



## The Hermeneutic Interpretation of Ta'lim Mutaallim By Al-Zarnuji In Shaping The Morals of Santri at Pesantren

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### Abstract

Islamic moral education has long been positioned as a normative and prescriptive process that emphasizes the doctrinal transmission of values. Such an approach tends to overlook the interpretive dimension and learners' lived experiences in the process of internalizing moral values. Departing from these limitations, this article examines *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim* by al-Zarnuji as a form of lived moral pedagogy within the pesantren context, employing Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutic theory of mimesis as the analytical framework. The purpose of this study is to understand how the moral teachings contained in *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim* are not merely taught as normative texts but are internalized, mediated, and dynamically interpreted by educational actors in the pesantren. This research adopts a qualitative case study design conducted at Pesantren Buntet, Indonesia. Data collection techniques include participant observation, in-depth interviews with kiai, ustaz, and santri, and textual analysis of *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim*. The data are analyzed through Ricoeur's three-stage mimesis framework: prefiguration, configuration, and refiguration. The findings reveal that al-Zarnuji's moral principles function as pre-reflective ethical horizons that shape the dispositions of santri (Mimesis I), are configured into coherent pedagogical narratives through the authority and exemplarity of the kiai (Mimesis II), and are actively refigured by learners in their responses to contemporary educational challenges (Mimesis III). The implications of this study underscore that Islamic moral education should be understood as a hermeneutic-narrative praxis that integrates textual authority, pedagogical mediation, and learner agency, thereby contributing to the development of character education discourse in the modern era.

**Keywords:** *Hermeneutics, Ta'lim Mutaallim, Al-Zarnuji, morals, pesantren, Buntet Cirebon*

### Abstrak

Pendidikan moral Islam selama ini banyak diposisikan sebagai proses normatif dan preskriptif yang menekankan transmisi nilai secara doktrinal. Pendekatan semacam ini cenderung mengabaikan dimensi interpretatif serta pengalaman hidup peserta didik dalam menginternalisasi nilai-nilai moral. Berangkat dari keterbatasan tersebut, artikel ini mengkaji *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim* karya al-Zarnuji sebagai bentuk pedagogi moral yang hidup (*lived moral pedagogy*) dalam konteks pesantren, dengan menggunakan teori hermeneutika mimesis Paul Ricoeur sebagai kerangka analisis. Tujuan penelitian ini untuk memahami bagaimana ajaran moral yang terkandung dalam *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim* tidak sekadar diajarkan sebagai teks normatif, melainkan diinternalisasi, dimediasi, dan ditafsirkan secara dinamis oleh para aktor pendidikan di pesantren. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan desain studi kasus yang dilaksanakan di Pesantren Buntet, Indonesia. Teknik pengumpulan data meliputi observasi partisipatif, wawancara mendalam dengan kiai, ustaz, dan santri, serta analisis tekstual terhadap

*Ta'lim al-Muta'allim. Data dianalisis melalui kerangka tiga tahap mimesis Ricoeur, yaitu prakonfigurasi, konfigurasi, dan refigurasi. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa prinsip-prinsip moral al-Zarnuji berfungsi sebagai horizon etis pra-reflektif yang membentuk disposisi santri (Mimesis I), dikonfigurasi dalam narasi pedagogis yang koheren melalui otoritas dan keteladanan kiai (Mimesis II), serta direfigurasi secara aktif oleh peserta didik dalam merespons tantangan pendidikan kontemporer (Mimesis III). Implikasi penelitian ini menegaskan bahwa pendidikan moral Islam perlu dipahami sebagai praksis hermeneutik-naratif yang mengintegrasikan otoritas teks, mediasi pedagogis, dan agensi peserta didik, sehingga berkontribusi pada pengembangan wacana pendidikan karakter di era modern.*

**Kata kunci:** Hermeneutika, Ta'lim Muta'allim, Al-Zarnuji, moral, pesantren, Buntet Cirebon

## INTRODUCTION

Studies on moral formation in Islamic education have long attracted scholarly attention, particularly because education is not solely aimed at developing intellectual competence but also at shaping students' character and ethical dispositions (Hallaq, 1997); (Makdisi, 1981). One of the most influential classical works in the Islamic educational tradition is *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim* by Al-Zarnuji, which emphasizes intention, discipline, respect for teachers, humility, and perseverance as foundational elements of moral formation (Komalasari & Yakubu, 2023; Salamah et al., 2025). Although written in the medieval period, this text continues to be widely taught in Indonesian pesantren, demonstrating its enduring relevance in shaping students' learning ethos and moral character across generations (A. Aziz et al., 2024). Thus, Al-Zarnuji's work functions not merely as a guide to learning ethics, but as a formative instrument of character deeply embedded in the Islamic educational tradition of the Malay-Indonesian world (Abdullah & Yusuf, 2024; Muslih et al., 2024).

