

# Akhlak and Ethical Competence in Pesantren Education: A Scoping Review and the ADK Model

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## Abstract

This study examines how pesantren education can move from akhlak (normative ethics) toward ethical competence, using discussions of ethical dilemmas as a pedagogical bridge between the two. A scoping review followed the Arksey and O'Malley framework, refined by Levac et al. and the Joanna Briggs Institute, with reporting guided by PRISMA-ScR. A systematic search of Scopus and ERIC yielded 369 records, of which 78 were retained after stepwise screening. Thematic synthesis identified four themes: pesantren as a normative ethical ecology, the expansion of pesantren functions toward reflective education, ethical-dilemma discussion as a pedagogical bridge, and ethical competence as an operational extension of akhlak. Building on these themes, the study proposes the Akhlak, Dilemma, Ethical Competence (ADK) Model, a seven-stage iterative cycle linking moral values, lived experience, dilemma situations, guided ethical dialogue, moral reasoning, decision-making, and reflective action. Unlike cognitive-oriented character education approaches, the ADK Model treats ethical competence as the operational language of akhlak rather than a replacement for it, and positions the normative authority of pesantren alongside deliberative pedagogy rather than against it. A structural tension between pesantren authority and deliberative pedagogy emerges as both a conceptual finding and a practical implementation challenge, particularly in Salafi pesantren. The ADK Model offers an initial framework for operationalizing ethical-dilemma discussion within Islamic education and provides a basis for future empirical validation across pesantren typologies.

**Keywords:** ethical competence; akhlak (Islamic ethics); pesantren; moral dilemma discussion

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## Introduction

Pesantren face serious pressures due to rapid social change and digital transformation. Jamil et al. evaluated several programs and reported low scores for technology adoption (16.4%) and enabling factors (19.5%) in their sample.<sup>1</sup> These figures reflect limitations in infrastructure, digital literacy, and curriculum policies within that specific sample, not the general conditions of all Islamic boarding schools. The gap between the current capacity of some Islamic boarding schools and the demands of contemporary education serves as the starting point for this study.

Digital transformation also opens opportunities to strengthen moral understanding, emotional engagement, and reflective reasoning,<sup>2</sup> while an intensive Islamic educational environment supports cognitive-emotional integration in the internalization of values.<sup>3</sup> A bibliometric analysis by Prasetya et al. of the literature from 2020 to 2026 shows that the themes of digital ethics, social-emotional literacy, and the integration of local cultural values are becoming increasingly prominent.<sup>4</sup> Religious moral education is no longer sufficient if understood merely as the transmission of normative values. It must equip students with the ability to weigh, choose, and take responsibility for their moral decisions.

Pesantren have a long track record of shaping the moral character, manners, independence, and Islamic identity of their students. Isbah demonstrates that pesantren have endured through a series of historical changes by adapting to the modern education system. At the same time, Burga and Damopolii argue that pesantren rooted in local culture can strengthen religious moderation.<sup>5</sup> Character formation occurs through mutually reinforcing channels: the kiai fosters a moderate attitude through personal

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<sup>1</sup>Z A Jamil et al., "Program Evaluation Study on Islamic Religious Education in Pesantren: Addressing Educational Degradation in the Digital Era," *Journal of Islamic Religious Education* 22, no. 1 (2025): 122–39, <https://doi.org/10.14421/jpai.v22i1.11358>.

<sup>2</sup>P Putra et al., "Digital Literacy as a Transformative Framework for Character Education: A Case Study in Madrasah Ibtidaiyah," *Nazhruna: Journal of Islamic Education* 9, no. 1 (2026): 33–51, <https://doi.org/10.31538/nzh.v9i1.429>.

<sup>3</sup>R Kurniawan et al., "Islamic Emotional-Cognitive Integration: How Islamic Education Shapes Students' Cognitive Processes and Outcomes through Expressive Writing," *British Journal of Religious Education*, 2025, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01416200.2025.2523385>.

<sup>4</sup>B Prasetya et al., "Thematic Evolution and Collaboration Networks in Character Education: A Bibliometric Perspective," *Multidisciplinary Reviews* 9, no. 10 (2026): e2026467, <https://doi.org/10.31893/multirev.2026467>.

<sup>5</sup> Muhammad Alqadri Burga and Muljono Damopolii, "Reinforcing Religious Moderation through Local Culture-Based Pesantren," *Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 8, no. 2 (2022): 145–62.

example and the integration of values of moderation into the curriculum,<sup>6</sup> while teachers build Islamic character through lessons in ethics, creed, jurisprudence, and Islamic history.<sup>7</sup> The moral foundation of the pesantren is thus strong. However, students still need the ability to navigate morally ambiguous situations that cannot be resolved simply by referring to memorized norms.

