

RESEARCH

Received: June 11, 2026

Revised: August 30, 2026

Accepted: September 8, 2026

Toward an Islamic Humanistic Paradigm of Wasathiyah Character Education: A Case Study of an Indonesian Pesantren

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Abstract

This study aims to reconstruct the paradigm of *wasathiyah* (moderate) character education based on Islamic humanism at the Al-Asror Islamic Boarding School in Semarang. It employs a qualitative approach with a case study design. Data were collected semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and the analysis of relevant documents. Data validity was ensured through the triangulation of sources, techniques, and time, while data analysis followed the interactive model developed by Miles and Huberman. The findings indicate that: (1) *wasathiyah* character education is grounded in five core values of Islamic humanism, namely *adab*, justice, wisdom, trust, and respect for human dignity, which are integrated into the entire educational process; (2) the internalization of values occurs gradually through value transformation, educational dialogue, role modeling, and habituation, thereby evolving into an intrinsic awareness that shapes the students' mindset, behavior, and actions; and (3) the *wasathiyah* character education paradigm is constructed as a holistic educational system by integrating philosophical foundations, goal orientations, internalization strategies, institutional culture, learning systems, and boarding school life practices, making character formation the unifying principle of all educational activities. This study contributes by offering a conceptual model of a *wasathiyah* character education paradigm based on Islamic humanism, which can serve as a reference for developing character education practices within Islamic boarding schools.

Keywords: Character Education, Wasathiyah, Islamic Boarding Schools

Introduction

The core attribute of Islam is "rahmatan lil 'ālamīn", that is, universal mercy. Its doctrine advocates peace, justice, and balance, and the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) have always emphasized noble morality, tolerance of differences, and rejection of extremism. This core doctrinal foundation has been confirmed and supported by academic interpretations (Adawiyah, 2019). However, contemporary society has seen a surge of radical acts, hate speech, and religious exclusionism that falsely claim Islamic legitimacy, including religious terrorism, rejection of religious diversity, and violence committed in the name of morality, which have severely tarnished the true face of Islam (Alim & Arif, 2026). Furthermore, rigid binary religious narratives spread rapidly in the digital sphere, making it easy for vulnerable young groups to be exposed to decontextualized, textualist religious interpretations (Wardiana & Hadi, 2026). This study argues that character education centered on *wasathiyah*, whose core

tenets are moderation, balance, and inclusivity, has become an urgent need. Traditional Islamic boarding schools called pesantren, which hold moral authority and operate intensive mentoring systems, have strategic advantages for instilling moderate religious values. Rudiana, Suryadi, & Helmawati, 2026).

Studies on the implementation of wasathiyah in Islamic boarding schools have been conducted by several researchers with diverse focuses. Sa & Rosuidin (2026) examined the integration of religious moderation values in the Tebuireng Islamic Boarding School through a historical-critical approach, finding that kiai exemplification is the main key, but has not yet revealed the dynamics of implementation at the student level in a participatory manner. Ishaki et.al (2026) used an ethnographic study at the Gontor Islamic Boarding School to analyze the wasathiyah-based curriculum, but there was little exploration of structural challenges in its implementation. Hidayatullah's (2026) research in five West Java Islamic boarding schools identified indicators of wasathiyah character, but it was quantitative so that it lost contextual depth. Meanwhile, Rahmaini, Fitriah, & Sari (2026) explore the role of female students in spreading the value of moderation in society, but does not touch on the internal aspects of pesantren as a character-building ecosystem. Finally, Ansori & Arsyadana, (2026) on wasathiyah in urban pesantren highlights the influence of digital media, but ignores the setting of pesantren in the Java region which has different socio-cultural dynamics. The research gap is clearly visible: there has been no research that has holistically examined the implementation of wasathiyah in Islamic boarding schools in Central Java with a qualitative approach that explores philosophical foundations, operational practices, and challenges simultaneously.

This research aims to describe, analyze, and reconstruct the paradigm of wasathiyah character education based on Islamic humanism at Al-Asror Islamic Boarding School Semarang through three interrelated study focuses. First, the research identifies the values of Islamic humanism that are the basis of wasathiyah character education, including the values of adab, justice ('adl), wisdom, trust, and respect for human dignity, as well as how these values are integrated in the entire Islamic boarding school education system. Second, the research analyzes the process of internalizing Islamic humanism values through value transformation, educational dialogue, exemplary, and habituation so that it develops into an intrinsic awareness that shapes the way students think, behave, and act. Third, the research reconstructs the paradigm of wasathiyah character education based on Islamic humanism by examining the integration between philosophical foundations, educational goal orientation, internalization strategies, institutional culture, learning systems, and pesantren life practices as a holistic education system (Solehudin, 2026).

The selection of Al-Asror Islamic Boarding School Semarang is based on several academic considerations, namely its consistency in developing Islamic education Ahlussunnah wal Jama'ah which prioritizes the values of moderation, its success in integrating the tradition of salaf pesantren with an educational system that is adaptive to the development of society, and the characteristics of pesantren life that allow the process of internalizing values comprehensively. In addition, the study of the construction of the wasathiyah character education paradigm based on Islamic humanism in the pesantren environment is still relatively limited, so this research is expected to make a conceptual contribution to the development of Islamic character education theory as well as become a model for the development of character education in Islamic boarding schools.