In the pesantren context, moral education conceptualized as *takhalluq bi akhlaq al-karimah* constitutes the core of all educational and formative activities (Bruinessen, 1995a; Dhofier, 1980). Pesantren integrate intellectual, spiritual, and social dimensions into a unified process of moral cultivation. However, social change, modernization, and the ethical challenges of the digital era necessitate a re-interpretation of these classical moral values (Bruinessen, 1995b); (Busthomy & Muhid, 2020). This condition underscores the need for more contextual interpretive approaches to classical texts, including *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim*, in order to elucidate and apply their moral teachings in ways that are relevant to contemporary santri life (M. Aziz et al., 2025; Mufrihah et al., 2025; Permadi et al., 2025).

Previous studies have examined Al-Zarnuji's educational ideas, particularly concerning learning etiquette, teacher-student relationships, and character values (Al-Rosyid & Tajiri, 2023). More recent international research has further affirmed the relevance of Al-Zarnuji's thought in modern Islamic education, including in the Malaysian context and in madrasa curricula and character education initiatives (Asrori, 2016). Nevertheless, much of this scholarship remains normative or descriptive in nature and has not yet employed a hermeneutic approach to explore how Al-Zarnuji's moral teachings are reinterpreted within contemporary educational settings. To date, there has been no systematic investigation of how kiai, ustaz, and santri understand, interpret, and enact Al-Zarnuji's teachings in the lived reality of pesantren life. This gap indicates a significant research lacuna.

This study seeks to address this gap by employing a hermeneutic approach to reinterpret *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim* and to examine how such interpretations shape the moral formation of santri at Pesantren Buntet. Pesantren Buntet was selected as the research site due to its status as one of the oldest and most influential pesantren in Indonesia, with a strong tradition of teaching *kitab kuning*, including the works of Al-Zarnuji (Dhofier, 1980); (Bruinessen, 1995b). The

integration of *salafiyah* traditions with modern educational systems renders this pesantren an ideal context for exploring how classical texts are reanimated within contemporary educational realities. Specifically, this study offers novelty by providing a hermeneutic analysis of a classical Islamic educational text within a modern pesantren setting—an approach that has not been systematically undertaken in previous studies while also elucidating the mechanisms through which Al-Zarnuji’s moral values are transformed into practical frameworks for santri character development in the contemporary era.

## METHOD

This study employs an interpretive qualitative approach grounded in Paul Ricoeur’s hermeneutic framework, which emphasizes layered meaning-making through the dynamic relationship between text, reader, and social context (Scott-Baumann, 2009). Ricoeur’s hermeneutic stages Mimesis I (prefiguration), Mimesis II (configuration), and Mimesis III (refiguration) are applied to examine *Ta’lim al-Muta’allim* from historical, structural, and praxeological perspectives. According to Paul Ricoeur, mimesis is a concept that explains how texts or narratives are interpreted and applied; in brief, it refers to the “imitation or representation of reality” imbued with moral meaning. In the context of pesantren education, mimesis describes how classical teachings such as *Ta’lim al-Muta’allim* by Al-Zarnuji are not merely read, but are also understood and practiced in the daily lives of the students (Scott-Baumann, 2009).

At the prefiguration stage, the study explores the historical context of Al-Zarnuji’s work and classical Islamic moral thought (Hallaq, 1997). During the configuration stage, textual analysis focuses on moral themes, learning ethics, symbolic representations of *adab*, and Al-Zarnuji’s argumentative structure. At the refiguration stage, the analysis investigates how the text is reinterpreted and enacted in the daily lives of santri at Pesantren Buntet through teacher–student interactions, everyday disciplinary practices, and patterns of traditional moral internalization (Dhofier, 1980). Primary data were collected through close textual reading, semi-structured interviews with kiai, ustaz, and santri, as well as participant observation.

Data analysis followed Ricoeur’s interpretive procedure of naïve reading, structural analysis, and comprehensive interpretation, enabling a progressive movement from initial understanding to reflective comprehension (Kaplan, 2021). Research validity was ensured through source and method triangulation, member checking, and peer debriefing with experts in pesantren education. The study was conducted at Pesantren Buntet one of the oldest pesantren in Indonesia with a strong tradition of *kitab kuning* instruction, including *Ta’lim al-Muta’allim* (Bruinessen, 1995b). The pesantren was selected due to its hybrid character, integrating classical scholarly traditions with modern educational adaptations, making it an ideal context for examining how classical ethical texts are reanimated in contemporary moral formation. Ethical considerations were observed through institutional approval, participant confidentiality, and respect for pesantren norms throughout the research process.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Results

#### The Role of Classical Texts in Pesantren-Based Moral Education

Classical Islamic texts (*kutub al-turats*) such as *Ta’lim Muta’allim* by Al-Zarnuji (Habsy et al., 2024) have played a pivotal role in shaping the moral and spiritual fabric of pesantren education in Indonesia. Far beyond serving as historical artifacts or linguistic references, these texts are perceived as living documents that actively guide the behavior, thought, and ethical attitudes of santri (Islamic boarding school students). *Ta’lim Muta’allim*, in particular, presents an educational philosophy that centers on *adab* (etiquette), *niyyah* (intention), humility, and

respect for knowledge and teachers (Bruinessen, 1995b). This framework is not only memorized but also actualized through the daily rituals and disciplined lifestyle of santri, reflecting the integration of knowledge and moral practice. Such integration affirms the core purpose of pesantren not merely as centers of knowledge transmission but as institutions of holistic character development.

