

POLICY DELIBERATION OF THE HIDDEN CURRICULUM AND ITS RELEVANCE TO RELIGIOUS CHARACTER BUILDING AT MA FATTAH HASYIM TAMBAKBERAS BAHRUL ULUM

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ARTICLE HISTORY

Received : 30-07-2026

Revised : 22-09-2026

Accepted : 30-09-2026

KEYWORDS

doxa;

habitus;

hidden curriculum;

religious character;

pesantren

ABSTRACT

Research on the hidden curriculum in *pesantren*-based institutions has largely focused on its function as a transmission mechanism, while the decision-making process behind its selection remains underexplored. This qualitative single-case study examines the policy deliberation underlying the choice of the hidden curriculum at MA Fattah Hasyim Tambakberas Bahrul Ulum and its relevance to students' religious character formation. Data were collected from six key informants through in-depth interviews, full-immersion observation, and documentation, and analyzed using the Miles and Huberman interactive model. The findings reveal five interrelated themes: (1) formal curriculum crises and inherited doxa as catalysts; (2) philosophical rejection of point-based measurement to avoid artificial compliance; (3) micro-mechanisms of exemplary conduct, visible self-correction, and peer control; (4) cross-arena actor networks conducting informal evaluations; and (5) longitudinal religious habitus amid accreditation tensions. Framed through Bourdieu's concepts of doxa, habitus, and field, the study shows that *pesantren* doxa can be consciously reactivated by institutional leaders in response to contemporary educational challenges. This process operates across formal and informal spaces and offers a contextual character education model for similar Islamic institutions. The study also acknowledges the limits of the hidden curriculum, which does not uniformly shape all students.

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INTRODUCTION

Religious character education in Islamic educational institutions often remains at the cognitive level, where students understand religious values conceptually but do not consistently practise them Muhammad et al. (2025) found a gap between students' conceptual understanding of religious values and the consistency of their daily behavior, even though the formal Islamic Religious Education (PAI) curriculum has been systematically designed. Solichin et al. (2026) reinforced this finding by showing that the hidden curriculum actually produces value dispositions (honesty, social concern, and collective

responsibility) that go far beyond formal learning outcomes alone. Such a gap indicates that the transfer of knowledge in the classroom is not sufficient to form character that is authentically embedded in students. This issue provides an initial basis for *pesantren*-based educational institutions to consider character-building pathways that operate outside the structure of the written curriculum.

The threat of moral degradation in the digital era further exacerbates this issue. Khasanah et al. (2024) noted that the decline in adolescent morality and self-control today has become a crucial challenge for Islamic educational institutions in internalizing religious character values, particularly because exposure to unfiltered online content can erode the religious foundation initially instilled by families. Setyawan et al. (2023) further emphasized that several *pesantren*-based educational institutions do not yet have a specific curriculum explicitly designed to support the development of religious character, making the integration of the national curriculum and hidden curriculum one of the approaches widely adopted. The combination of limitations in the formal curriculum and the rapid flow of digitalization has encouraged many *pesantren*-based madrasahs to seek alternative mechanisms that are more grounded and sustainable.

Religious character education in Islamic educational institutions often remains at the cognitive level, where students understand religious values conceptually but do not consistently practise them (Muhammad et al., 2025; Solichin et al., 2026). This gap is exacerbated by moral degradation in the digital era (Khasanah et al., 2024), and many *pesantren*-based madrasahs therefore integrate the national curriculum with the hidden curriculum because the formal curriculum is not always explicitly designed to support religious character development (Setyawan et al., 2023). Bourdieu's concepts of habitus and doxa offer a useful lens: habitus refers to dispositions formed through repeated experiences within a social space, while doxa refers to taken-for-granted beliefs (Vakalopoulos, 2023). In *pesantren* contexts, dormitory life, exemplary leadership, habituation, supervision, and communal discipline function as a hidden curriculum (Sutikno, 2026). Previous studies have documented these mechanisms in various *pesantren*, including symbolic practices, twenty-four-hour institutional culture, and congregational *tahajud* (Bustami et al., 2026; Hasyim & Rijal, 2026; Muttaqin et al., 2026; Sahrandi et al., 2026).

Religious character education in Islamic educational institutions often remains at the cognitive level, where students understand religious values conceptually but do not consistently practise them (Muhammad et al., 2025; Solichin et al., 2026). This gap is further exacerbated by moral degradation in the digital era, which has become a crucial challenge for Islamic educational institutions in internalising religious character (Khasanah et al., 2024). Many *pesantren*-based madrasahs therefore integrate the national curriculum with the hidden curriculum, especially because the formal curriculum is not always explicitly designed to support religious character development (Setyawan et al., 2023).