This research has strategic urgency at three levels of analysis. First, in terms of public

policy, the research findings provide an organic and contextual model of wasathiyah implementation for the Ministry of Religion in strengthening the Religious Moderation program which has tended to be top-down and does not touch the cultural roots of Islamic boarding schools. Second, in terms of scientific contributions, this study fills the epistemological gap by showing how the value of wasathiyah is not only imported from the global discourse, but is transformed through the roots of authentic pesantren traditions, a perspective that is absent in previous studies that rely too much on Western theoretical frameworks. Third, in terms of social impact, this research is an academic response to the contemporary religious crisis: the radicalization of the younger generation that threatens national integration. More than that, in the midst of the hegemony of dichotomous religious narratives in the public sphere, this research is empirical evidence that Indonesian Islam is able to be the guardian of inclusive, humanist, and equitable religious moderation. Without this kind of academic documentation, good practices in Islamic boarding schools are in danger of being swallowed up by the increasingly massive flow of digital extremism.

Method

This study adopts a case study design under the qualitative research framework. Leveraging the proven suitability of this methodological approach, which has been validated by a large body of similar empirical work in educational research, this study draws on classic academic literature to support the scientific rigor of its method selection. Following the logic of purposive sampling, this study selects Al Asror Islamic Boarding School in Semarang, Indonesia as its research subject (Salmona, Kaczynski, & Grummert, 2026). The school is a typical local entity that has long and consistently implemented Islamic moderatism (wasathiyah) character education, and it fully meets the in-depth exploration needs of this study. This study will carry out a systematic analysis focusing on the specific implementation mechanisms, on-the-ground operational pathways, and actual effects of the school's moderatism character education (Bouncken, Czakon & Schmitt, 2026).

Table 1. Informant Profiles

No	Initials	Remarks	Location	Gender
1	GAS1	Caregiver	Pesantren Al-Asror Semarang	Male
2	GAS2	Teacher	Pesantren Al-Asror Semarang	Male
3	GAS3	Teacher	Pesantren Al-Asror Semarang	Male
4	MAS1	Student	Pesantren Al-Asror Semarang	Male
5	MAS2	Student	Pesantren Al-Asror Semarang	Male
6	MAS3	Student	Pesantren Al-Asror Semarang	Male
7	MAS4	Student	Pesantren Al-Asror Semarang	Male
8	MAS5	Student	Pesantren Al-Asror Semarang	Male
9	MAS6	Student	Pesantren Al-Asror Semarang	Male

This study adopts a multi-source data collection framework to enhance the richness and credibility of its research findings, which covers three specific approaches: First, primary data was collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews with 9 participants selected via purposive sampling, all of whom were directly involved in the on-site implementation of wasathiyah, the golden mean character education. These participants included heads Islamic boarding school, one religious scholar (ustadz), and students at all levels. Second, a two-month participatory observation was conducted to record daily activities that embody golden mean values, such as the study of the Yellow Book (Yellow Book), to offset the limitations of interview data (Li et al, 2026). Third, institutional documents including course plans and school rules were collated, and triangulation was applied to solidify the research foundation. The rationality of this research design is supported by three methodology studies, including Lopez & Whitehead (2013). In addition, this study

strengthens its reliability through a member checking mechanism: preliminary interpretations of the data were shared with core respondents for verification and revision at two key nodes, namely after the completion of all interviews and after the completion of preliminary analysis. The legitimacy of this strategy is also corroborated by three additional existing studies.

Data analysis followed the interactive model proposed by Miles and Huberman (1984), consisting of three iterative stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. This study conducts qualitative research on wasathiyah character education at contemporary Islamic boarding schools. During the data reduction phase, we used NVivo software to systematically code three types of data: interview transcripts, field notes, and literature. We extracted themes related to the philosophical foundation, operational practices, and implementation challenges of this character education, then organized these themes into a theme matrix and a narrative display table. These tools were used to carry out cross-respondent comparisons, and identify patterns, linkages, and contradictions within the dataset. Following the 2002 method of Huberman & Miles, we advanced data collection and analysis simultaneously, using emergent findings to guide subsequent research until thematic saturation was achieved. We also ensured the rigor of our analysis through triangulation and member checking. This set of strategies solidified the study's credibility, reliability, and verifiability, and enabled a comprehensive presentation of the full landscape of this character education's implementation.

Results

Islamic humanism values as the basis for wasathiyah character education at Al-Asror Islamic Boarding School Semarang

The findings of this study show that the values of Islamic humanism which are the basis of wasathiyah character education at the Al-Asror Islamic Boarding School in Semarang are not positioned as a set of norms that are taught textually, but as a value system that directs all educational relations between kiai, ustaz, students, and the pesantren environment including the values of adab, justice, wisdom, trust, and respect for human dignity. 1) The value of manners is the main foundation in the entire educational process in Islamic boarding schools. Adab is not understood as being limited to manners, but as the ability to put everything in its place, both in relation to Allah SWT., teachers, science, fellow students, and the surrounding environment. The form of implementation can be seen in the tradition of ta'dzim to kiai and ustaz, ethics when participating in learning, discipline in carrying out pesantren rules, and the habit of maintaining speech and behavior in daily life. 2) The value of justice ('adl) is realized through proportionate treatment of all students regardless of regional origin, social status, economic ability, or academic level. Each student gets the same opportunity to learn, express opinions, receive guidance, and participate in various Islamic boarding school activities, while the difference in treatment is only based on the needs of coaching and the responsibilities carried out. 3) The value of wisdom is developed through habituation of deliberation, dialogue, tabayyun, and wise resolution of differences. Students are directed not to easily judge different views, but to build an argumentative, rational way of thinking, and still based on sharia values. 4) The value of trust is reflected in the formation of responsibility through various management tasks, student organization activities, picket schedules, and the implementation of service programs that train commitment to individual and collective obligations. 5) The value of respect for human dignity is manifested through a culture of mutual respect, avoiding bullying, accepting the diversity of characters, backgrounds, and abilities of each student, and instilling the belief that every human being has a glory that must be maintained.