The social conditions of the globalization era demand moral education that goes beyond the mere instillation of norms. While at the pesantren, students live in relatively controlled dormitories. Outside the pesantren, they face the digital world, a diversity of viewpoints, increasingly fragmented religious authorities, and public debates on moderation, mental health, and gender relations. Pesantren must not passively accept curriculum modernization but rather negotiate it to preserve their scholarly identity.<sup>8</sup> Meanwhile, students face challenges in reading classical texts, low motivation, and emotional instability,<sup>9</sup> as well as issues of inconsistent behavior, limited parental involvement, and difficulties for teachers in maintaining exemplary conduct.<sup>10</sup> Moral education must prepare students to manage morally ambiguous situations, not merely instill notions of *right* and *wrong*.

Pesantren actually already possesses the pedagogical resources to develop these skills. The daily experiences of the student community service, leadership, and communal routines can serve as learning opportunities through life-based learning.<sup>11</sup> Hamdanah et al. demonstrate that intra- and inter-religious dialogue can foster moderation competencies.<sup>12</sup> Hefner, in her ethnography of female santri in Java, demonstrates that

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<sup>6</sup> Burga and Damopolii, "Reinforcing Religious Moderation through Local Culture-Based Pesantren."

<sup>7</sup> Miftahuddin, Aman, and R D A Yuliantri, "Islamic Character Education Model: An in-Depth Analysis for Islamic Boarding Schools," *Cakrawala Pendidikan* 43, no. 2 (2024): 370–80, <https://doi.org/10.21831/cp.v43i2.66516>.

<sup>8</sup> M Hanif et al., "Pesantren's Resistance to Indonesia's National Curriculum in Defense of Its Curriculum Model," *Revista de Gestão Social e Ambiental* 18, no. 7 (2024): e05473, <https://doi.org/10.24857/rgsa.v18n7-049>.

<sup>9</sup> T Ratnawulan et al., "Integrating Islamic Values and Individual Characteristics to Overcome Learning Difficulties in Islamic Boarding Schools," *Munaddhomah* 7, no. 2 (2026): 308–21, <https://doi.org/10.31538/munaddhomah.v7i2.3084>.

<sup>10</sup> F Irfani et al., "Moral Education in Malaysian Islamic Boarding Schools: Challenges Educators Face in Nurturing Ethical Imitation," *Munaddhomah* 6, no. 4 (2025): 618–34, <https://doi.org/10.31538/munaddhomah.v6i4.1967>.

<sup>11</sup> Z Nuryana, E T Somae, and A M Nasih, "Success Story in Life-Based Learning: How Pesantren Transforms Real-Life Experiences into Educational Gold," in *Lifelong Learning Book Series*, vol. 37, 2026, 317–29, [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-032-16731-6\\_21](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-032-16731-6_21).

<sup>12</sup> Hamdanah et al., "Exploring Inter-Religious-Based Instruction in Islamic Boarding Schools: Love-Based Curriculum Perspectives," *Journal of Social Studies Education Research* 17, no. 1 (2026): 276–306.

moral formation also occurs through “moral care among peers,” a relational practice that involves agency and goes beyond mere supervision.<sup>13</sup> What needs to be strengthened is how *asatidz* and *santri* translate these moral sources into exercises in critical thinking, dialogue, and reflection.

This article examines the relationship between normative ethics and ethical competence. Normative ethics refers to values, etiquette, exemplary behavior, and moral orientations rooted in Islam, which are shaped in *pesantren* through institutional habitus. Recent works in Islamic education encourage *pesantren* to foster reflective Muslim spirituality. Sahin acknowledges the tension between traditional pedagogy and contemporary methods in the integration of Islamic ethics,<sup>14</sup> while Zul et al. urge a curriculum transformation toward critical thinking, moral reasoning, and participatory learning.<sup>15</sup> Character formation in *pesantren*, therefore, needs to be directed toward the development of observable and trainable ethical competencies.<sup>16</sup>

In this study, ethical competence is understood as students’ ability to identify moral issues, understand value conflicts, consider consequences, engage in dialogue, make responsible decisions, and reflect on their implications. Following Lilja et al.<sup>17</sup> and Hartvigsen,<sup>18</sup> the term “ethical competence” was chosen because it is more neutral than “moral competence” in the Lind tradition (KMDD). Such competencies cannot be built through normative lectures. Hartvigsen demonstrates that dilemma discussions based on real-life experiences develop when facilitated through ethical questions and case analysis; Steć et al., through KMDD, demonstrate its support for tolerance, social skills, and moral-

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<sup>13</sup> C.-M. Hefner, “Moral Custodianship between Friends: Girlhood, Class, and Islamic Education in Indonesia,” *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 13, no. 3 (2023): 557–72, <https://doi.org/10.1086/727777>.