Based on the results of the observation, the strength of pesantren lies in their ability to translate these classical values into contemporary relevance. Through methods such as *bandongan* (collective reading), *sorogan* (individual tutoring), and the embedded culture of *khidmah* (service), classical texts like *Ta'lim Muta'allim* are not treated as static dogma but are interpreted contextually in response to modern ethical challenges (Huda, M., & Kartanegara, 2015). As observed in many pesantren, teachings on patience, discipline, and sincerity are continuously re-embedded in students' personal development, enabling them to confront modern temptations such as materialism, individualism, and digital distraction. The hermeneutic engagement between the classical text and the lived experience of santri facilitates an ongoing moral conversation that bridges past wisdom with present realities.

In this way, classical texts function not merely as pedagogical content but as dynamic tools of ethical formation. They reflect the pesantren's enduring relevance in preserving Islamic moral values amid an era increasingly marked by moral relativism. The interpretive flexibility of texts like *Ta'lim Muta'allim* allows pesantren to remain both faithful to tradition and adaptive to societal change. Rather than being obsolete, the text gains new layers of meaning as it is taught, debated, and practiced in new sociocultural contexts (Kiai Salman, *Interview*, August, 2023). This continuous reinterpretation underscores the pesantren's role as a resilient moral bastion, one that upholds Islamic ethical teachings through time-tested methods and dynamic intellectual engagement.

This aligns with the view of the pesantren caretakers, who emphasize that *Ta'lim Muta'allim* is not merely a textbook but a life guide that holistically shapes the moral character of santri. Classical works like *Ta'lim Muta'allim* play a vital role in shaping the moral character of students in Indonesian pesantren. The book is not only studied but also brought to life through daily practice, instilling values such as *adab* (etiquette), *niyyah* (intention), and respect for knowledge and teachers. Methods such as *bandongan*, *sorogan*, and the culture of *khidmah* illustrate how pesantren transform classical teachings to address modern challenges like materialism and digital distractions. Through a hermeneutic approach, the text is continually reinterpreted in contemporary contexts, making it a dynamic ethical tool and affirming the pesantren's role as a moral stronghold that is both adaptive to change and faithful to tradition (Kiai Salman, *Interview*, August, 2023). Furthermore, the presentation of the research findings is structured with reference to Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutic framework.

### **Mimesis I: Prefiguration of Moral Concepts in *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim***

Field findings at Pesantren Buntet indicate that the foundational values articulated by Al-Zarnuji constitute a strong ethical foundation for all educational activities. These values include sincere intention (*niyyah*), proper conduct in seeking knowledge (*adab al-ta'allum*), and respect for teachers, which are regarded as essential moral capital that every santri must possess prior to formal study. Kiai emphasize that this initial understanding is not merely formalistic, but serves as a moral compass guiding santri in all aspects of pesantren life, from classroom learning to social interactions in the dormitory.

*Ta'lim al-Muta'allim* is consistently used as the primary reference for inculcating learning ethics. At the beginning of each academic year, kiai reiterate discussions on intention and teacher–student ethics, underscoring these values as the core of pesantren moral education. Classroom and dormitory observations reveal that santri routinely engage in moral habituation

prior to formal instruction, such as greeting respectfully, lowering their gaze when speaking to teachers, and adhering to proper seating etiquette. These practices indicate moral prefiguration, whereby values are organically embedded through daily interactions and social habits before formal theoretical learning occurs.

Beyond the pesantren, many santri report familiarity with Al-Zarnuji's teachings through their families, previous madrasas, or village environments. This suggests that moral formation begins within broader social contexts rather than being confined to the pesantren institution. Such findings portray moral education as a holistic process involving family, community, and pesantren as integrated spaces for ethical cultivation.

Mimesis I at Pesantren Buntet is further characterized by the consistent reinforcement of moral values through rituals, prayers, and habituation practices such as *tadarus*, nightly *mujahadah*, and collaborative work. Interviews reveal that santri perceive *adab* not as formal regulation but as an integral component of their identity as santri, providing the foundation for subsequent moral interpretation (Kiai Salman, *Interview*, August, 2023; Kiai Fahad, *Interview*, August, 2023). Prefigurative values are also evident in peer interactions, including mutual respect, shared responsibilities, and cooperation in dormitory life. Kiai employ verbal and non-verbal reinforcement such as praise for discipline or corrective admonitions to ensure effective moral internalization. Everyday practices, including greeting seniors, honoring study commitments, and maintaining environmental cleanliness, represent concrete manifestations of Al-Zarnuji's prefigurative moral values. Overall, Mimesis I underscores that moral values are firmly established prior to formal instruction, serving as a foundation that facilitates subsequent processes of configuration and refiguration.