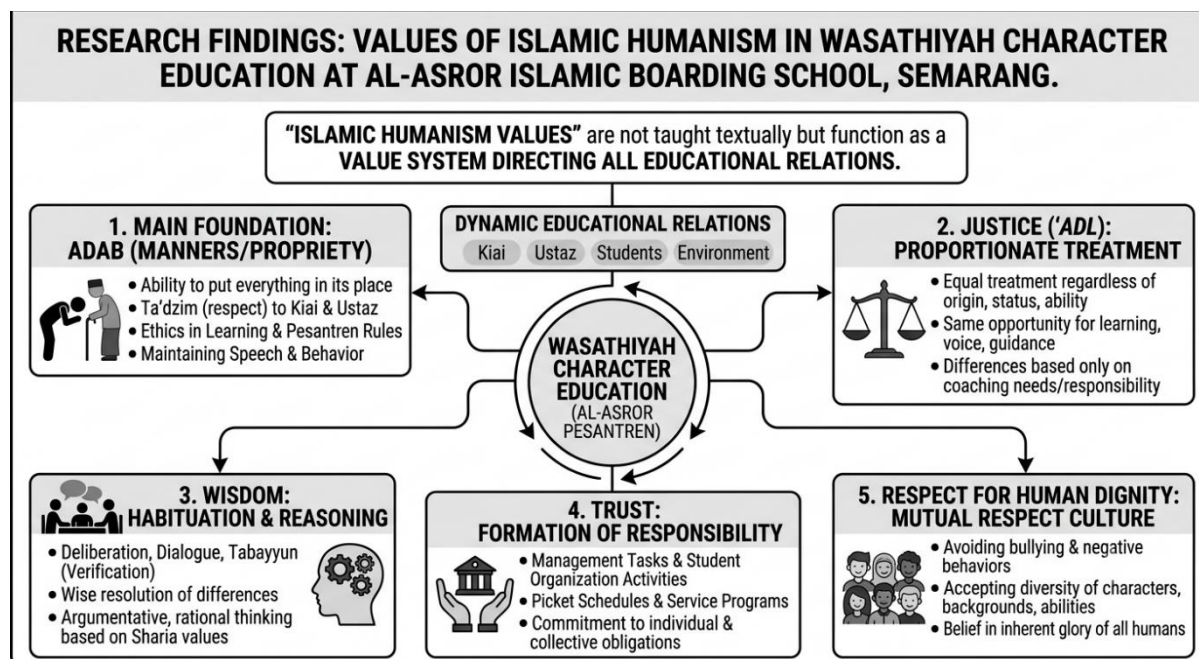


Fig. 1. Islamic humanism values as the basis for wasathiyah character

Interview data revealed that adab was perceived as the primary value guiding educational relationships within the pesantren. Participants described adab not merely as courteous behaviour but as an ethical orientation governing interactions with religious knowledge, teachers, peers, and the wider community. According to the pesantren leader, successful character education depended upon the consistent enactment of these values within everyday institutional life rather than their transmission through classroom instruction alone:

"In this Islamic boarding school, we have never taught wasathiyah only as a theory that students memorize. Values such as manners, justice, wisdom, trust, and respect for every human being must be lived in daily life. If students only understand the concept but do not see the examples of kiai, ustaz, and pesantren culture, then character education will not succeed in shaping their personality." (GAS1, Interview, 22 June 2026).

Observation data confirmed the centrality of adab within daily institutional practices. During classroom activities, santri consistently demonstrated respect toward kiai and teachers by standing upon their arrival, greeting them respectfully, and observing appropriate classroom etiquette. Similar patterns were evident in dormitory life, mosque activities, and informal interactions, where respectful communication and disciplined conduct were maintained across different educational settings. These recurring practices indicate that adab functioned as an institutional norm regulating everyday social relationships throughout the pesantren.

The findings further show that justice ('adl) and wisdom (hikmah) were primarily enacted through participatory dialogue and collective decision-making. Both interviews and observations revealed that students were encouraged to express opinions, discuss differing perspectives, and resolve disagreements through musyawarah and tabayyun rather than confrontation. A teacher described this educational approach as follows:

"When there is a difference of opinion in the classroom or in the dormitory, we don't immediately say who is right or wrong. We invite students to dialogue, do tabayyun, then find solutions based on postulates and mutual benefits. From that process they learn that being moderate does not mean being weak, but being able to be fair and wise in the face of differences." (GAS2, Interview, 25 June 2026).

2026).

Observations during student organizational meetings and dormitory deliberations corroborated these accounts. Students from different regional and social backgrounds were provided equal opportunities to participate in discussions, while institutional leaders facilitated dialogue without privileging particular viewpoints. Decision-making processes consistently emphasized evidence, collective benefit, and respectful consideration of alternative perspectives, reflecting the operationalization of justice and wisdom within everyday institutional governance.

Interview and observation data also identified trustworthiness (*amanah*) and respect for human dignity as values reinforced through shared responsibilities and communal living. Students reported receiving equal opportunities to participate in leadership roles, organizational activities, and institutional responsibilities regardless of socioeconomic background or place of origin. One participant explained:

"During my stay at the Islamic boarding school, I felt that all students were treated equally, even though they came from different regions and economic backgrounds. We are given equal opportunities to learn, become administrators, and express opinions. From there, I learned that respecting others, maintaining trust, and not demeaning friends are part of the teachings of Islam that must be practiced every day." (MAS4, Interview, 28 June 2026).

These perceptions were supported by field observations showing that organizational duties, dormitory responsibilities, and communal activities were distributed proportionally among students. During the observation period, no discriminatory treatment or bullying behaviour was identified. Instead, students regularly demonstrated mutual assistance, appreciation for individual differences, and collective responsibility in completing shared tasks. Institutional leaders consistently addressed interpersonal issues through dialogue and educational guidance, reinforcing an environment characterized by equality, cooperation, and mutual respect.