<sup>14</sup> Abdullah Sahin, “Critical Issues in Islamic Education Studies: Rethinking Islamic and Western Liberal Secular Values of Education,” *Religions* 9, no. 11 (2018): 335.

<sup>15</sup> Z Zul et al., “Integration of Islamic Ethics in Modern Education Curriculum: Challenges and Opportunities A Systematic Literature Review,” *British Journal of Religious Education*, 2026, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01416200.2026.2621177>.

<sup>16</sup> M R Falaqi et al., “Transformation of Islamic Education Curriculum Based on the Thoughts of Three Educational Philosophers: A Systematic Literature Review,” *British Journal of Religious Education*, 2025, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01416200.2025.2521384>.

<sup>17</sup> A Lilja et al., “Ethical Competence: A Comparison between the Swedish and the Icelandic Curricula and Some Teachers’ Views,” *Education 3–13* 46, no. 5 (2018): 506–16, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03004279.2017.1284249>.

<sup>18</sup> K M Hartvigsen, “Discussions of Ethical Dilemmas: Developing Ethical Competence and Life Skills in Upper Secondary Religious Education in Norway,” *British Journal of Religious Education* 48, no. 2 (2026): 232–47, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01416200.2025.2591299>.

spiritual growth;<sup>19</sup> and Scuotto et al. affirm that moral interventions are more effective when students practice decision-making interactively.<sup>20</sup>

Life in a pesantren is rich in relevant moral experiences: conflicts among peers, senior–junior relationships, group solidarity, honesty, and interactions with diverse communities. In such situations, character education must train students to weigh conflicting values, rather than merely memorizing a hierarchy of values. Cognitively based moral learning has been shown to enhance social tolerance through discussions of dilemmas and perspective-taking.<sup>21</sup> Character education is more meaningful when understood as a reflective and dialogic practice.<sup>22</sup> and Villacís et al. demonstrate that adolescents’ character strengths are closely linked to self-exploration, commitment, and identity development.<sup>23</sup>

Three gaps in the literature serve as the basis for this study. *First*, the literature on Islamic boarding schools has not systematically explained how normative ethics can be developed into ethical competencies among students (RQ1). *Second*, the literature on ethical dilemmas has not been contextualized within the boarding school tradition, including adab, musyawarah, *bahtsul masail*, the exemplary role of religious leaders, and *mahasabah* (RQ2). *Third*, there is no conceptual synthesis that explains the relationship among moral values, students’ life experiences, ethical dialogue, moral reasoning, and reflection on actions within a coherent model (RQ3).

Based on the above discussion, this study aims to examine the shift from normative ethics to ethical competence in pesantren education by positioning the discussion of ethical dilemmas as a pedagogical strategy that connects Islamic values, santri life experiences, and moral decision-making. Three questions guide this study: (1) How does the literature frame the relationship between normative ethics and ethical competence in

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<sup>19</sup> M Steć, M M Kulik, and A Wendołowska, “From Supporting Moral Competence to Fostering Spiritual Growth: The Psycho-Didactic Potential of the Konstanz Method of Dilemma Discussion (KMDD®),” *Religions* 12, no. 8 (2021): 646, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel12080646>.

<sup>20</sup> C Scuotto et al., “Digital Interventions to Support Morality: A Scoping Review,” *British Journal of Educational Psychology* 94, no. 4 (2024): 1072–90, <https://doi.org/10.1111/bjep.12706>.

<sup>21</sup> H Fitriyani, D R., and I Lestari, “Cognitive-Based Learning of Morals for Social Tolerance Character in Elementary School Students: A Systematic Literature Review,” *Salud, Ciencia y Tecnología* 5 (2025): 1715, <https://doi.org/10.56294/saludcyt20251715>.

<sup>22</sup> J Sargeant and K Trask-Kerr, “Character Education as Curriculum-Making in the Humanities: A Scoping Review,” *Curriculum Journal*, 2026, <https://doi.org/10.1002/curj.70064>.

<sup>23</sup> J L Villacís, C Naval, and J de la Fuente, “Character Strengths, Moral Motivation, and Vocational Identity in Adolescents and Young Adults: A Scoping Review,” *Current Psychology* 42, no. 27 (2023): 23448–63, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12144-022-03427-x>.

pesantren education? (2) How can the discussion of ethical dilemmas be contextualized as a pedagogical strategy to develop students' ethical competence? (3) What conceptual model can be formulated to integrate pesantren moral education, students' life experiences, and the discussion of ethical dilemmas?