## **Mimesis II: Configuration Narrative Structure of Moral Teachings**

Field data demonstrate that kiai at Pesantren Buntet employ narrative methods as a primary pedagogical strategy for conveying the teachings of *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim*. Narratives function to animate moral values within the santri's moral imagination. Stories of classical scholars who traveled long distances in pursuit of knowledge serve as concrete examples for instilling perseverance and learning discipline. Such narratives not only inspire but also render moral values experientially tangible.

When discussing respect for teachers, for instance, kiai recount stories of scholars who walked great distances to seek permission or blessing from their teachers, emphasizing the enduring relevance of classical values in contemporary santri life (Kiai Fahad, *Interview*, August, 2023). Observations indicate that narrative pedagogy enhances comprehension and retention, as santri engage emotionally and cognitively with moral experiences rather than merely receiving prescriptive rules.

Configuration is also evident in curricular structuring. Kiai and ustaz sequence moral instruction systematically beginning with intention, followed by social ethics, learning discipline, and peer relations thus constructing a coherent moral trajectory. Each moral teaching is linked to practical pesantren activities, such as daily assignments, ritual practices, or peer interactions, rendering moral theory contextual and lived. Narratives of conflict or hardship experienced by scholars further reinforce the notion that morality requires experiential engagement and sustained practice.

Santri internalize moral values as part of a coherent moral storyline rather than as isolated rules. Narrative pedagogy thus highlights value hierarchies, positioning sincere intention as the moral foundation and subsequent virtues as practical extensions (Kiai Fahad, *Interview*, December, 2023; Kiai Wawan, *Interview*, August, 2023). This interactive process, involving discussion and reflection, positions kiai as moral configurators who mediate between classical

texts and contemporary santri realities, making ethical learning narratively meaningful and reflective.

**Mimesis III: Refiguration Interpretation by Kiai, Ustaz, and Santri**

Mimesis III emphasizes how kiai, ustaz, and santri relate classical texts to lived experience, enabling contextual moral application. At Pesantren Buntet, refiguration occurs when kiai interpret *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim* to address contemporary challenges such as social media use, modern learning discipline, and interpersonal dynamics. Santri translate the concept of sincere intention into daily discipline through routine recitation, consistent attendance at learning sessions, and timely completion of academic tasks.

Interpretations are heterogeneous and individualized, shaped by personal experiences. Ustaz function as hermeneutic mediators who adapt classical teachings to the psychological, social, and cultural conditions of santri, while kiai employ contextual narratives to demonstrate moral problem-solving in situations such as peer conflict resolution. Refiguration is also evident when santri apply moral values beyond the pesantren within families, peer networks, and broader communities (Gufran, student in Pesantren Buntet, *Interview*, January, 2024; Kiai Fahad, *Interview*, December 2024).

Observations show that santri actively engage in reflection and discussion, reinterpreting Al-Zarnuji's principles to meet contemporary educational and social needs. Moral values thus become practical and actionable rather than abstract. Kiai emphasize sincerity as essential to moral practice amid modern motivational challenges. Through refiguration, santri come to understand morality not as formal compliance but as a guiding framework for actions, decisions, and social relations. This dialectical process among text, educators, and learners enables the continuous revitalization of *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim* in contemporary moral formation. Overall, Mimesis III affirms that hermeneutic interpretation by kiai, ustaz, and santri is central to bridging classical Islamic moral education with modern challenges at Pesantren Buntet.

**Table 1. Ricoeur's Mimesis in *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim* at Pesantren Buntet**

Mimesis Stage	Conceptual Focus	Forms of Practice at Pesantren Buntet	Key Actors
Mimesis I	Prefiguration of moral concepts (sincere intention, learning ethics, respect for teachers)	Moral habituation: greetings, respectful conduct toward teachers, classroom etiquette, daily rituals ( <i>du'a</i> , <i>tadarus</i> , <i>mujahadah</i> ), ethical dormitory interactions	Kiai, families, social environment
Mimesis II	Configuration—coherent narrative and pedagogical structuring of moral values	Use of scholars' narratives, kiai's experiences, exemplary stories; curricular sequencing (intention → ethics → discipline → social relations); discussion and reflection	Kiai, ustaz
Mimesis III	Refiguration—contextual interpretation and application of moral values	Application of <i>adab</i> in social media use, time management, conflict resolution, and family/community relations	Kiai, ustaz, santri
<b>Mimesis Stage</b>	<b>Conceptual Focus</b>	<b>Forms of Practice at Pesantren Buntet</b>	<b>Key Actors</b>
Mimesis I	Prefiguration of moral concepts (sincere intention, learning ethics, respect for teachers)	Moral habituation: greetings, respectful conduct toward teachers, classroom etiquette, daily rituals ( <i>du'a</i> , <i>tadarus</i> ,	Kiai, families, social environment

Mimesis II	Configuration—coherent narrative and pedagogical structuring of moral values	<i>mujahadah</i> ), ethical dormitory interactions	Kiai, ustaz
		Use of scholars’ narratives, kiai’s experiences, exemplary stories; curricular sequencing (intention → ethics → discipline → social relations); discussion and reflection	

**Practical Manifestation of Moral Values in Pesantren Buntet**

Field findings indicate that the moral values articulated in *Ta’lim al-Muta’allim* are visibly embedded in the daily routines of santri at Pesantren Buntet. Simple practices, such as the habitual exchange of greetings when encountering kiai, ustaz, or fellow santri, function as concrete expressions of *adab*. Beyond greetings, ethical social conduct constitutes an integral dimension of pesantren life. Santri are trained to communicate respectfully, lower their gaze when addressing teachers, and demonstrate mutual respect through cooperative behavior, indicating the internalization of classical moral values within everyday social interactions.