Table 2 Observation Findings on the Implementation of Islamic Humanistic Values

Observed Activity	Key Observation	Observed Value
Student deliberation	All students were given equal opportunities to express opinions, while decisions were reached through dialogue and <i>tabayyun</i> .	'adl, hikmah
Student organization	Leadership roles and responsibilities were assigned proportionally regardless of students' regional or socioeconomic backgrounds.	amanah, 'adl
Dormitory daily activities	Students collaboratively completed communal duties and voluntarily helped peers experiencing difficulties.	Amanah, Respect for human dignity
Interpersonal interaction	No discriminatory behaviour or bullying was observed; students consistently demonstrated mutual respect and appreciation for diversity.	Respect for human dignity, Adab
Conflict resolution	Teachers and student leaders resolved disagreements through dialogue, clarification, and educational guidance rather than punishment.	

Overall, evidence from interviews and observations demonstrates that Islamic humanistic values function as interconnected principles shaping educational relationships and institutional culture at Pesantren Al-Asror. Across all data sources, participants consistently described these values as being enacted through routine educational practices, interpersonal interactions, organizational participation, and communal responsibilities, indicating that *adab*, justice, wisdom, trustworthiness, and respect for human dignity collectively form the empirical

foundation of wasathiyah character education within the pesantren.

The process of internalizing Islamic humanism values in wasathiyah character education at Al-Asror Islamic Boarding School Semarang

The findings of this study show that the process of internalizing Islamic humanist values in wasathiyah character education at Al-Asror Islamic Boarding School Semarang takes place through continuous stages so that character formation does not occur instantly, but through continuous educational experience. The initial stage is realized through value transformation when kiai and ustaz convey the meaning of manners, moderation, responsibility, respect for others, and the importance of maintaining balance in life through book recitation activities, Islamic studies, and various learning forums. The delivery then develops into a value transaction when students get a space to dialogue, ask questions, express opinions, and discuss life issues openly while maintaining scientific ethics. This interaction makes the educational process take place in a participatory manner so that students do not just receive grades, but also construct their understanding through learning experiences.

The next stage is strengthened by the example of the kiai, ustaz, and pesantren administrators who consistently show the practice of moderate life, humility, discipline, respect for differences, and be able to resolve conflicts wisely. This example is then strengthened through habituation in daily life, starting from congregational worship activities, deliberations, community service, student organizations, to service to the surrounding community that allows these values to be repeated continuously in real actions. As the process progresses, Islamic humanist values are no longer perceived as external rules that must be followed, but change into personal consciousness that influences the way of thinking, the way of making decisions, and the way of interacting with others. Thus, the character of wasathiyah develops as an identity that is inherent in the students because it has been integrated with their belief system and life orientation.

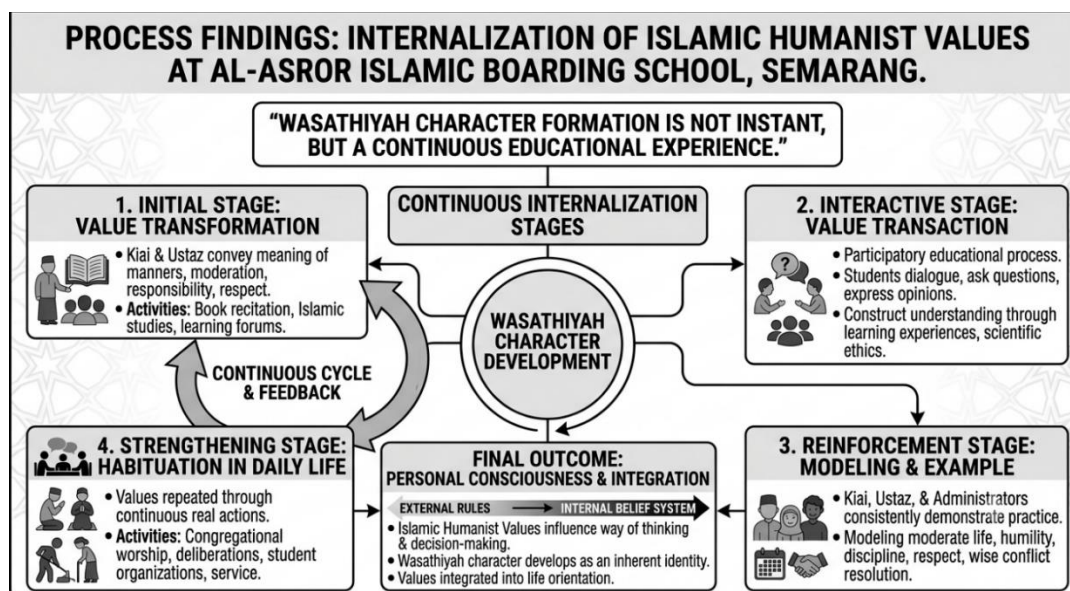


Fig.2: Process Of Internalizing Islamic Humanism Values In Wasathiyah Character

Interview data revealed that the initial stage of internalization was experienced through the communication of moral and religious values during pengajian kitab, Islamic studies, and other learning forums. Participants explained that teachers not only introduced normative teachings regarding adab, moderation, responsibility, and respect for others, but also encouraged students to understand the underlying ethical principles behind these values. Rather than emphasizing

compliance, instructional activities promoted reflective understanding of Islamic teachings. As one participant explained:

"In Islamic boarding schools, we are not only told what is right and what is wrong, but also invited to understand the reasons behind each teaching. When there is a difference of opinion in the study or student organization, the ustaz always gives us the opportunity to ask questions and discuss. From that process I learned that being moderate means being able to listen, respect others, and stick to the teachings of Islam without demeaning different opinions." (MAS1, Interview, 24 June 2026).