### Research Methodology

This study employs a *scoping review* design to map the transition from normative ethics to ethical competence in pesantren education, using ethical dilemmas as a pedagogical strategy. This design was chosen for three reasons. First, the topic is interdisciplinary, spanning studies of pesantren, moral education, religious education, and ethics, yet it lacks a fully consolidated conceptual framework. Second, the high heterogeneity of study designs makes systematic reviews and meta-analyses inappropriate. Third, narrative reviews do not provide transparent and replicable selection procedures.

This study does not examine the effectiveness of interventions. Its objectives are to map the scope of the literature, identify relationships between concepts and research gaps, and formulate a conceptual synthesis. The procedure follows the framework of Arksey and O'Malley,<sup>24</sup> with adaptations from Levac et al.,<sup>25</sup> the Joanna Briggs Institute (JBI) guidelines, and the PRISMA-ScR reporting principles.<sup>26</sup> These three methodological references were used solely to design the procedure and are not included in the 78 substantive documents. This separation ensures the traceability of numerical claims throughout the article.

The scope of the study was defined using the PCC (*Population, Concept, Context*) framework. This framework aligns with the review's objective, which is to map concepts, populations, and contexts, rather than to compare interventions as in the PICO framework. Table 1 presents the operationalization of each component.

Table 1.  
PCC Research Framework

Component	Operational Scope
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<sup>24</sup> H Arksey and L O'Malley, "Scoping Studies: Towards a Methodological Framework," *International Journal of Social Research Methodology* 8, no. 1 (2005): 19–32, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1364557032000119616>.

<sup>25</sup> D Levac, H Colquhoun, and K K O'Brien, "Scoping Studies: Advancing the Methodology," *Implementation Science* 5 (2010): 69, <https://doi.org/10.1186/1748-5908-5-69>.

<sup>26</sup> A C Tricco et al., "PRISMA Extension for Scoping Reviews (PRISMA-ScR): Checklist and Explanation," *Annals of Internal Medicine* 169, no. 7 (2018): 467–73, <https://doi.org/10.7326/M18-0850>.

Population	Santri, kiai, ustadz, Islamic education teachers, and the broader Islamic education community
Concept	Normative ethics, character education, ethical competencies, moral competencies, moral reasoning, ethical decision-making, moral sensitivity, moral reflection, and ethical dilemma discussions
Context	Pesantren, Islamic boarding schools, madrasahs, Islamic education, religious education, moral education, and ethics education

The search was conducted in two databases, Scopus and ERIC, which cover literature on religious education, Islamic education, and moral education. The initial search was conducted in January 2025 and updated periodically because some relevant documents were still in “*online-first*” status; the final update was completed on February 29, 2026. That date serves as the cutoff for the literature review. Documents published in 2026 were still included if they had received a final volume and page number before that date. The publication year in the reference list follows the official publication date as specified by the DOI, in accordance with JBI and PRISMA-ScR guidelines.

The documents sought include journal articles, review articles, book chapters, academic books, and conference proceedings. *Grey literature* (theses, institutional reports, and policy documents) was excluded due to limited access and inconsistent quality. The search strategy combines four groups of keywords according to the PCC framework: (1) the context of Islamic boarding schools and education (pesantren, madrasah, Islamic boarding schools); (2) moral and character education (akhlak, adab, character education, Islamic ethics); (3) ethical competencies (ethical/moral competencies, ethical decision-making, moral reasoning, moral sensitivity, moral courage); and (4) pedagogical strategies (ethical/moral dilemmas, dilemma discussions, KMDD, reflective, experiential, and case-based learning).

The search is limited to literature from 2010 to 2026. This period coincides with increased academic attention to Islamic moderation (*wasathiyah*) and the expansion of the literature on competency-based Islamic character education. References before 2010 are still used when relevant to explain the scope review procedure or the basic framework for ethical decision-making. Inclusion and exclusion criteria ensure direct or conceptual relevance to the research objectives (Table 3).

Table 3.  
Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Aspect	Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
Document type	Journal articles, review articles, book chapters, academic books, and conference proceedings.	Popular editorials, news, non-academic opinion pieces, and

