are enacted through collective activities and social relationships rather than through classroom instruction alone (Ilahi, Yusuf, and Witro 2022; Latif and Hafid 2021). However, the literature reviewed for this study has paid less attention to how community members negotiate the relationship between the moral expectations attached to *santri* status and their assessments of individuals' observable conduct. It has also given limited attention to how these evaluations are articulated in relation to *non-santri*, defined here as individuals who have not studied in an Islamic boarding school.

Jogowono provides a bounded rural setting in which *santri* and *non-santri* participate in overlapping religious and community activities. Within such interactions, an individual's religious educational background may shape initial expectations, while everyday behavior provides a basis for continued social evaluation. This tension between status-based expectations and conduct-based recognition constitutes the central problem of the study. It also requires caution against treating *santri* identity as either an automatic indication of moral character or an irrelevant social category.

Drawing on Berger and Luckmann's theory of social construction, this study examines how moral meanings become expressed, shared, and incorporated into individuals' understandings through externalization, objectivation, and internalization (Berger and Luckmann 1966). Specifically, it aims to describe the perceptions of five selected informants regarding the *akhlak* of *santri* and *non-santri*, identify the factors that inform those perceptions, and analyze how the perceptions are socially constructed in relation to religious education in Jogowono. Rather than evaluating the effectiveness of *pesantren* education or representing the views of the entire community, the study provides a context-specific account of how religious educational identity, observable conduct, and social recognition are connected in the informants' interpretations.

B. Methods

This study employed a qualitative case study design to examine how selected informants in Jogowono constructed perceptions of the *akhlak* of *santri* and *non-santri*. A qualitative design was appropriate because the study focused on participants' interpretations, experiences, and social interactions rather than on causal relationships among predetermined variables (Creswell and Poth 2018). The case study design allowed the phenomenon to be examined within its specific social and cultural setting (Merriam and Tisdell 2016). Berger and Luckmann's (1966) concepts of externalization, objectivation, and internalization guided the interpretation of how moral expectations and evaluations became socially shared.

The study was conducted from May to June 2026 in Jogowono, Donorejo Village, Kaligesing District, Purworejo Regency, Central Java. The site was selected purposively because religious and communal activities provide recurring settings in which residents interact and observe one another's conduct. These activities include *pengajian* (Islamic study gatherings), *Ratib al-Haddad*, *al-Barzanji*, *mujahadah* (collective devotional practices), *tahlilan* (communal prayers for the deceased), and *gotong royong* (mutual community cooperation). Such settings enabled the researcher to examine how moral conduct was expressed and evaluated in everyday community life.

Five informants were selected purposively on the basis of their social roles, experiences, and involvement in local religious and community activities (Patton 2015). They comprised two community leaders, one *kiai* (Islamic religious leader), one *santri* (Islamic boarding school student), and one *non-santri*. The community leaders were selected for their knowledge of local social relations; the *kiai* was included because of his role in Islamic education and religious guidance; and the *santri* and *non-santri* provided perspectives associated with different educational backgrounds. Sampling concluded after five interviews because the responses had developed recurring patterns and the final interviews did not produce substantially new themes relevant to the research questions. Given the small and heterogeneous sample, this criterion indicates data adequacy for the bounded case rather than representativeness of the Jogowono population.

Table 1.
Characteristics of the Informants

Code	Social role	Position	Basis for selection
P1	Community leader	Community representative	Knowledge of local values and social interaction
P2	Community leader	Village elder	Experience in religious and community activities
P3	<i>Kiai</i>	Religious leader	Role in Islamic education and community religious guidance
P4	<i>Santri</i>	Islamic boarding school student	Perspective based on <i>pesantren</i> education
P5	<i>Non-santri</i>	Community member	Perspective without a <i>pesantren</i> educational background

Source: Authors' field data, May–June 2026. Codes P1–P5 are used throughout the Results section

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, moderate participant observation, and document analysis. Each interview lasted approximately 45–90 minutes and was conducted face-to-face. With the participants' informed consent, the interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Interview excerpts are identified by participant code and social role. All interviews were conducted in Jogowono during the fieldwork period from May to June 2026. Quotations presented in English were translated by the author. During moderate participant observation, the researcher participated in community activities without assuming an organizing or leadership role. Observations conducted throughout May and June 2026 focused on religious gatherings, communal work, patterns of interaction, participation, responsibility, courtesy, and cooperation. Field notes were maintained during this process. Documentary materials, including photographs and records of religious and community events, were used to contextualize the interview and observational data.