Discipline in daily religious observance, including congregational prayers, *dhikr*, and regular religious study sessions, serves as a tangible manifestation of spiritual character formation (Muchlis, santri at Pesantren Buntet, *Interview*, January, 2024). These practices cultivate not only ritual obedience but also perseverance, responsibility, and consistency. Nightly learning routines such as *tabajjud* and nocturnal *tadarus* demonstrate that moral habituation extends beyond formal instruction and becomes embedded in the rhythm of santri life, reinforcing Al-Zarnuji’s emphasis on sincere intention (*ikhlas*) and diligent effort.

Pesantren Buntet enforces structured disciplinary regulations, including restricted mobility, duty rosters, and dormitory supervision systems. These regulations function as mechanisms of self-regulation, translating classical moral teachings into concrete ethical practices. Norms governing teacher–student interaction—such as refraining from interrupting, maintaining appropriate tone, and waiting one’s turn to speak—are consistently observed in classrooms, kiai offices, and study groups, reaffirming respect for pedagogical authority as a core component of character education (Kiai Fahad, *Interview*, December 2024).

The monitoring of digital device and social media use constitutes a significant institutional policy. Santri are encouraged to minimize distractions, thereby operationalizing classical values of focus and intellectual diligence within a modern context. Observations further reveal that peer interactions function as key arenas for moral enactment. Practices such as mutual assistance during dormitory duties, sharing learning resources, and resolving conflicts through deliberation (*musyawarah*) reflect the internalization of Al-Zarnuji’s social and ethical principles. Moral values are also enacted through extracurricular activities, including sports, environmental hygiene, and pesantren social programs, all of which are designed to foster responsibility, discipline, and social awareness. Overall, the practical enactment of *Ta’lim al-Muta’allim* at Pesantren Buntet demonstrates that classical moral values are not merely taught theoretically but are actively internalized and sustained through daily practice, shaping santri into holistic, disciplined, and ethically grounded individuals (Kiai Wawan, *Interview*, January, 2024. Kiai Fahad *Interview*, January 2024; Somad, santri at Pesantren Buntet, *interview* January, 2024).

**Hermeneutic Themes in Santri Moral Formation**

Hermeneutic analysis reveals several recurring themes that structure santri moral formation at Pesantren Buntet and consistently manifest in daily practices and interactions. The first theme is sincere intention (*al-niyyah*), whereby santri are taught that all actions—both learning and worship must be grounded in a pure intention to seek knowledge and divine approval, reflecting Al-Zarnuji’s emphasis on internal moral orientation. The second dominant

theme is reverence for teachers and kiai (*ta'ẓīm*), expressed through modes of speech, bodily comportment, and obedience to guidance, illustrating the internalization of classical ethical norms within a contemporary educational setting.

The third theme concerns discipline and self-regulation, evident in adherence to daily schedules, ritual habituation, and regulated access to digital devices. This discipline underscores that morality is enacted through practice rather than remaining at a theoretical level. The fourth theme is cooperation and social responsibility, emerging in peer interactions, communal duties, and social outreach activities, reflecting the integration of moral and social dimensions emphasized in Al-Zarnuji's teachings.

The fifth theme involves self-reflection and introspection, through which santri are encouraged to regularly evaluate their intentions, behavior, and personal development, enabling deeper and more individualized moral internalization. The sixth theme highlights narrative experience as a source of moral learning; stories of classical scholars, lived experiences of kiai, and concrete pesantren examples provide existential contexts that render moral values intelligible and applicable. The seventh theme concerns the adaptive reinterpretation of classical values in response to contemporary challenges, such as digital ethics, modern time management, and online social interaction, demonstrating the continued relevance of Al-Zarnuji's moral framework in the modern era. The eighth theme emphasizes the harmony between spiritual and social morality, indicating that character formation extends beyond internal piety to shape santri's relationships with peers, teachers, and the wider community (Kiai Wawan, *Interview*, January, 2024; Kiai Fahad *Interview*, December, 2023; Muchlis, santri at Pesantren Buntet, interview January, 2024).

Overall, the hermeneutic analysis confirms that the moral themes derived from Al-Zarnuji's text generate an integrated character pattern that bridges classical ethical principles with lived practice, equipping santri to navigate contemporary ethical challenges while remaining rooted in Islamic moral tradition.