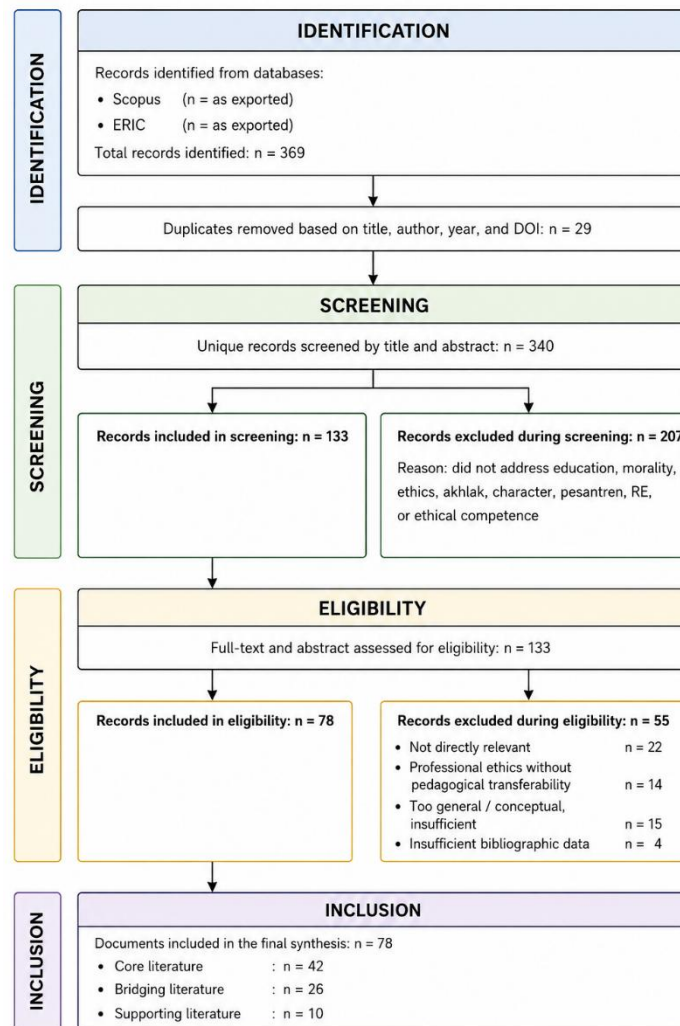
		documents without an academic basis
Research focus	Pesantren, moral education, Islamic character education, religious education, moral competence, ethical competence, ethical decision-making, or discussions of ethical dilemmas	Studies that do not address education, ethics, morality, character, or ethical competencies
Context	Pesantren, madrasah, Islamic boarding schools, Islamic education, religious education, moral education, or ethics education	Technical professional ethics without pedagogical contributions applicable in the pesantren context
Language	English and Indonesian	Other languages that cannot be adequately analyzed
Data availability	Has a title, abstract, metadata, DOI, or adequate bibliographic information	Documents with insufficient bibliographic data or abstracts for analysis

Documents on professional ethics (nursing, pharmacy, midwifery, engineering, or educational administration) are not automatically excluded. Such documents are included if they provide pedagogical contributions that can be transferred to the pesantren context, such as ethical decision-making, moral sensitivity, reflective learning, or ethical competency training. Every inclusion decision is documented along with its rationale.

### Document Selection Process and PRISMA-ScR Diagram

The selection process followed the PRISMA-ScR screening protocol. The search yielded 369 records; after removing 29 duplicates, 340 unique records remained. Screening of titles and abstracts excluded 207 records that did not address the target concept, leaving 133 documents for full-text assessment. In the eligibility stage, 55 documents were excluded for four reasons: irrelevant to pesantren or ethics pedagogy (n = 22); focused on professional ethics without pedagogical contributions (n = 14); too general (n = 15); and insufficient bibliographic data (n = 4). A total of 78 documents were included in the final synthesis. Figure 1 summarizes this process in four stages: identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion.

Figure 1.  
PRISMA-ScR Flowchart



Screening was conducted independently by the first and second authors. All exclusion decisions at the eligibility stage were documented along with their rationale. The third author reviewed a 20% random sample; any discrepancies in the results were resolved through discussion.

The 78 documents were classified into three analytical categories based on their function in the synthesis (Table 4). This classification is functional, not hierarchical; a single document may contribute to more than one category. Studies on Islamic boarding schools and moderation, for example, can serve as core literature while also reinforcing the discussion of dialogic competence.

Table 4.  
Analytical Classification of Documents in the Synthesis

Literature Categories	n	Functions in Synthesis
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Core Literature	42	Discusses Islamic boarding schools, moral education, student character, moderation, the leadership of religious scholars, the hidden curriculum, and moral life in Islamic boarding schools
Supplementary Literature	26	Discusses ethical dilemmas, moral competence, ethical competence, religious education, moral reasoning, and ethics education
Supporting Literature	10	Discusses case-based, reflective, and experiential learning, digital ethics, and ethical decision-making in other pedagogically relevant educational contexts
Total	78	Substantive documents forming the basis of the final synthesis

Data from 78 documents were extracted using a standardized data collection sheet.