The data were analyzed using the interactive model of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification developed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2020). Interview transcripts, field notes, and documentary materials were first coded to identify meaningful units related to perceptions of *akhlak*, religious education, family influence, social environment, lived interaction, and community participation. Related codes were grouped into categories and then developed into three themes corresponding to the research objectives: perceptions of the morality of *santri* and *non-santri*; factors shaping those perceptions; and the social construction of moral expectations and recognition. Berger and Luckmann's (1966) framework was applied during interpretation: externalization referred to the expression of values in social practice; objectivation to the development of shared expectations; and internalization to individuals' acceptance of these expectations as guides for identity and conduct.

Trustworthiness was addressed through credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability (Lincoln and Guba 1985). Credibility was supported by comparing accounts across the five informants and by examining interview findings alongside observations and documentary materials. Dependability and confirmability were supported by retaining interview transcripts, field notes, coding records, analytical notes, and supporting documents as an audit trail. Transferability was addressed through a description of the research setting, informant roles, and relevant community activities. The findings remain specific to the five informants and the bounded setting and are not intended for statistical generalization.

C. Results and Discussion

1. Results

The analysis produced three themes corresponding to the research objectives: the informants' perceptions of the morality of *santri* and *non-santri*; the factors shaping those perceptions; and the construction of moral expectations through externalization, objectivation, and internalization. Across these themes, the informants distinguished between the expectations initially associated with *santri* identity and the moral recognition earned through observable conduct.

1) Perceptions of the Morality of Santri and Non-Santri

The two community leaders emphasized everyday behavior as the principal basis for evaluating moral character. P1 acknowledged that *santri* were generally viewed positively because of their religious education but maintained that their actual conduct remained decisive:

"In my area, *santri* are generally viewed positively. However, when assessing someone's moral character, people look at their daily behavior. Ultimately, what matters most is a person's moral character as reflected in

their conduct.” (P1, interview conducted in Jogowono, translated by the author)

P2 similarly reported that residents did not distinguish the social position of *santri* and *non-santri*, although they placed different expectations on their behavior and manners. In his account, speech, courtesy, and the ability to interact respectfully were more important than educational background.

The *kiai* informant placed greater emphasis on religious education. For P3, the cultivation of noble *akhlak* was a central purpose of religious education, which explained why *santri* were expected to serve as moral examples:

“One of the primary objectives of religious education is to cultivate noble moral character. Therefore, the community expects *santri* to set a good example because they are expected to be morally upright individuals.” (P3, interview conducted in Jogowono, translated by the author)

The *santri* informant experienced these expectations personally. P4 reported that being recognized as a *santri* created an initial positive impression but also a responsibility to maintain appropriate behavior:

“People have viewed me as disciplined in worship and in the way I present myself. Yes, I feel that I am expected to behave well because I am a *santri*.” (P4, interview conducted in Jogowono, translated by the author)

The *non-santri* informant did not consider educational identity sufficient to determine moral character. P5 instead emphasized respect, speech, courtesy, and everyday relationships. He nevertheless acknowledged that people were less likely to rely on him in religious matters:

“Because I am not a *santri*, people tend to rely on me less for religious matters. However, *non-santri* can also become role models if they behave well and prove themselves to be trustworthy.” (P5, interview conducted in Jogowono, translated by the author)

Observations conducted between May and June 2026 were consistent with these accounts. The researcher observed *santri* and *non-santri* participating in religious gatherings, communal work, and other community activities. Appreciation was directed toward participants who demonstrated responsibility, cooperation, and social concern. These observations support the more limited conclusion that, among the selected informants, *santri* identity generated higher initial expectations, whereas sustained moral recognition depended on conduct observed in everyday community life.