## DISCUSSION

This study analyzes the relevance of Al-Zarnuji's moral teachings at Pesantren Buntet. Employing Ricoeur's hermeneutic framework, the findings demonstrate that core values such as intention, discipline, *adab*, and social responsibility are internalized and adaptively enacted in everyday practices, thereby bridging the classical Islamic ethical legacy with the demands of contemporary education.

### Hermeneutic Significance of Mimesis I–III (Ricoeur) in the Pesantren Context

The stage of Mimesis I (Prefiguration) emphasizes that moral and ethical values precede formal textual instruction. At Pesantren Buntet, santri enter the learning environment with pre-existing moral dispositions such as politeness, the practice of greeting, and respect for teachers shaped by family upbringing, local traditions, and prior madrasah education (Scott-Baumann, 2009); (Kaplan, 2021); (Asrori, 2016). This indicates that the pesantren functions not merely as an academic institution but as a historically embedded moral-social space shaped by longstanding Islamic traditions. Mimesis II (Configuration) focuses on the narrative structures through which moral values are conveyed. Kiai and ustaz at Buntet employ stories of classical scholars, personal experiences, and pedagogical anecdotes to organize ethical teachings into coherent moral plots (Annabil & Hanif, 2025; Ma'arif et al., 2025; Mumtaz et al., 2024). This narrative approach effectively facilitates the gradual internalization of ethical principles, enabling santri to comprehend and apply moral teachings in a structured and meaningful manner (Scott-Baumann, 2009). Mimesis III (Refiguration) underscores the active role of interpretation by readers and learners. Santri at Pesantren Buntet do not passively receive moral values; rather, they reinterpret and refigure Al-Zarnuji's teachings in relation to their lived



experiences. This process reveals the dynamic and adaptive nature of pesantren morality, which continuously responds to modern social and technological challenges (Scott-Baumann, 2009).

Ricoeur's hermeneutics conceptualizes interpretation as an interconnected three-stage process in which prefigurative values, moral narratives, and learner refiguration form a cyclical pedagogical dynamic. At Pesantren Buntet, this cycle is evident in santri daily routines, including disciplined study practices, congregational worship, and interpersonal interactions grounded in respect and patience (Kaplan, 2021); (Busthomy & Muhid, 2020); (Bakar et al., 2019). Within this framework, mimesis provides a robust theoretical lens for explaining how classical traditions persist within modern contexts. Pesantren Buntet thus emerges as a social laboratory demonstrating that *kitab kuning* are not merely historical artifacts but living ethical resources sustained through moral practice and character education (Huda, M., & Kartanegara, 2015).

Mimesis I further highlights the importance of social prefiguration in establishing moral foundations. Santri from diverse backgrounds bring initial value systems that are subsequently contextualized within pesantren culture. (Ricoeur & Ricoeur, 1976; Scott-Baumann, 2009) approach emphasizes that these preliminary meanings serve as the basis for subsequent interpretation, rendering moral learning both personal and contextually relevant (Asrori, 2016). During the configuration stage, narrative pedagogy employed by kiai does more than transmit information; it constructs moral structures capable of deep internalization. Narrative practices connect classical values with santri lived realities, facilitating dialogical and reflective learning processes (Suherman et al., 2025).

Refiguration, as articulated in Ricoeur's hermeneutic framework, underscores the role of learners as active moral agents who appropriate ethical meanings through lived practice rather than passive recipients of normative instruction. In this stage, moral texts and teachings transcend their original didactic function and are re-embedded within the concrete life-world (*Lebenswelt*) of the santri. The ethical values conveyed through classical texts and pedagogical narratives are thus reinterpreted and enacted in accordance with the santri's evolving experiential horizons (Badri, 2022). This dynamic is evident in everyday practices within the pesantren environment. Self-regulation during night study sessions, for instance, reflects the internalization of discipline (*mujāhadah al-nafs*) and responsibility, where santri exercise moral autonomy in managing time, focus, and behavior without constant external supervision (Husnaeni & Burga, 2024; Lestari & Bedi, 2025; Yulianto, 2024). Similarly, active participation in communal duties such as cleaning shared spaces, assisting peers, and observing collective rituals demonstrates how ethical principles of cooperation, humility, and social accountability are translated into habitual action.

Furthermore, the regulated use of digital devices illustrates a contemporary site of moral negotiation. Rather than rejecting technology outright, santri reinterpret traditional ethical norms—such as moderation (*wasatiyyah*), self-restraint, and respect for knowledge—within modern digital contexts. This process reveals that moral formation in pesantren is not rigidly prescriptive but dialogical, allowing ethical norms to be recontextualized in response to new challenges. In line with Ricoeur's hermeneutic perspective, refiguration thus represents a transformative moment in which ethical meaning reshapes the subject's practical reasoning and moral identity. Santri do not merely replicate inherited moral codes; instead, they actively reconfigure ethical teachings through reflective practice, thereby contributing to the ongoing vitality and adaptability of the pesantren's moral tradition (Scott-Baumann, 2009).