This sheet included the author, year, document type, database source, context, purpose, design, key concepts, pedagogical approach, main findings, forms of ethical competence, literature category, and relevance to each research question.

The analysis employs abductive thematic synthesis. This approach combines an inductive reading of emerging patterns with established conceptual frameworks in moral education and pesantren studies, aiming to formulate a new conceptual model rather than merely summarize. The analysis proceeds in three stages. First, open coding of key concepts. Second, axial coding that groups similar codes into broader themes; for example, “adab,” “exemplary behavior,” and “kiai leadership” become “pesantren as a normative ethical ecology,” and “moral reasoning,” “moral sensitivity,” and “moral courage” become “dimensions of ethical competence.” Third, thematic mapping that establishes relationships between themes to answer the research questions. Saturation was determined iteratively, that is, when the emergence of codes no longer produced significant new categories.

The validity of the synthesis was ensured through repeated review of the titles, abstracts, and substantive information of each document, as well as systematic documentation at every stage. Since this study is based on published literature without human participants, ethical considerations focused on academic integrity: accurate attribution, avoidance of distorting the original authors’ findings, and transparency in reporting methodological decisions. Four limitations are discussed in the concluding section: the use of two databases, the exclusion of *gray literature*, screening by a single reviewer, and the partial reliance on abstracts.

## Results

This section presents a descriptive synthesis of the results: the authors' findings, the thematic patterns that emerged, and the distribution of the 78 documents across the themes. The analytical interpretation is presented in the Discussion section.

### Literature Search Results

Searches in Scopus and ERIC yielded 369 records. After deduplication (29 records), title–abstract screening (207 excluded), and full-text assessment (55 excluded), 78 documents were included in the final synthesis (Figure 1). Table 5 summarizes this process numerically.

Table 5.  
Summary of the Literature Selection Process

Selection Stage	Number of Documents
Records identified from Scopus and ERIC	369
Duplicate records removed	29
Unique records for screening	340
Records deleted during filtering	207
Documents assessed for eligibility	133
The document was rejected at the eligibility stage	55
Documents in the final synthesis	78

The 78 documents are divided into three analytical categories: core literature (n = 42), connecting literature (n = 26), and supporting literature (n = 10), with their respective functions shown in Table 4. Temporally, publications are concentrated in the last five years (2021–2026), particularly 2024–2026 (Table 6).

Table 6. Time Distribution of the 78 Final Synthesis Documents

Year Range	Number (n)	Proportion
2005–2012	7	9.0%
2013–2020	11	14.1%
2021–2023	18	23.1%
2024–2026	42	53.8%
Total	78	100%

In the 2024–2026 curriculum, character education, Islamic boarding schools, digital ethics, moral competence, and ethical decision-making are closely interrelated. Character is no longer understood merely as the internalization of values, but is linked to moral reflection, dialogue, moderation, digital literacy, and readiness to address real-world ethical issues.

The thematic synthesis yielded four themes that form a layered argument. The *first* theme (pesantren as a normative moral ecology) lays the foundation. The *second* theme

(the expansion of the pesantren’s functions toward reflective and dialogical education) maps the contemporary pesantren movement. The *third* theme (discussion of ethical dilemmas as a pedagogical bridge) introduces a framework from the connecting literature. The *fourth* theme (ethical competence as an operational extension of moral education) unifies the three. Table 7 summarizes the four themes and their meanings.

Table 7.  
Main Themes of the Synthesis

Theme	Thematic Meaning	Literature Examples
Pesantren as an environment for the formation of normative moral values	Character development through role modeling, habit formation, discipline, ethics, clerical leadership, and dormitory culture	Isbah (2020); Burga & Damopolii (2022); Ma’arif et al. (2025); Miftahuddin et al. (2024); Izfanna & Hisyam (2012)
Expansion of the functions of the pesantren	Pesantren are evolving into learning spaces centered on real-life experiences, moderation, dialogue, hidden curriculum, digital literacy, and social reflection.	Nuryana et al. (2026); Hamdanah et al. (2026); Purwanto et al. (2021); Sahid et al. (2021); Hefner (2023); Syarifah et al. (2025)
Discussing ethical dilemmas as pedagogy	Ethical dilemmas train students to recognize value conflicts, construct moral arguments, engage in dialogue, and consider consequences.	Hartvigsen (2026); Steć et al. (2021); Ehrich et al. (2011); Catacutan & de Guzman (2015); Megregian et al. (2021)
Ethical competencies	Character education is manifested in moral sensitivity, ethical reasoning, dialogue, decision-making, moral courage, and reflection.	Hartvigsen (2026); Okkonen & Takala (2019); Fino et al. (2022); Kurt & Özsaban (2026); Villacís et al. (2023)

In summary, the core literature highlights the established strengths within the pesantren tradition, the bridging literature points to aspects that still need to be developed, and the supporting literature describes pedagogical strategies that can enrich that development.