Bourdieu's concepts of habitus and doxa offer a useful lens for understanding this phenomenon. Habitus refers to dispositions formed through repeated experiences within a social space, while doxa refers to fundamental beliefs that are taken for granted and largely unquestioned by community members (Vakalopoulos, 2023). In *pesantren* contexts, dormitory life, exemplary leadership, habituation, supervision, and communal discipline function as a hidden curriculum that shapes students' character holistically (Sutikno, 2026). Previous studies have documented these mechanisms in various *pesantren*, including symbolic practices, twenty-four-hour institutional culture, and congregational *tahajud* (Bustami et al., 2026; Hasyim & Rijal, 2026; Muttaqin et al., 2026; Sahrandi et al., 2026).

Although studies on the hidden curriculum in *pesantren* have extensively documented its mechanisms and outcomes, most stop at describing how it is implemented. They rarely examine why an institution deliberately chooses this pathway instead of strengthening a measurable formal assessment system. Saputra et al. (2024) and Lailiyah et al. (2026), for instance, mapped implementation and integration but did not trace the institutional decision-making process, historical background, or managerial deliberations behind that choice. Three gaps therefore remain: first, the lack of analysis of policy deliberation behind the selection of the hidden curriculum; second, limited attention to the philosophical and managerial tension between qualitative character formation and quantitative accountability; and third, insufficient explanation of how such a choice is sustained across formal and informal arenas. This study addresses these gaps by examining the deliberation process at MA Fattah Hasyim Tambakberas Bahrul Ulum and its relevance to students' religious character.

The urgency of this research becomes increasingly evident given that MA Fattah Hasyim operates under the auspices of Pondok Pesantren Bahrul Ulum Tambakberas, one of the oldest and largest *pesantren* in East Java, which is currently facing tension between maintaining the essence of tradition-based character education and the demands of modern bureaucracy that is highly quantitative. Khizbullah et al. (2026) who conducted research directly within the Bahrul Ulum Tambakberas environment, found that the exemplary behavior of the *kiai* and teachers, as well as the religious culture of the

pesantren, were the main supporting factors in strengthening the values of the Pancasila Student Profile, while the density of activity schedules constituted a particular obstacle. Latif et al. (2025) added that optimizing the hidden curriculum in pesantren still faces challenges in the form of limited conceptual understanding among administrators, the dominance of the formal curriculum, and unsystematic evaluation. The tension between accreditation requirements that demand numerical indicators and character that emerges from a qualitative process makes an in-depth examination of the policy background at MA Fattah Hasyim relevant for documentation.

The complexity of this phenomenon, which involves institutional decision-making processes, the philosophical dilemmas of caregivers, and students' experiences that cannot be reduced to numbers, requires a qualitative approach with a case study design. Homsiyah et al. (2026) in a systematic literature review of sixteen articles on the hidden curriculum in pesantren published between 2021 and 2026, found that the majority of studies on this topic employed qualitative approaches because of the contextual, interpretive, and subjectively meaningful nature of the data. Amirudin et al. (2024) also emphasized the use of qualitative studies with the Miles and Huberman interactive analysis model to uncover patterns of hidden curriculum implementation that differ between religious-based schools and general schools. A single case study at MA Fattah Hasyim was selected because this design enables an in-depth and comprehensive exploration of a single context through source triangulation, member checking, and negative case analysis, as commonly employed in qualitative research in Islamic education.

This research is expected to contribute a layered conceptual model that maps the hidden curriculum not merely as a collection of habituation practices, but as a value ecosystem that moves from historical-philosophical backgrounds, the foundation of doxa, and micro-mechanisms of exemplary behavior to its impacts and limitations at the individual level. This contribution enriches the synthesis of the literature, which has thus far remained general, as in Homsiyah et al. (2026) and Latif et al. (2025), by presenting the depth of a single case that traces the policy deliberation process from internal evaluation and teacher resistance to the confirmation of the model with key informants. Thus, this research not only describes what occurs in the field, but also traces why and how a pesantren-based madrasah deliberately chooses the hidden curriculum as its primary strategy for developing students' religious character.

Based on these gaps and the urgency described above, this research specifically focuses on exploring and describing in depth the deliberation process and background behind the selection of the hidden curriculum at MA Fattah Hasyim Tambakberas Bahrul Ulum in developing students' religious character, by tracing the historical, philosophical, and managerial considerations underlying the decision and how this choice is manifested in the mechanisms of exemplary behavior, habituation, and horizontal social control experienced by students in their daily lives within the madrasah and dormitory environments.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach with a single case study design, which is appropriate for obtaining an in-depth understanding of a contextual phenomenon within its real-life context and for investigating a specific case bounded by particular contextual conditions (Yin, 2018), in this case, the background behind the selection of the hidden curriculum at MA Fattah Hasyim Tambakberas Bahrul Ulum. Research informants were determined through purposive sampling based on the criteria of direct involvement and in-depth knowledge of the hidden curriculum policy, resulting in six key informants: the Madrasah Principal (KM), Vice Principal for Curriculum (WK), Pesantren Caregiver (PS), Senior Religious Teacher (GA), Senior Dormitory Supervisor/*Musyirif* (PA), and a 12th-grade student (SW-1). The research was conducted at MA Fattah Hasyim Tambakberas Bahrul Ulum, Jombang, East Java, from November 12 to December 12, 2025, in three data collection phases, namely the initial exploration phase, micro-level exploration and critical reflection, and model confirmation and sustainability projection. Data saturation began to be reached with the fourth informant, while all six informants were retained to strengthen the credibility and depth of the findings.