Overall, Mimesis I–III operate as an integrated and complementary framework. Prefiguration establishes moral foundations, configuration provides narrative coherence, and refiguration enables contextual interpretation. This hermeneutic cycle renders moral education at Pesantren Buntet dynamic, character-oriented, and resilient within the conditions of modernity (Scott-Baumann, 2009).

### **Relevance of Al-Zarnuji's Ethics to Contemporary Pesantren: A Hermeneutic Perspective**

Al-Zarnuji's moral ethics remain highly relevant within modern educational contexts, particularly at Pesantren Buntet. Core concepts such as sincere intention (*niyyah*), *adab*, and reverence for teachers constitute foundational ethical principles that are internalized by santri and guide their everyday conduct (Razali & Mamat, 2024); (Huda, 2021). From Ricoeur's hermeneutic perspective, this condition corresponds to Mimesis I (prefiguration), in which santri enter the educational setting with prior moral experiences and dispositions that shape their readiness to receive and interpret Al-Zarnuji's text (Scott-Baumann, 2009). The relevance of these values is further evident in the narrative structures employed by kiai to convey moral teachings. Stories of classical scholars and teachers' lived experiences enable santri to recognize that ethical learning is not merely theoretical but is enacted in concrete practice, thereby sustaining the vitality of classical teachings in contemporary life (Suherman et al., 2025). Within Ricoeur's framework, this reflects Mimesis II (configuration), whereby the narrative organization of the text structures moral values in a gradual and meaningful manner for its audience (Scott-Baumann, 2009).

Practices of discipline and self-regulation-such as restrictions on digital device use and structured dormitory schedules represent tangible applications of Al-Zarnuji's principles in a modern context (A. Aziz et al., 2024). These practices demonstrate that classical moral values can be effectively contextualized within contemporary institutional policies. At the level of Mimesis III (refiguration), santri actively reinterpret and appropriate moral values in relation to their personal experiences, allowing classical teachings to be reread and revitalized within everyday life (Scott-Baumann, 2009).

Teacher-student relationships grounded in respect, patience, and effective communication exemplify the implementation of Al-Zarnuji's ethics within social interaction. This underscores that character education in pesantren continues to prioritize interpersonal ethics, in alignment with classical Islamic moral principles and Ricoeur's concept of refiguration (Huda, M., & Kartanegara, 2015); (Razali & Mamat, 2024). Daily moral habituations-such as nocturnal *tadarus*, congregational prayers, and communal duties-further illustrate the internalization of classical values within pesantren culture. These practices reinforce the hermeneutic argument that character education is most effective when enacted through lived experience rather than conveyed solely at a theoretical level (Suherman et al., 2025; Widiani et al., 2023).

The findings also highlight the congruence between classical moral values and contemporary educational challenges, including time management, student leadership development, and digital ethics. Pesantren Buntet successfully integrates Al-Zarnuji's ethical legacy with modern pedagogical practices without diminishing its essential values, consistent with Ricoeur's hermeneutic principle of dialogue between text and lived context (Scott-Baumann, 2009).

Based on a pedagogical standpoint, the use of narrative and lived examples in moral instruction demonstrates that ethical learning becomes more effective when contextualized, enabling santri to grasp the meaning and purpose of moral values rather than merely memorizing prescriptive rules (Suherman et al., 2025); (Scott-Baumann, 2009)). This approach aligns with Mimesis II and III, which emphasize the relationship between textual narrative and reader experience. Hermeneutic methodology thus enables pesantren, as traditional educational institutions, to bridge classical pedagogy with modern challenges. Al-Zarnuji's text functions as a medium for moral reflection, internalization, and adaptive interpretation relevant to contemporary santri life (Huda, M., & Jasmi, 2016); (Huda, 2021); (A. Aziz et al., 2024)). Overall, these findings affirm that Al-Zarnuji's pedagogical legacy remains a living ethical tradition

within pesantren, linking theory and practice while shaping santri into holistic, disciplined, and ethically grounded individuals. Moreover, this study underscores the value of Ricoeurian hermeneutics for reinterpreting classical texts within contemporary Islamic education (Suherman et al., 2025); (Razali & Mamat, 2024).

### **Contribution to Islamic Moral Pedagogy**

Ricoeurian hermeneutics can serve as an effective theoretical framework for understanding contemporary Islamic moral pedagogy. By employing the stages of Mimesis I–III, moral education is conceptualized not merely as the transmission of normative rules but as an interpretive process that enables classical texts to be reread and contextualized within lived educational settings (Ricoeur & Ricoeur, 1976; Scott-Baumann, 2009). Narrative, habituation, and social practice emerge as the primary foundations of santri moral formation at Pesantren Buntet. Narratives of classical scholars, teachers' experiential accounts, and daily routines—such as nocturnal *tadarus*, congregational prayers, and communal duties—collectively shape an internalized moral habitus, reinforcing culturally grounded character education theory (Busthomy & Muhid, 2020) ; (Badri, 2022)).