### The Pesantren as a Normative Ethical Ecology

The first theme portrays the pesantren as a normative moral ecology. The term “ecology” is used metaphorically to refer to the interactive system of kiai, peers, dormitory rules, worship rituals, religious texts, and physical spaces that collectively shape and sustain moral character. The influence of moral formation is multidirectional. Students absorb values through repeated practices, the example set by teachers, interactions with fellow students, routines, scripture study, and communal discipline, rather than solely through the formal curriculum.

Kiai occupy a central position. Their leadership promotes moderation through setting a good example, strengthening religious traditions, selecting teachers, and integrating the values of moderation into the curriculum.<sup>27</sup> while Islamic character is shaped through courses in ethics, creed, jurisprudence, and Islamic history.<sup>28</sup> Local values such as mutual respect, offering advice, and compassion can serve as the foundation for multicultural education and moderation.<sup>29</sup>

This theme also reveals a significant analytical limitation. The literature on pesantren focuses more on explaining the *values* instilled than *on how* students are trained to navigate value conflicts in concrete situations. Many studies position ethics as the goal of character development, but few explain the pedagogical mechanisms for training students to identify dilemmas, weigh moral arguments, engage in dialogue, and make decisions. This gap serves as the entry point for the following themes.

### **Expanding the Role of Pesantren Toward Reflective and Dialogic Education**

The second theme identifies patterns in the literature from 2021 to 2026: contemporary pesantren serve not only as spaces for the transmission of religious knowledge and character development, but also as spaces for life-based learning, leadership, interfaith dialogue, digital literacy, and social reflection. This represents a pattern identified in the literature, not an empirical claim about all pesantren. Community service, student leadership, organizational activities, and communal routines can serve as rich learning environments.<sup>30</sup>

Intra- and interfaith dialogue can foster interfaith competence, tolerance, and moderation,<sup>31</sup> while tolerance is also shaped through the hidden curriculum and respect for differences.<sup>32</sup> Hefner adds that moral development also occurs through peer moral

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<sup>27</sup> Muhamad Arif, M K N A Aziz, and M A Ma'arif, "A Recent Study on Islamic Religious Education Teachers' Competencies in the Digital Age: A Systematic Literature Review," *Journal of Education and Learning (EduLearn)* 19, no. 2 (2025): 587–96.

<sup>28</sup> Miftahuddin, Aman, and Yuliantri, "Islamic Character Education Model: An in-Depth Analysis for Islamic Boarding Schools."

<sup>29</sup> Burga and Damopolii, "Reinforcing Religious Moderation through Local Culture-Based Pesantren."

<sup>30</sup> Nuryana, Somae, and Nasih, "Success Story in Life-Based Learning: How Pesantren Transforms Real-Life Experiences into Educational Gold."

<sup>31</sup> Hamdanah et al., "Exploring Inter-Religious-Based Instruction in Islamic Boarding Schools: Love-Based Curriculum Perspectives."

<sup>32</sup> Syarifah et al., "Fostering Tolerance through the Hidden Curriculum: An Ethnographic Study of Inclusive Education in an Indonesian Islamic Boarding School," *Munaddhomah* 6, no. 4 (2025): 603–17, <https://doi.org/10.31538/munaddhomah.v6i4.1960>.

monitoring, which is embedded in the dynamics of friendship, gender, and class.<sup>33</sup> In line with the findings of Putra et al.<sup>34</sup> and Kurniawan et al.,<sup>35</sup> the potential of Islamic boarding schools for reflective and dialogic education has been documented, including through digital literacy and cognitive-emotional integration. What remains to be formulated is a pedagogical framework that makes this movement systematic and evaluable.

### **Ethical Dilemmas as a Pedagogical Bridge**

The third theme, grounded in the literature, positions the discussion of ethical dilemmas as a bridge between the two previous themes. In the literature on religious education and ethics, discussions of dilemmas help students recognize value conflicts, construct moral arguments, listen to other perspectives, weigh consequences, and make responsible decisions. Discussions based on real-life experiences develop ethical competencies and life skills as teachers guide students through ethical questions and case extensions.<sup>36</sup> Steć et al., through the Konstanz Method (KMDD), emphasize the urgency of moral competence, tolerance, and moral-spiritual growth,<sup>37</sup> while Ehrich et al. highlight the need to examine critical incidents, choices of action, and the implications of decisions for individuals, organizations, and communities.<sup>38</sup>

In the context of Islamic boarding schools, traditions such as *musyawarah*, *halaqah*, *bahtsul masail*, *nasihat*, and *mahasabah* provide a cultural space that can serve as a forum for discussing ethical dilemmas. With pedagogical *scaffolding*, these traditions have the potential to yield observable outcomes; the key points are outlined in the Discussion section.