Data were collected through three complementary techniques: semi-structured in-depth interviews using an open-ended question guide developed based on the theoretical aspects examined in the study (historical-philosophical background, micro-mechanisms of exemplary behavior and habituation, and the stages of value internalization), participant observation ranging from general observation in the initial phase to focused observation and full immersion in the subsequent phases, and documentation studies of the madrasah's vision and mission, dormitory guidelines, and the institution's written regulations.

At the model confirmation stage, the researcher also conducted a limited FGD with key informants to clarify and confirm the patterns of findings obtained. In line with the multi-method approach used by Amirudin et al. (2024) in a multi-case study of the hidden curriculum, this combination of techniques enabled data triangulation from the data collection stage. The credibility of the interview and observation guides was strengthened through expert judgment by the research supervisor before they were used in the field to ensure that each question item was relevant to the conceptual aspects to be explored without directing the informants' responses.

The data were analyzed using the Miles and Huberman interactive model, comprising data reduction (sorting interview transcripts and observation notes into key themes), data display (organizing findings into thematic categories and triangulation matrices), and conclusion drawing, which was continuously verified throughout the data collection process across the three phases. Data trustworthiness followed Lincoln & Guba (1985). Credibility was ensured through source triangulation (interviews, observations, documents), member checking with three key informants, and negative case analysis of two divergent cases. Transferability was supported by thick description of the pesantren setting. Dependability was maintained through an audit trail of field notes and structured transcripts. Confirmability was strengthened through documented researcher reflection at the end of each phase.

Table 1. Conceptual Definitions and Aspects/Dimensions of the Research Phenomenon

Research Phenomenon/Focus	Conceptual Definition	Aspects/Dimensions/Categories
Hidden Curriculum	Values, norms, and habits that are implicitly embedded through the interactions, culture, and daily routines of educational institutions, outside the written curriculum (Rossouw & Frick, 2023; Solichin et al., 2026)	Exemplary behavior; habituation; horizontal social control; spatial and artifact symbolism
Background of Policy Selection	Historical, philosophical, and managerial processes underlying the institution's decision to adopt a character education strategy	Tradition heritage (doxa); internal evaluation of the formal curriculum; contemporary urgency; policy resistance and deliberation
Internalization of Religious Values	A gradual process of instilling religious values until they become integrated into an individual's personality (Dahlan, 2022)	Value transformation; value transaction; value transinternalization
Religious Character	Religious dispositions manifested in the individual's vertical and horizontal relationships (Solichin et al., 2026)	Vertical dimension (relationship with God); horizontal dimension (social relations)
Habitus and Doxa (Bourdieu)	Internal dispositions shaped through repeated practices within a field, as well as fundamental beliefs that are taken for granted and remain largely unquestioned by members of the community (Bourdieu, 1977; Vakalopoulos, 2023)	Field (madrasah-pesantren domain); cultural capital; habitus dispositions; doxa beliefs

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

RESULT

The Formal Curriculum Crisis and the Legacy of Pesantren Doxa as a Starting Point

Field data indicate that MA Fattah Hasyim's decision to adopt the hidden curriculum did not emerge from a single policy, but rather from an accumulation of empirical awareness of the limitations of the formal curriculum in shaping students' actual behavior. The Madrasah Principal emphasized that this approach has strong historical roots because the madrasah emerged from the pesantren tradition. Since its establishment, the founders, who were none other than the elders of Bahrul Ulum Islamic Boarding School, had believed that knowledge without manners is like a tree without fruit (KM, Fattah Hasyim). This philosophical awareness was subsequently translated into a comprehensive ecosystemic policy. The Madrasah Principal explained that the madrasah deliberately built an ecosystem ranging from how students wake up, how they walk past teachers,

to how they eat in the dormitory, with the entire series of habits constituting an unwritten curriculum that has the strongest influence (KM, Fattah Hasyim).

The Vice Principal reinforced this narrative by describing the institution's experience with formal programs that had previously been implemented. The madrasah had implemented a scheduled morning habituation program equipped with attendance records. However, the implementation results did not meet expectations because although students attended the activities, their facial expressions appeared listless, so the activity was ultimately regarded as merely an empty routine (WK, Fattah Hasyim). The internal evaluation in 2018 then became a turning point that determined the subsequent direction of policy. According to the Vice Principal, the evaluation showed that the students with the best behavior were in fact those who lived in the dormitory and actively participated in *pengajian kitab* activities, rather than those who received an A in Akidah Akhlak lessons (WK, Fattah Hasyim).