Participants further described that value internalization extended beyond formal instruction through continuous interaction with kiai, teachers, and student leaders. Daily observation of how educational leaders demonstrated fairness, humility, responsibility, and respectful communication was repeatedly identified as an important mechanism influencing students' behavioural development. One participant stated:

"What is most influential for me is not only the material taught in class, but how the kiai, ustaz, and administrators carry out what they convey. We saw firsthand how they were fair, humble, and responsible in solving problems. Over time, we imitate that habit until it finally becomes part of the way we behave every day." (MAS6, Interview, 29 June 2026).

Field observations supported these accounts by showing that value internalization occurred through dialogical educational practices. During *pengajian kitab*, students were consistently encouraged to ask questions, express differing opinions, and discuss practical issues encountered in everyday life. Rather than providing immediate prescriptive answers, the kiai facilitated reflective discussion by encouraging students to examine evidence, practice *tabayyun* (verification), consider multiple perspectives, and formulate conclusions based on Islamic principles and collective benefit. These observations indicate that instructional activities emphasized participatory learning in which students actively engaged in constructing moral understanding instead of passively receiving normative instruction.

Observation data also identified habituation as a central mechanism through which Islamic humanistic values became embedded in everyday practice. During dormitory duties, communal cleaning activities, student organizations, and community service programs, students consistently carried out collective responsibilities without distinction based on regional or social background. Mutual assistance frequently emerged spontaneously when peers encountered difficulties, while institutional leaders addressed disciplinary issues through persuasive guidance rather than punitive approaches. Repeated participation in these routine activities enabled values such as responsibility, trustworthiness (*amanah*), cooperation, respect for others, and social solidarity to become normalized within students' daily interactions.

Table 3. Observation Findings on process of internalizing Islamic humanism values in wasathiyah character

Observed Activity	Key Observation	Internalization Mechanism
<i>Pengajian kitab</i>	Students were encouraged to ask questions, discuss differing views, and practice <i>tabayyun</i> before drawing conclusions.	Dialogical learning
Interaction with <i>kiai</i> and teachers	Educational leaders consistently demonstrated fairness, humility, responsibility, and respectful communication.	Role modelling
Dormitory and communal activities	Students completed shared responsibilities collaboratively regardless of social or regional background.	Habituation through daily practice
Student organizations and community service	Students practiced leadership, cooperation, and collective responsibility in organizational and service activities.	Experiential learning

Observed Activity	Key Observation	Internalization Mechanism
Student discipline and guidance	Teachers addressed misconduct through dialogue and educational guidance rather than punishment.	Reflective and value-based reinforcement

Taken together, evidence from interviews and observations indicates that the internalization of Islamic humanistic values at Pesantren Al-Asror is characterized by an interconnected sequence of value communication, dialogical learning, exemplary leadership, and sustained habituation. Across all data sources, participants consistently described these educational processes as gradually transforming externally introduced values into personally accepted behavioural orientations that guided everyday interactions, interpersonal relationships, and decision-making within the pesantren community.

The Construction of the Wasathiyah Character Education Paradigm Based on Islamic Humanism at Al-Asror Islamic Boarding School Semarang

The findings of this study show that *wasathiyah character education* based on Islamic humanism at Al-Asror Islamic Boarding School Semarang is built as a holistic education system through the integration of the philosophical foundations of Islamic humanism, the basic values of the Islamic boarding school, the orientation of educational goals, internalization strategies, institutional culture, learning systems, and the life practices of the pesantren that are interrelated and work synergistically in shaping the character of the Islamic boarding school Scott. This paradigm places humans as educational subjects who have spiritual, intellectual, moral, social, and humanitarian potential that must develop in a balanced manner through the internalization of the values of adab, justice ('*adl*), wisdom, trust, and respect for human dignity as the foundation of *wasathiyah* character. All components of education are designed to form a balance in human relationships with God, fellow humans, nature, and society so that character formation is not positioned as a separate subject, but rather becomes a principle that integrates all educational activities. These values are revived through the pesantren culture characterized by the example of kiai and ustaz, book learning, deliberation traditions, student organization, discipline, leadership, discipline of common life, community service, and dialogical and participatory educational relationships. The process of character formation takes place gradually through the transformation of values, dialogue, examples, and habituation so that the values of Islamic humanism are internalized into an awareness that guides the way students think, behave, and act in their daily lives.

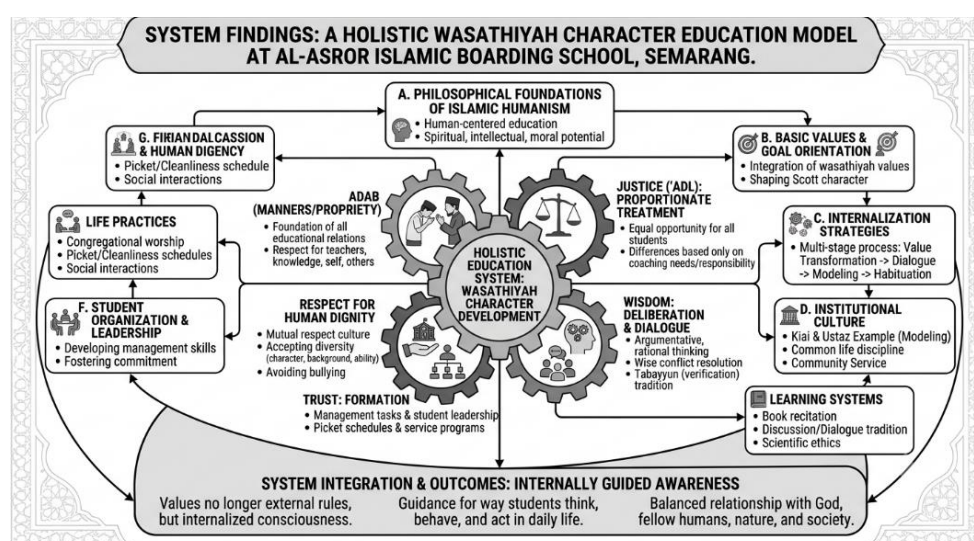


Fig.3: Construction of the Wasathiyah Character Education Paradigm

Santri consistently perceived that all educational activities were interconnected in cultivating wasathiyah values. Rather than identifying a single learning context responsible for character formation, participants described multiple educational settings that reinforced similar moral principles. Daily religious practices, classical Islamic learning (pengajian kitab), student organizations, deliberative meetings (musyawarah), and community service were perceived as mutually reinforcing arenas through which values of respect, responsibility, justice, trustworthiness, and social awareness gradually became habitual dispositions. One participant explained:

"In my opinion, in this pesantren, character education is not only conveyed during recitations or lessons. Almost all activities teach the same thing, starting from congregational prayers, organizations, deliberations, to when we serve the community. Over time, I felt that the value of respecting others, being responsible, and being fair became a habit that came into its own because every day we lived in such an environment." (MAS2, Interview, 21 June 2026).

Another participant emphasized that character education was experienced as an institutional way of life rather than an independent subject:

"What I feel during the mondok is that all activities are interrelated. When studying the book, we are taught manners and wisdom, then those values are practiced in organizations, deliberations, until the time of hanging out with friends. So I don't see character education as a lesson in itself, but as a way of life that is always habituated by all Islamic boarding school residents." (MAS5, Interview, 27 June 2026).

Similarly, another respondent highlighted the importance of daily role modelling in facilitating value internalization:

"Here we are taught that being a student is not only diligent in studying, but also must be able to maintain trust, respect everyone, and be responsible for the tasks given. Because every day we see examples from kiai, ustaz, and administrators, we finally get used to applying those values without feeling forced to follow the rules of the pesantren." (MAS3, Interview, 30 June 2026).

Field observations corroborated these interview findings. Observation data showed that educational activities functioned as an interconnected system in which similar values were continuously reproduced across multiple institutional settings. Values introduced during religious instruction were consistently reinforced during congregational prayers, student organizational meetings, environmental service activities, and community engagement programs. Interactions among kiai, teachers, student leaders, and santri demonstrated consistent patterns of modelling respectful communication, collective responsibility, deliberative decision-making, and mutual assistance. No clear distinction was observed between academic learning and character education because both operated simultaneously throughout everyday institutional life.

This study draws on a dual data source combining observations and interviews to analyze the wasathiyah character education paradigm at Pesantren Al-Asror Islamic Boarding School, and finds that institutional culture is the core mechanism for implementing Islamic humanistic values. The school's daily practices that support the realization of these values include disciplined communal life, collaborative problem-solving, participatory leadership, and dialogue that respects dissenting opinions. The local musyawarah consultation process is always conducted prior to any collective decision-making, and the trait of mutual assistance runs through all of the school's formal and informal activities.

Table 4. Observation Findings on the Integrated Wasathiyah Character Education System

Observed Setting	Key Observation	Observed Pattern
Religious learning and congregational worship	Values introduced during Islamic learning were consistently reinforced through daily worship practices.	Integration of learning and character education
Student organizations and <i>musyawarah</i>	Decision-making was conducted through participatory dialogue and collective deliberation.	Deliberative leadership and respect for diverse opinions
Communal life	Students practiced shared responsibilities, mutual assistance, and disciplined daily routines.	Collective responsibility and cooperation
Leadership interaction	<i>Kiai</i> , teachers, and student leaders consistently demonstrated respectful communication and role modelling.	Exemplary leadership in value transmission
Community engagement	Character values were practiced through environmental service and community service activities.	Continuous application of Islamic humanistic values beyond the classroom

These practices confirm that the core values tied to wasathiyah are never merely disseminated as normative rules, but are continuously put into practice across the campus. This study concludes that character development stems from sustained engagement with institutional culture, rather than isolated instructional interventions. The school's paradigm integrates seven dimensions: philosophical orientation, institutional culture, religious learning, communal practice, organizational participation, leadership modeling, and social engagement, uniting them into a single coherent educational ecosystem. All respondents noted that character development is gradually internalized through daily participation, which verifies that Islamic humanistic values function as organizing principles that permeate the entire campus environment, rather than being teaching content limited to specific segments of school operations.

Discussion

The findings demonstrate that wasathiyah character education at Pondok Pesantren Al-Asror is not implemented as an isolated curricular component but as an integrated institutional process grounded in Islamic humanism. Five interrelated values *adab*, justice (*'adl*), wisdom (*hikmah*), trustworthiness (*amanah*), and respect for human dignity function as the moral foundation regulating relationships among *kiai*, *ustadz*, *santri*, and the wider pesantren community. These values are internalized progressively through value transformation, dialogical interaction, exemplary leadership, and sustained habituation. In practice, students encounter the same moral principles through religious learning, congregational worship, dormitory life, *musyawarah*, student organizations, communal responsibilities, and community service. This pattern indicates that character formation does not result solely from classroom cognition but from repeated participation in an institutional culture where religious values are continuously interpreted, modelled, and practised. The findings therefore address the study objectives by connecting philosophical foundations, internalization mechanisms, and institutional practices within a unified wasathiyah character education paradigm. This interpretation is consistent with the empirical evidence showing that dialogical learning, role modelling, habituation, experiential participation, and reflective reinforcement jointly transform externally introduced values into personally accepted behavioural orientations.