2) Factors Shaping the Informants’ Perceptions

Four interrelated factors shaped the informants’ evaluations: religious education, family environment, social environment, and lived social interaction. All five informants regarded religious education as relevant to the development of *akhlak*, although they did not treat it as the sole determinant. P3 described religious education as a moral foundation, while P4 associated *pesantren*

education with discipline, respect for teachers and parents, compliance with rules, and repeated moral practice. P5 explained that religious learning was also available outside a *pesantren*, including through the family, Qur'anic learning centers, and formal schools.

Family influence was particularly evident in the accounts of P3 and P5. P3 identified family background, peer relationships, and the wider environment as influences alongside religious education. P5 similarly referred to education, family, and a positive social environment as interconnected influences. These accounts positioned the family as an early setting for learning courtesy, responsibility, respect, and religious values, although the study did not independently evaluate the relative influence of each setting.

The social environment and lived interaction provided the basis on which initial expectations were confirmed or revised. P1 and P2 stated that people evaluated conduct and speech in daily interactions, while P3 explained that judgments emerged after observing how individuals participated in community life. P5's experience showed that a person without a *pesantren* background could gain trust through consistent behavior, even if access to certain religious roles remained more limited.

Participant observation supported the importance of these social settings. Religious and communal activities allowed residents to observe cooperation, responsibility, courtesy, and concern for others. The findings therefore do not establish that any single factor caused moral character. Rather, they show that the five informants interpreted moral character through an interaction among educational background, family experience, social environment, and repeated interpersonal encounters.

3) The Social Construction of Moral Expectations

Externalization occurred when individuals expressed religious and moral values through participation in everyday activities. P2 reported that both *santri* and *non-santri* participated in communal work and religious gatherings. P4 mentioned communal work, *tahlilan*, and *Safari al-Barzanji*, while P5 described community service, funeral assistance, organizational activities, neighborhood security patrols (*siskamling*), and the organization of Islamic holiday commemorations. These activities provided visible settings in which individuals enacted responsibility, cooperation, and social concern.

Observations indicated that *santri* and *non-santri* participated together in most religious and community activities. Roles were generally not separated by educational identity, except in activities requiring particular religious competencies, such as leading prayers or conducting *tahlil*. In this sense, externalization involved the expression of values through practices that could be observed by others.

Objectivation occurred as repeated experiences became shared expectations. P3 stated that people commonly associated *santri* with goodness and expected them to serve as examples. P4 likewise experienced *santri* identity as carrying responsibility for preserving and transmitting religious values. However, P1 and P5 indicated that this shared expectation was conditional. P1 emphasized that conduct remained decisive, while P5 maintained that *non-santri* could earn recognition by demonstrating trustworthy behavior. The objectified image of *santri* as morally exemplary therefore operated as an initial expectation rather than an automatic judgment of individual character.

Internalization was evident in how informants interpreted and responded to these expectations. P4 regarded good conduct as a responsibility attached to his *santri* identity. P5, by contrast, understood moral recognition as something that could be earned without that identity through respect, contribution, and reliable conduct. P2's emphasis on behavior and speech showed that these expectations also functioned as shared criteria for evaluating others.

Taken together, these processes show how the five informants understood moral evaluation as socially produced and continually revised. Religious education contributed to expectations surrounding *santri* identity, but everyday interaction provided the evidence through which those expectations were maintained, modified, or rejected. Moral legitimacy, as used in this study, therefore refers to social recognition based on the perceived consistency of an individual's conduct rather than to a formal or universally shared moral status.

2. Discussion

The central finding is that the informants distinguished between initial moral expectations and socially earned moral recognition. A *santri* was initially expected to display stronger religious knowledge, discipline, and exemplary behavior because of the educational experience associated with a *pesantren*. However, the informants did not consider that identity sufficient evidence of good *akhlak*. Recognition depended on conduct that could be observed through speech, responsibility, cooperation, religious participation, and relationships with other community members. Conversely, the *non-santri* informant described a more limited position in religious matters but also reported that trust could be earned through consistent and socially responsible behavior. These findings should be understood as patterns across five accounts rather than as a general comparison between *santri* and *non-santri* populations.