These findings were further reinforced by the Pesantren Caregiver's perspective, which added the dimension of doxa as the foundation of the decision. According to the Pesantren Caregiver, morality cannot be imposed because knowledge must be accompanied by blessing, and such blessing comes from manners (PS, Fattah Hasyim). This perspective became part of the awareness that subsequently directed the madrasah toward a policy change. The culmination of this awareness was manifested in a managerial decision that explicitly reduced the use of numerical character measurement systems. The Madrasah Principal explained that the madrasah reduced formal assessment instruments for character-related aspects and relied more on direct observation of students' behavior in their daily lives (KM, Fattah Hasyim).

These accounts were consistent with the madrasah's vision and mission documents, which emphasize *uswatun hasanah*.

The Rejection of the Point System: Philosophical Foundations Behind the Decision

The field data show that behind the decision to adopt the hidden curriculum lies a philosophical foundation deeply held by the pesantren policy stakeholders, namely that morality cannot be transferred through verbal instruction, but rather through lived exemplary behavior. The Pesantren Caregiver described the origins of this belief from his own personal experience. He recalled that as a child he saw Mbah Kyai never instruct them to perform the night prayer, but always wake up and perform *tahajjud*, so that they automatically followed the behavior (PS, Fattah Hasyim). This belief was reinforced by the Senior Religious Teacher from the perspective of everyday pedagogy in the classroom. According to him, a teacher may teach the interpretation of verses concerning the command to pray, but if students see their own teacher praying late or failing to pray in congregation, then the teaching delivered in the classroom will be rendered meaningless (GA, Fattah Hasyim).

In Phase 2, the Pesantren Caregiver explicitly compared this approach with the reward and punishment system commonly used in formal education. Based on his experience, the system of points, rewards, and punishments only produces situational compliance. The Pesantren Caregiver stated that children may obey in front of teachers, but change when they are behind the teacher. This condition is viewed not as character, but as "pseudo-compliance" (PS, Fattah Hasyim). This view ultimately led to a philosophical principle that forms part of the Pesantren Caregiver's doxa, namely that "the heart changes through the heart, not through rules" (PS, Fattah Hasyim).

This belief exists not only at the philosophical level, but also serves as a basis for managerial considerations. The Madrasah Principal recognized that character measurement through a point system has the potential to shift students' orientation from striving to become good individuals toward striving to obtain points. According to the Madrasah Principal, if character is measured through points, students will compete to seek points, and this condition may instead create "hypocrisy" (KM, Fattah Hasyim). Thus, the rejection of the point system is not merely based on personal sentiment or traditional considerations, but is related to concerns that quantitative measurement mechanisms may transform the orientation of character formation into mere compliance with rules.

Observation notes showed that calligraphy of verses concerning morality and manners on classroom and dormitory walls was not merely decorative; it often became a subject of informal discussion. This indicates that the philosophical foundation of "manners above knowledge" does not stop at the level of leadership discourse, but is embodied in environmental artifacts that continuously remind members of the madrasah.

Five informants—KM, PS, and GA, supported by PA and WK on other themes—expressed the same principle that exemplary behavior surpasses instruction, while criticism of the point system emerged from both spiritual-traditional and modern-managerial perspectives.

Exemplary Conduct, Habituation, and Horizontal Social Control as Micro Mechanisms

While Theme 2 reveals the philosophical foundation behind exemplary behavior, the data in Theme 3 show how exemplary behavior operates concretely in the field, including when such exemplary behavior actually fails but nevertheless remains impactful. The Dormitory Supervisor explained that the *musyrif* avoids verbal instructions and chooses to provide a direct example. According to him, the *musyrif* more often stands in front of the dormitory wearing a sarong and cap, then walks to the mosque until, gradually, the students follow this behavior (PA, Fattah Hasyim).

The Senior Religious Teacher provided a deeper finding in Phase 2, namely that failing to serve as an example and then correcting that failure in front of students can have a stronger impact than perfect success. He realized that students are far more sensitive to teachers' inner conditions than had previously been assumed. Therefore, the hidden curriculum mechanism operates not only when teachers successfully serve as role models, but also when teachers fail and subsequently correct themselves in front of students (GA, Fattah Hasyim).

Among students, moments of concrete exemplary behavior outside the classroom were more memorable than formal lesson material. One student described his experience of seeing Ustadz Manaf return excess shopping money to a shop. This event made him realize that honesty is not merely a theory, but something that can be seen and practiced in everyday life (SW-1, Fattah Hasyim).

Horizontal social control among students also emerged as a mechanism operating without the involvement of teacher authority. Students did not always report friends who did not go to the mosque to the *ustadz*, but instead chose to call them gently because they felt that all students shared the same habits and responsibilities (SW-1, Fattah Hasyim). Behavioral control therefore did not originate only from teachers or *musyrif* but also grew from relationships among students.