At the international level, the findings resonate with recent scholarship emphasizing that contemporary religious education should connect strong religious identity with dialogue, social

responsibility, and engagement with diversity. Kolb (2021) shows that interreligious learning is most meaningful when learners encounter religious differences through relational and dialogical pedagogical practices rather than through descriptive knowledge alone. Genç and Uddin (2023) similarly propose an inclusivist approach to religious education that allows commitment to religious identity to coexist with constructive participation in plural societies. These arguments parallel the Al-Asror findings, particularly the use of dialogue, *tabayyun*, collective reflection, and respectful engagement with differing perspectives. Saada (2023) further argues that Islamic religious education can contribute to global citizenship by connecting Islamic ethical commitments with justice, responsibility, tolerance, and recognition of human diversity. However, the present study advances this discussion by showing how these principles are institutionally reproduced through everyday residential life rather than solely through formal classroom pedagogy.

The findings also correspond to Kimanen's (2023) argument that religious education must move beyond learning *about* justice toward learning *with* and *through* social justice. In Al-Asror, justice, respect, and responsibility are not only presented as conceptual values; students are required to enact them through organizational leadership, shared duties, deliberation, and community service. This experiential dimension is particularly important because it transforms moderation from cognitive understanding into routine moral practice. In contrast to studies conducted primarily in formal classroom settings, the pesantren context enables sustained interaction between learning, residence, religious authority, peer relationships, and communal responsibility. Consequently, the present findings suggest that institutional continuity may explain why values introduced during formal religious instruction can become more deeply embedded in students' behavioural dispositions.

The findings are strongly aligned with recent Indonesian research on character education, pesantren, and religious moderation. Hidayat and Bujuri (2020) show that character education in Islamic boarding schools is developed through institutional vision, formal instruction, extracurricular activities, and habituation. Muhyiddin et al. (2022) similarly emphasize that sustainable character development requires the integration of learning, modelling, and everyday pesantren practices. Huda (2024) demonstrates that pesantren core values constitute an important foundation for strengthening religious moderation. These findings correspond directly with the present study, particularly the conclusion that wasathiyah cannot be effectively cultivated through classroom instruction alone.

More specifically, Mujahid (2021) shows that moderate Muslim character can be developed through the interaction of pesantren traditions, religious foundations, institutional identity, and daily educational experiences. Nasir and Rijal (2021) likewise demonstrate the importance of institutionalizing religious moderation within Islamic educational environments rather than treating it as a peripheral discourse. Rohman and Muhtamiroh (2022) further find that comprehensive curriculum structures and discursive learning contribute to the development of inclusive attitudes among santri. The Al-Asror case supports these conclusions but extends them by identifying Islamic humanism as the philosophical foundation through which curriculum, leadership, dialogue, habituation, and communal experience become interconnected.

Recent Indonesian studies on religious literacy provide additional support. Subchi et al. (2022) position religious moderation as a critical response to intolerance and radicalism in Indonesian Muslim society, while Hanafi et al. (2022) demonstrate that students' perspectives on moderation are shaped through religious literacy processes rather than merely by exposure to doctrinal statements. Hanafi et al. (2023) further show that the integration of moderation into teaching content and pedagogical practice is more effective than presenting moderation as an

independent theme. Rukiyanto et al. (2025) similarly indicate that religious education can strengthen respect for plurality when learners experience direct engagement, dialogue, and reflective encounters with difference. Together, these studies reinforce the present conclusion that moderation is best understood as a socially and educationally constructed orientation.

The present findings are also consistent with studies emphasizing contextual and integrated Islamic learning. Al Khansa et al. (2024) demonstrate that integrated Islamic Religious Education becomes more meaningful when religious values are linked to students' lived educational experiences. Koderi et al. (2023) similarly indicate that contextualized and culturally responsive learning environments strengthen meaningful engagement with educational content. Erlina et al. (2025) extend this perspective by emphasizing equality, inclusion, and human dignity within Islamic educational design, while another study by Erlina et al. (2025) shows that moderation-oriented problem-based learning can integrate balanced reasoning, justice, respectful disagreement, and non-violence into participatory learning. These studies support the Al-Asror finding that Islamic values become more durable when students actively interpret and enact them rather than simply memorize them.

The importance of institutional and community contexts is further reinforced by Usman et al. (2021), who demonstrate how religious identity develops through participation in a community of practice. This is particularly relevant to the present study because Al-Asror operates as a residential learning community in which santri gradually acquire institutional norms through legitimate participation in worship, study, organizations, and service. More recent local evidence also points to the potential extension of character education into digital environments. Suharmanto et al. (2025) show that wasathiyah values can be incorporated into digital learning materials, while Primahadi and Purwasih (2025) demonstrate the potential of character-based digital media for strengthening value-oriented learning. Hariandini et al. (2026), however, indicate that successful digital integration depends on pedagogical design, educator competence, and institutional support. These findings suggest that the Al-Asror model may eventually be extended into hybrid environments, although the relational character of pesantren education should not be reduced to technological delivery.

Theoretically, the findings support Bandura's (1986) social learning theory because students' repeated observation of kiai, ustadz, and administrators provides a mechanism through which moral behaviour is modelled and socially reinforced; they are also consistent with Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural perspective because moral understanding is constructed through language, relationships, collective activity, and culturally embedded practices. Lave and Wenger's (1991) situated learning framework and Wenger's (1998) concept of communities of practice further illuminate how participation in worship, organizations, shared responsibilities, and community service gradually transforms students from recipients of norms into active members who embody institutional values, an interpretation reinforced by Usman et al. (2021). Freire's (1970) dialogical pedagogy and Mezirow's (1997) transformative learning are likewise relevant because *musyawarah*, questioning, critical reflection, and *tabayyun* allow students to examine assumptions rather than merely accept authoritative statements. These findings extend the character education perspectives of Berkowitz and Bier (2005), Tan (2014), Sahin (2018), and Abdullah et al. (2019) by suggesting that character formation in pesantren is sustained through the interaction of philosophical commitments, social participation, authority, and institutional culture. Pedagogically, wasathiyah should therefore be integrated across curriculum, dialogue, peer interaction, organizational participation, conflict resolution, community service, and digital religious literacy rather than confined to stand-alone moderation lessons. Educators should facilitate psychologically