Previous studies have shown that character education in *pesantren* is cultivated through habituation, discipline, exemplary conduct, institutional values, and sustained participation in daily activities (Hidayah 2021; Romdoni and Malihah 2020). Jalaluddin et al. (2021) similarly identify institutional routines and habituation as important components of character education, while Mujahid

(2021) demonstrates how continuous learning and interaction within a *pesantren* can support the formation of religious and socially responsible dispositions. Recent ethnographic research likewise identifies embodied authority and collective learning as processes through which moral dispositions are reproduced and negotiated in everyday *pesantren* life (Rofiqi et al. 2026). The present findings do not contradict this literature. They indicate, more specifically, that the educational identity produced through these practices also becomes an object of evaluation outside the institution. Among the Jogowono informants, *pesantren* education provided a basis for expecting moral conduct, but the fulfillment of that expectation was assessed through community interaction.

The four factors identified in the results further indicate that the informants did not isolate institutional education from other social environments. Religious education supplied moral language and expectations; the family was described as an early setting for learning values; community activities made conduct visible; and repeated interaction allowed residents to revise their judgments. This interpretation is compatible with Subianto's (2013) argument that character formation involves relationships among family, school, and community. Studies of parental evaluation and *santri*-community interaction likewise indicate that moral formation is interpreted across institutional, familial, and community settings (Munir, Hernisawati, and Abrori 2025; OK et al. 2026). The present study adds a context-specific observation: these environments were not only described as sources of moral learning but also as settings in which moral claims were evaluated. Because the evidence consists of informants' interpretations rather than measurements of influence, the study cannot determine which factor contributed most strongly to an individual's character.

Berger and Luckmann's (1966) framework clarifies how these evaluations became socially meaningful. Externalization was visible when individuals enacted religious and moral values through communal practices. Objectivation occurred when repeated encounters supported a shared expectation that *santri* should display exemplary conduct. Internalization appeared when the *santri* informant accepted this expectation as part of his responsibility and when the *non-santri* informant understood trustworthy conduct as a route to social recognition. Syarifuddin, Huda, and Zuhdi (2021) previously applied the same framework to the social construction of Pancasila values among student *santri*. In the present case, the framework is applied to a different but related question: how educational identity becomes associated with moral expectations and how those expectations are reassessed through everyday interaction.

This application does not revise Berger and Luckmann's theory. Its contribution is empirical and context-specific. It shows that, in the accounts examined, the community was not merely a setting in which the presumed

outcomes of religious education appeared. Community members also interpreted, confirmed, and sometimes qualified the moral meanings associated with educational identity. The distinction between moral expectation and moral recognition captures this process: *santri* identity provided symbolic credibility, but continued recognition depended on perceived consistency between that identity and everyday conduct. This claim remains bounded by the composition of the sample and should not be generalized to rural communities or *pesantren* populations more broadly.

The findings have modest implications for religious and character education. They suggest the value of connecting institutional moral instruction with opportunities for participation in community life, where responsibility, cooperation, and concern for others can be practiced. They also support communication among *pesantren*, families, and community institutions because the informants understood moral development through all three environments. These implications should be treated as directions for reflection rather than as evaluated interventions: the study did not examine an educational program, compare institutions, or measure changes in participants' conduct.

D. Conclusion

Based on the accounts of five informants in Jogowono, *santri* identity was associated with higher initial moral expectations because it signaled more intensive religious education. Nevertheless, the informants evaluated individual *akhlak* primarily through observable conduct, including respectful communication, responsibility, cooperation, social concern, and participation in religious and community activities. Their perceptions were shaped by the interaction of religious education, family environment, social environment, and lived social experience. These findings answer the study's first two objectives while remaining specific to the selected informants.

Berger and Luckmann's concepts of externalization, objectivation, and internalization explain how these perceptions were produced and maintained. Moral values were expressed through community practices, developed into shared expectations surrounding *santri* identity, and accepted or negotiated as guides for individual conduct. The study's context-specific contribution lies in distinguishing the moral expectations attached to religious educational identity from the social recognition accorded on the basis of everyday behavior. It does not establish that one educational background produces better moral character than another.

The study is limited by its single-site design and by the number and composition of its informants, including only one *santri* and one *non-santri*. The findings therefore cannot represent the range of perceptions within Jogowono or other communities. Future research could include women, young people,

parents, *pesantren* alumni, organizational leaders, and participants from different geographical and sociocultural settings. Comparative qualitative studies or carefully designed mixed-methods research could examine whether the distinction between moral expectation and moral recognition appears across a wider range of communities.

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