The progressive assignment of responsibility, as seen in the case of Garuda, shows that this micro-mechanism requires time and physical guidance, rather than a one-time instruction. The Dormitory Supervisor explained that when assigning responsibility to students, he first provides an example and builds an understanding that the *adhan* is a call from Allah. According to him, the key is not to demean students, to involve them, to give them trust, and to accompany them physically (PA, Fattah Hasyim).

In the canteen, a student who almost cut in line was gently reprimanded by a peer rather than by a teacher. The *musyrif* also walked around the dormitory at night not to check for violations but to engage in casual conversation.

Across interviews with GA, SW-1, and PA and observations in the canteen and dormitory, the micro-mechanisms thus operated through three simultaneous pathways: exemplary behavior (including corrected failure), gradual habituation with physical guidance, and horizontal social control complementing formal supervision.

Actor Networks and Informal Arenas in the Reproduction of Values

The field data show that the hidden curriculum at MA Fattah Hasyim is not driven by a single actor, but by a network of actors with layered roles that complement one another across different arenas. The Vice Principal for Curriculum revealed the existence of an informal evaluation space that actually serves as the heart of decision-making outside the formal meeting structure. He explained that every month there is an informal meeting with the *musyrif* and several senior teachers, usually held at a coffee shop after Maghrib, without minutes or a formal format, but rather in the form of casual conversation (WK, Fattah Hasyim).

The role of the *musyrif* as a 24-hour supervisor also appears to have its own evaluation indicators that differ from conventional academic measures. The Vice Principal for Curriculum explained that they observe who becomes the prayer leader in the dormitory not based on appointment, but on who naturally emerges in that role. In addition, they observe who reminds their friends to pray, not the *musyrif*, but their peers (WK, Fattah Hasyim). Evaluation of religious values therefore centered not only on students' actions under direct supervision but also on the emergence of initiative and responsibility among students themselves.

Observation data reinforce that the teachers' room serves as an arena for reproducing the hidden curriculum culture among educators themselves, with hierarchies deliberately relaxed. The researcher noted that the *musyrif* and Madrasah Principal sat together in equal positions. In this interaction, a senior teacher could even provide suggestions regarding ways to begin lessons that were considered more appropriate to the students' conditions (Observation Notes, Teachers' Room Interaction). Thus, the teachers' room functions not only as a place for work coordination, but also as an arena for exchanging experiences and values among educational actors.

At the model confirmation stage through the FGD, the Pesantren Caregiver reinforced the interpretation concerning the existence of spiritual actors operating beyond the reach of conventional observation. He reminded the researchers of the

role of the *kyai*'s nightly prayers, which cannot be directly measured but are strongly felt (PS, Model Confirmation FGD Input). This shows that the network of actors involved in the reproduction of values consists not only of actors observable through direct interaction, but also includes spiritual roles believed to influence the religious life of the madrasah community.

The physical arena of the pesantren was also confirmed as a space spatially designed to support these roles. The researcher noted that the prayer room is located at the center of the complex and built higher than the other buildings, making it appear to be the axis of activity (Observation Notes, Symbols and Physical Environment). This position shows that the physical environment of the pesantren also supports the reproduction of religious values through spatial arrangements that are closely connected to the daily activities of the madrasah community.

The Senior Religious Teacher added that his role as an actor does not stop at the teacher-student relationship, but also extends into a regenerative role for junior teachers. This process is carried out through the transfer of values using narratives and personal experiences shared in informal interactions at a coffee shop (GA, Sustainability Projection Interview). Thus, the values that develop within the hidden curriculum are not only transmitted to students, but are also reproduced among educators.

The WK's account indicate that the value ecosystem operated across formal, semi-formal, and informal arenas simultaneously.

Religious Habitus Outcomes: Achievements, Limits, and Accreditation Tensions

This final theme reveals an aspect that is rarely highlighted in narratives of the success of the hidden curriculum, namely its limited effectiveness in individual cases and the structural tensions faced by the institution amid the demands of modern bureaucracy. The long-term impact of the hidden curriculum can be seen in a student's reflective acknowledgment of his own transformation. One student revealed that his change, from previously being reluctant to pray to subsequently feeling uncomfortable when missing congregational prayer, occurred due to the influence of the environment at the madrasah (SW-1, Fattah Hasyim).

However, in Phase 2, the same student acknowledged that the process was not linear and was marked by ups and downs, far from the impression of smooth success. He explained that at times he joined congregational prayer simply because his friends went to the prayer room and he felt uncomfortable staying behind alone. According to him, a person cannot completely change within a short period (SW-1, Fattah Hasyim). Behavioral change through the hidden curriculum was gradual and not always initially driven by personal awareness.

The limits of the effectiveness of the hidden curriculum are clearly illustrated in the Pesantren Caregiver's candid acknowledgment of a failed case ten years ago. The Pesantren Caregiver recalled a student who did not change at all after living in the pesantren for three years. The student had even been exposed for stealing. From this experience, the Pesantren Caregiver concluded that the hidden curriculum only works for those who open their hearts, while the rest lies within the domain of God (PS, Fattah Hasyim).