safe discussion, strengthen *tabayyun* as a form of critical media and religious literacy, and use exemplary conduct as an explicit pedagogical resource. Studies on integrated and moderation-oriented education similarly support the value of connecting religious concepts with participatory and contextual learning (Al Khansa et al., 2024; Hanafi et al., 2023; Mukhibat et al., 2024; Purwanto et al., 2023). At the policy level, these findings suggest that institutional and governmental evaluations of religious moderation should assess not only curricular content but also leadership behaviour, student participation, school culture, mechanisms of dialogue, conflict resolution, digital literacy, and community engagement. Policy approaches should allow pesantren to contextualize core principles such as justice, balance, tolerance, non-violence, responsibility, and human dignity according to their educational traditions while providing safeguards against polarized and decontextualized religious narratives in digital environments.

The novelty of this study lies in conceptualizing wasathiyah character education as an integrated educational ecosystem grounded in Islamic humanism rather than as a collection of independent teaching techniques. Previous studies have demonstrated the importance of curriculum, leadership, moderation, literacy, modelling, inclusion, or habituation separately (Hidayat & Bujuri, 2020; Mujahid, 2021; Nasir & Rijal, 2021; Muhyiddin et al., 2022; Hanafi et al., 2022, 2023; Huda, 2024), but the current findings explain how these components interact within a single institutional structure. The proposed paradigm positions *adab*, justice, wisdom, trustworthiness, and respect for human dignity as foundational values; dialogue and reflection as interpretive mechanisms; leadership modelling as relational reinforcement; habituation as behavioural stabilization; and organizational and community participation as arenas for experiential application. In this way, the study extends earlier Islamic education scholarship by explaining how wasathiyah develops from abstract theological knowledge into a lived moral orientation. The contribution is therefore both conceptual and empirical: it reconstructs Islamic humanism as a coherent foundation for moderation while demonstrating how this foundation becomes embedded within everyday institutional practice.

Several limitations should be considered when interpreting these findings. First, this qualitative study focuses on a single pesantren in Semarang, and its institutional culture, Ahlussunnah wal Jama'ah orientation, leadership traditions, and local social context may differ substantially from those of other Indonesian pesantren. Second, the relatively small participant group and its predominantly male composition limit the study's ability to capture gendered variations in the experience of wasathiyah education. Third, interviews concerning desirable religious and moral behaviour may be affected by social-desirability bias, while observation captures behaviour within a particular institutional period rather than demonstrating whether these dispositions persist after students leave the pesantren. Fourth, the qualitative design explains processes and meanings but cannot determine causal relationships or quantify changes in moderation, empathy, tolerance, justice orientation, or civic responsibility. Future research should therefore undertake comparative multi-site studies involving traditional, modern, urban, rural, and female pesantren; include more heterogeneous socioeconomic and regional populations; and integrate qualitative evidence with validated quantitative measures. Longitudinal research is also needed to determine whether institutionally cultivated wasathiyah persists into higher education, employment, family life, and civic participation. Finally, future studies should examine how dialogue, *tabayyun*, humanistic leadership, and communal moderation operate within digitally mediated religious environments, particularly social media and AI-assisted learning. Emerging studies on character-oriented digital media and integrated digital learning (Koderi et al., 2023; Primahadi & Purwasih, 2025; Suharmanto et al., 2025; Hariandini et al., 2026) provide an initial

foundation for investigating whether the relational and humanistic mechanisms identified in pesantren can be preserved in hybrid educational ecosystems.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that wasathiyah (middle-way) character education at Pondok Pesantren Al Asror is developed through an integrated institutional ecosystem rather than through religious instruction or formal character education alone. The findings indicate that the formation of middle-way character is supported by the interaction of six core elements within the pesantren's educational environment, enabling wasathiyah to function as an ongoing educational orientation grounded in Islamic humanism. In this context, wasathiyah is expressed through the development of four core competencies that support students' capacity to navigate religious, social, and cultural diversity. Based on these findings, the study proposes the Humanistic Islamic-Based Wasathiyah Character Education Paradigm as a framework for understanding how Islamic boarding schools can cultivate middle-way character through the integration of institutional practices, educational relationships, and Islamic humanistic values.

Although this study has generated certain theoretical and practical contributions, it still has core limitations: this research was conducted solely at Pondok Pesantren Al Asror, an Islamic boarding school in Semarang, Indonesia. The proposed Humanistic Islamic-Based Wasathiyah Character Education Paradigm only aligns with this school's institutional characteristics, leadership traditions, and educational culture. Its conclusions have limited transferability, and cannot be generalized to other Islamic education settings or educational institutions with different sociocultural backgrounds. For follow-up research, scholars may include multiple types of Islamic boarding schools such as traditional (salaf), modern (khalaf), and girls-focused Islamic boarding schools to carry out cross-regional comparative multi-case studies. Researchers can also combine longitudinal and mixed-methods approaches to observe the paradigm's long-term impacts, and gradually refine and expand the use of this paradigm.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to express our deepest gratitude to the leadership, administrators, ustadz, and students of Pondok Pesantren Al-Asror Semarang for their invaluable cooperation, openness, and assistance throughout the data collection process. Special thanks are extended to the key informants and participants whose willingness to share their insights and experiences made this research possible. We also acknowledge the academic support and constructive feedback provided by our colleagues at Universitas Negeri Walisongo Semarang, which significantly enhanced the quality of this manuscript.

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