Pesantren Buntet provides a concrete example of how Islamic moral values can be systematically transmitted through repetitive and consistent pedagogical practices. Routine activities and structured patterns of social interaction function as effective media of moral instruction, demonstrating that character education is not merely normative but deeply internalized through embodied experience (Suherman et al., 2025); (Razali & Mamat, 2024). The findings further indicate that a hermeneutic approach highlights the active role of santri in the refiguration of moral values. Rather than passive recipients, santri actively interpret, adapt, and implement ethical teachings in accordance with their socio-cultural contexts, ensuring the continued relevance of classical values in modern life. This process underscores a dynamic and participatory model of moral pedagogy aligned with Ricoeur's hermeneutic principles (Suherman et al., 2025); (Scott-Baumann, 2009)).

The integration of narrative instruction and moral habituation within pesantren culture demonstrates that Islamic character education is most effective when embedded in concrete social practice. Al-Zarnuji's teachings are conveyed not only through textual study or didactic instruction but through everyday actions, facilitating ethical internalization and holistic character development (Suherman et al., 2025); (Scott-Baumann, 2009)). Moreover, the hermeneutic approach enables a critical assessment of the relevance of classical moral values to contemporary challenges, including digital discipline, student leadership, and time management. These findings illustrate that the pedagogical legacy of classical Islamic thought remains adaptable and capable of guiding modern education without compromising its essential principles (Hadi, 2022).

This study further contributes by systematically documenting concrete moral practices at Pesantren Buntet. These practices include disciplined study routines, congregational worship, respectful teacher–student relations, and communal responsibilities. Such documentation provides a transferable reference for other pesantren and Islamic educational institutions that seek to strengthen character education rooted in classical Islamic texts. The findings indicate that moral transmission does not rely solely on textual instruction. Instead, it emerges from a synergistic interaction between the authority of classical texts, the interpretive role of teachers, and the lived social experiences of santri. Teachers function as mediators who translate textual ethics into practical guidance. Santri, in turn, internalize moral values through daily participation in pesantren life (Juwaini et al., 2025; Miftahuddin et al., 2024; Safrilsyah et al., 2024). This process ensures that moral education is consistent, embodied, and contextually meaningful. As

a result, classical moral teachings remain relevant and applicable within contemporary educational settings, as noted by Razali and Mamat (2019).

By foregrounding the role of active interpretation and moral refiguration, this research advances a nuanced understanding of the dynamic interaction between classical texts and pesantren traditions. Ricoeurian hermeneutics thus functions as a conceptual bridge between inherited moral teachings and contemporary pedagogical practice, affirming the contextual and adaptive nature of Islamic moral education (Huda, 2021; Listrianti et al., 2025; Sabarudin et al., 2023). Overall, this study addresses a significant scholarly gap concerning the relationship between classical texts, hermeneutic interpretation, and santri moral formation. It reinforces the insight that effective character education in pesantren transcends theoretical instruction by internalizing moral values through narrative, habituation, and interpretive engagement, thereby cultivating disciplined, ethical, and morally grounded santri (Aisah et al., 2025; Ma`arif et al., 2024).

Based on this analysis, the study demonstrates that Al-Zarnuji's moral teachings remain relevant and actively embodied in educational practices at Pesantren Buntet. The analysis employs Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutic framework through the stages of Mimesis I–III. At the stage of prefiguration, santri enter the pesantren with initial moral dispositions, such as sincere intention, politeness, and respect for teachers. These values are shaped by family upbringing, local culture, and prior educational experiences. At the stage of configuration, kiai and ustaz convey moral teachings through narrative forms. Stories of classical scholars and teachers' personal experiences are used as pedagogical media. This narrative approach enables santri to understand ethical principles in a gradual and meaningful way. At the stage of refiguration, santri play an active role in interpreting moral values. Al-Zarnuji's teachings are enacted through disciplined study habits, congregational worship, social relations, and digital ethics. This process indicates that pesantren morality is dynamic and adaptive. Classical texts are not positioned as static artifacts but as living sources of ethical guidance. Through narrative, habituation, and social practice, Pesantren Buntet successfully bridges classical Islamic tradition with the challenges of modern education. Ricoeur's hermeneutics thus proves effective as a theoretical framework for understanding contextual and character-oriented Islamic moral pedagogy.

## CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that moral education grounded in *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim* at Pesantren Buntet operates as a stratified hermeneutic process rather than a mere normative transmission of ethical prescriptions. Drawing on Ricoeur's triadic model of mimesis, the findings show that Al-Zarnuji's moral principles function as pre-reflexive ethical horizons (*Mimesis I*), are pedagogically configured through coherent narrative structures mediated by kiai (*Mimesis II*), and are dynamically refigured by santri in response to contemporary educational and socio-cultural challenges (*Mimesis III*). This process indicates that Islamic moral pedagogy within the pesantren context is inherently adaptive, reflexive, and meaning-oriented, enabling classical texts to maintain normative authority while remaining contextually operative. The study contributes theoretically by reconceptualizing Islamic moral pedagogy as a hermeneutic–narrative praxis that integrates textual tradition, pedagogical mediation, and learner agency, thereby offering an alternative framework for contemporary character education that foregrounds moral internalization, identity formation, and contextual sustainability.

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