The negative case of Garuda, a student who remained indifferent despite having lived in the dormitory for two years, shows that personal conditions can be a factor influencing the process. Based on the negative case analysis notes, the student was found to experience severe homesickness and secretly brought a gadget into the dormitory and demonstrated excessive use (Negative Case Analysis Notes 1). This finding shows that the effectiveness of the hidden curriculum cannot be separated from the student's personal condition as the recipient of the value-formation process.

At the institutional level, the Madrasah Principal revealed the most evident structural tension currently faced by the institution. He described the dilemma of how to maintain this approach when accreditation requirements and external reports continually demand numerical data. In practice, the institution often has to translate qualitative data into numbers so that they can be accepted in official reports, a condition that the Madrasah Principal considers ironic (KM, Fattah Hasyim).

The Vice Principal for Curriculum added the methodological difficulty of identifying the causes when a student does not show change. He questioned whether the condition was caused by the dormitory environment or by a family background that had a very strong influence. According to him, the hidden curriculum is not a machine, but a process. Some students respond quickly, while others respond slowly (WK, Fattah Hasyim). Character formation through the environment had complex dynamics and could not easily be measured through simple cause-and-effect relationships.

DISCUSSION

Activated Doxa: Reading the Crisis of the Formal Curriculum through Bourdieu

The crisis in the effectiveness of the formal curriculum and the legacy of pesantren doxa as the starting point of this decision are consistent with the general picture in the literature that the hidden curriculum often emerges as a response to the structural limitations of the formal curriculum. Solichin et al. (2026) identified a similar gap between students' conceptual understanding of religious values and the consistency of their behavior, which in turn encourages Islamic educational institutions to rely on implicit mechanisms outside the classroom. Saputra et al. (2024) at MAN 1 Ponorogo also found that the absence of formal assessment for character-related aspects actually became a characteristic of successful hidden curriculum implementation, in line with KM's decision to reduce formal assessment instruments. However, this study reveals something more specific. While previous studies generally describe the hidden curriculum as an existing condition, the data from MA Fattah Hasyim instead record the deliberation process behind it, including internal debates, explicit rejection of the point system, and the consideration that quantitative measurement of character carries the risk of creating pseudo-compliance.

The crisis in the formal curriculum does not stand alone, but intersects with the legacy of doxa that has long existed within the pesantren tradition. Doxa, namely the belief that knowledge without manners is like a tree without fruit, is not an idea newly created in 2018, but rather an inherited belief that, according to Vakalopoulos (2023), has long been taken for granted by the pesantren community without being questioned. In this context, the crisis in the formal curriculum functions as an empirical trigger that reactivates this old doxa into an institutionally conscious policy.

Sutikno (2026) describes a similar pattern in which pesantren boarding life functions as a field that naturally tends toward implicit mechanisms rather than formal instruments. Therefore, when the formal curriculum proves unable to fully achieve the goal of character formation, the institution does not need to create a hidden curriculum from scratch. Instead, awareness returns to values that have long existed within the field. This process shows that the madrasah's decision was driven not only by the results of evaluations of formal programs, but also by the way members of the institution understand education through inherited social experiences.

Character Ethics vs. Quantification: Critique of Reward-Punishment and Educational Accountability

The philosophical foundation that rejects point-based character assessment is consistent with the literature emphasizing exemplary behavior as a core mechanism of the hidden curriculum in pesantren. Sahrandi et al. (2026) at Pesantren At-Taqwa concluded that the caregivers' authentic spiritual consistency in the practice of *tahajud*, precisely as described by PS regarding his Mbah Kyai, becomes the breath or ethos that drives the entire formal character education process, rather than merely serving as its complement. Bustami et al. (2026) at Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor also emphasized that exemplary leadership becomes a primary pedagogical mechanism that operates through direct experience rather than verbal instruction.

Nevertheless, the informants' explicit criticism of the reward-punishment system in this study expands the existing discourse. Rather than merely describing exemplary behavior as a practice that operates effectively, the data from MA Fattah Hasyim show that the rejection of quantitative alternatives has become part of a philosophical argument that the institution consciously maintains, even though it conflicts with the logic of modern educational accountability, which emphasizes measurement.

This philosophical foundation of the heart changing through the heart is a manifestation of doxa in its purest form. Vakalopoulos (2023) describes doxa as a belief that is simply taken for granted without ever being questioned by the community that lives by it. Therefore, the rejection of the point system is not merely the result of rational calculation, but rather a logical consequence of doxa that had been deeply embedded long before the policy debate took place.

Khasanah et al. (2024) found that the dialectic between institutional regulation and teachers' exemplary behavior transforms external control into self-control. The findings from MA Fattah Hasyim clarify the mechanism behind this process. The rejection of the point system instead becomes a conscious strategy to prevent character from remaining at the level of external compliance, namely control by the system, and to encourage it to develop into internal awareness or self-control. Such an interpretation has not been widely articulated explicitly in previous literature on the hidden curriculum in pesantren.

Habitus in the Pesantren Field: Micro-Mechanisms and the Logic of Value Reproduction

The findings regarding exemplary behavior, habituation, and horizontal social control indicate that character formation at MA Fattah Hasyim takes place through direct and repetitive mechanisms. This pattern is consistent with the study by Muttaqin et al. (2026) at Pesantren Annuqayah, which found that *santri* compliance develops progressively from practical actions toward reflective and spiritual awareness through modeling and informal social interaction. Bustami et al. (2026) at Gontor also confirmed that direct experience and the assignment of responsibilities within organizations strengthen the moral and social development of *santri*, in line with the pattern of progressive responsibility assignment in the Garuda case.

Interestingly, this study also finds that exemplary behavior does not always appear in the form of perfect performance. The finding regarding failed exemplary behavior instead shows that the process of self-improvement in front of students can become an important part of the character formation mechanism. This has not been widely articulated explicitly in the existing literature on the hidden curriculum in pesantren. Most previous studies tend to describe exemplary behavior as the consistent performance of caregivers or teachers, whereas the findings at MA Fattah Hasyim reveal a dimension of vulnerability and a process of self-improvement that can be directly witnessed by students.

This process illustrates how *habitus* is formed through continuous and repeated experiences within the pesantren field. Jin et al. (2026) explain that *habitus* develops through repeated participation in the field, allowing individuals to gradually internalize the rules and expectations of that field. This pattern can be seen in Garuda's process of change after six months of physical guidance. The change did not occur through a single reprimand, but through continuous experiences that eventually formed a new habit.

At a certain stage, horizontal social control also shows that the values instilled no longer depend entirely on the authority of teachers or caregivers. Students begin to act as agents who help maintain and reproduce values within their social environment. This condition indicates that *habitus* has become sufficiently rooted in the community so that values can be maintained through interactions among community members themselves. Sutikno (2026) refers to such a condition as the point at which the *pesantren* field is able to reproduce its values independently through members of its own community.

Formal-Informal Arenas and Actor Networks: Cultural-Symbolic Capital in Evaluation Practices

The findings regarding actor networks and cross-spatial arenas within the value ecosystem enrich the literature, which generally focuses on only one or two main actors. Khizbullah et al. (2026), who conducted research directly in the Bahrul Ulum Tambakberas environment, found that the exemplary behavior of the *kyai* and teachers was a primary supporting factor in strengthening students' character. However, that study did not trace informal evaluation mechanisms among actors, such as the coffee-shop meetings revealed in this study. Homsiyah et al. (2026), through a systematic review, identified four pillars of hidden curriculum implementation, namely exemplary leadership, organizational culture, the dormitory environment, and digital integration. The study tends to view these four pillars as relatively fixed structures, rather than as a network of actors who actively evaluate and regenerate one another as found in the MA Fattah Hasyim case.

Zuhri et al. (2025) also emphasized the importance of collective institutional exemplary behavior. However, the specific role of the *kyai*'s prayers as a hidden element explicitly acknowledged by the informants themselves represents a dimension that is rarely raised as a distinct analytical category in the literature on the hidden curriculum in pesantren. This finding shows that the reproduction of values occurs not only through visible exemplary practices, but also through informal relationships and practices that are recognized as meaningful by the actors within the field.

From a Bourdieusian perspective, the madrasah-pesantren field is not a single space, but rather a series of interconnected sub-fields, ranging from classrooms, dormitories, prayer rooms, teachers' rooms, to coffee shops outside the pesantren complex. Each space has its own local rules of the game or *doxa* and its own distribution of authority. Sutikno (2026) describes dormitory life as the primary field for *habitus* formation. This study extends that understanding by showing that the field relevant to the reproduction of values also extends beyond the physical boundaries of the pesantren, including informal spaces such as coffee shops where cultural capital in the form of experiences, stories, and reflections is transmitted across generations of educators.

The role of the *kyai* through prayers that cannot be measured but are strongly felt can also be understood as a form of symbolic capital within this field, namely an authority recognized by all actors without requiring empirical proof, because its very existence has already become part of the unquestioned *doxa*.

Inter-Field Tensions: Hidden Curriculum amid Accreditation Bureaucracy

The variability of individual responses in the process of character formation is consistent with Salim et al. (2024) at Pesantren Al-Ilahiyyah Ngoro Jombang, which emphasized that the process of habituation and internalization of moderate values takes place gradually and is not uniform among *santri*. Latif et al. (2025) also identified similar challenges in optimizing the hidden curriculum, particularly the limited conceptual understanding of administrators and the lack of systematic evaluation, precisely as reflected in WK's difficulty in separating the influence of the dormitory environment from family background.

On the other hand, the dilemma of translating qualitative data into numbers to meet accreditation requirements is a relatively new finding and has not been widely addressed explicitly in the existing literature on the hidden curriculum in

pesantren. The majority of previous studies have focused more on the internal effectiveness of this approach rather than on its tensions with the formal educational accountability system outside the *pesantren*. This is where the study provides a new contribution, namely by highlighting the political-bureaucratic dimension accompanying the decision to maintain the hidden curriculum amid the pressures of a highly measurable national education system.

The limits of the effectiveness of the hidden curriculum in certain cases also show that the transmission of *habitus* is not a mechanical process that automatically succeeds for every individual entering the same field. Jin et al. (2026) emphasize that *habitus* formation is mediated by the cultural capital that individuals bring with them before entering the field. In the case of Garuda, the capital in the form of psychological vulnerability and gadget addiction brought from outside the *pesantren* field became obstacles that were not immediately dissolved by the strength of the new field.

The tension between the qualitative essence of the hidden curriculum and the demands of quantitative accreditation further reveals a conflict between fields. The *pesantren* field, which is based on *doxa* and symbolic-spiritual capital, confronts the field of national educational bureaucracy, which recognizes capital in the form of numbers and standardized documents. Such a struggle for legitimacy is described by Vakalopoulos (2023) as a natural consequence when the *doxa* of one community begins to intersect with the rules of the game of another field with a different logic.

The Deliberate Hidden Curriculum as a Superior Character Education Strategy

The findings of this study allow for a more assertive conclusion: the deliberate selection of the hidden curriculum at MA Fattah Hasyim Tambakberas Bahrul Ulum represents one of the better approaches to religious character education in *pesantren*-based madrasahs. This claim rests on three interrelated arguments derived from the data and the Bourdieusian framework.

First, the deliberative reactivation of *doxa* produces a form of character formation that is internally coherent with the institution's historical identity. Unlike point-based systems that impose external compliance, this approach cultivates dispositions that are rooted in the community's taken-for-granted beliefs. As the findings show, students gradually internalize religious values not because they seek rewards, but because the environment consistently embodies those values. This makes the resulting *habitus* more durable and authentic than compliance driven by numerical incentives.

Second, the rejection of quantification prevents the transformation of character education into a bureaucratic exercise. The informants' critique of the point system, namely that it generates "pseudo-compliance," is supported by the observation that students may obey in front of teachers but behave differently elsewhere. By contrast, the hidden curriculum operates through exemplary behavior, gradual habituation, and horizontal social control, which together foster self-awareness rather than situational obedience. This mechanism aligns with the philosophical principle that "the heart changes through the heart, not through rules," and it produces a form of character that is less artificial and more sustainable.

Third, the cross-arena actor network ensures that value reproduction is not dependent on a single authority figure. The involvement of the *kyai*, madrasah principal, teachers, *musyirif*, and even students themselves creates a distributed system of character formation that operates across formal, semi-formal, and informal spaces. This network enables the institution to adapt to contemporary challenges while maintaining the core of its tradition. Although accreditation tensions remain, the deliberative and networked nature of this approach allows the madrasah to translate qualitative processes into accountable documentation without reducing character to mere numbers.

Taken together, these arguments suggest that the deliberate hidden curriculum is not merely a traditional remnant but a strategically superior alternative to purely quantitative character assessment. It is better suited to the ontological and epistemological foundations of *pesantren* education, and it offers a contextual model that similar Islamic institutions can adapt. This does not mean that the approach is without limitations, since individual variation and structural tensions persist. However, it does mean that the deliberative choice of the hidden curriculum constitutes a defensible and arguably better pathway for nurturing religious character in *pesantren*-based madrasahs.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that the selection of the hidden curriculum at MA Fattah Hasyim Tambakberas Bahrul Ulum shaped students' religious character through a layered and continuous process. The process began with awareness of the formal curriculum's limitations, intersected with inherited *pesantren* *doxa*, and led to a philosophical rejection of number-based character assessment. It was enacted through exemplary behavior, including failed examples corrected before students,

gradual habituation, and horizontal social control. A network of actors across formal and informal arenas sustained this process, although its effects were not uniform because individual psychological and background factors mediated internalization.

The study contributes theoretically by showing that pesantren doxa can be consciously reactivated by institutional leaders rather than merely inherited passively, and by extending Bourdieusian analysis to informal fields such as coffee shops. Practically, it offers an alternative for pesantren-based madrasahs facing accreditation pressure: character formation can be documented through qualitative observation of processes, habits, interactions, and behavioral change rather than number-based instruments alone. Its main limitations are the single-case design and the short full-immersion period, which limit statistical generalizability and long-term capture of character formation. Future research should extend observation periods and adopt longitudinal or comparative designs to examine how religious habitus is formed, maintained, or transformed, and to develop systematic qualitative documentation mechanisms that remain accountable within educational management.

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