### **Ethical Competence as an Operational Extension of Moral Education**

The fourth theme integrates the previous three themes by defining ethical competence as the operational language of moral education. Morality provides a

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<sup>33</sup> Hefner, "Moral Custodianship between Friends: Girlhood, Class, and Islamic Education in Indonesia."

<sup>34</sup> Putra et al., "Digital Literacy as a Transformative Framework for Character Education: A Case Study in Madrasah Ibtidaiyah."

<sup>35</sup> Kurniawan et al., "Islamic Emotional-Cognitive Integration: How Islamic Education Shapes Students' Cognitive Processes and Outcomes through Expressive Writing."

<sup>36</sup> Hartvigsen, "Discussions of Ethical Dilemmas: Developing Ethical Competence and Life Skills in Upper Secondary Religious Education in Norway."

<sup>37</sup> Steć, Kulik, and Wendołowska, "From Supporting Moral Competence to Fostering Spiritual Growth: The Psycho-Didactic Potential of the Konstanz Method of Dilemma Discussion (KMDD®)."

<sup>38</sup> L C Ehrich et al., "Ethical Dilemmas: A Model to Understand Teacher Practice," *Teachers and Teaching: Theory and Practice* 17, no. 2 (2011): 173–85, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13540602.2011.539794>.

foundation of values; ethical competence provides the capacity to apply them in real-life situations that require deliberation and decision-making. A literature synthesis identifies six dimensions relevant to the pesantren context: moral sensitivity, ethical reasoning, ethical dialogue, ethical decision-making, moral courage, and reflection on actions.

These six dimensions constitute a speculative-logical synthesis drawn from three sources: (1) the ethical competence frameworks of Hartvigsen.<sup>39</sup> and Lilja et al.<sup>40</sup> in Scandinavian religious education, which places sensitivity, reasoning, and reflection at the core; (2) the Four-Component Model in the professional ethics literature, Megregian et al.,<sup>41</sup> ; Fino et al.,<sup>42</sup> ; Wen et al.,<sup>43</sup> which adds decision-making and courage; and (3) the explicit inclusion of “ethical dialogue” inspired by the pesantren tradition of deliberation and interfaith dialogue literature.<sup>44</sup> These six dimensions are not claimed to be final or exclusive; their number and grouping may differ when derived from other traditions. Table 8 maps the six dimensions against the pesantren tradition along with their points of convergence and tension.

Table 8.  
Dimensions of Ethical Competence and Functional Intersections with the Pesantren Tradition

Dimension	Operational Meaning	Functional Intersection	Tension/Differences
Moral Sensitivity	Awareness that the situation involves ethical issues	Awareness of trust, responsibility, and courtesy	Includes issues such as digital privacy and gender justice that are not always explicit in classical ethics
Ethical reasoning	Weighing values, rules, reasons, context, and consequences	Consultation; <i>bahtsul masail</i>	<i>Bahtsul masail</i> is bound by qauli/manhaji methodology and authoritative rulings; modern reasoning is more open to premises outside the text.

<sup>39</sup> Hartvigsen, “Discussions of Ethical Dilemmas: Developing Ethical Competence and Life Skills in Upper Secondary Religious Education in Norway.”

<sup>40</sup> Lilja et al., “Ethical Competence: A Comparison between the Swedish and the Icelandic Curricula and Some Teachers’ Views.”

<sup>41</sup> M Megregian et al., “Essential Components of Midwifery Ethics Education: Results of a Delphi Study,” *Midwifery* 96 (2021): 102946, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.midw.2021.102946>.

<sup>42</sup> L B Fino et al., “Implementing and Evaluating a Course in Professional Ethics for an Undergraduate Pharmacy Curriculum: A Feasibility Study,” *Currents in Pharmacy Teaching and Learning* 14, no. 1 (2022): 88–105, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cptl.2021.11.031>.

<sup>43</sup> H Wen et al., “Enhancing Nursing Ethics Education: Comparing the PAD Model and Traditional Lecture-Based Learning,” *BMC Medical Ethics* 26, no. 1 (2025): 158, <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12910-025-01319-w>.

<sup>44</sup> Hamdanah et al., “Exploring Inter-Religious-Based Instruction in Islamic Boarding Schools: Love-Based Curriculum Perspectives.”

Ethical dialogue	Articulating reasons and listening to other perspectives in a civilized manner	Etiquette of disagreement	Pesantren ethics uphold a hierarchy of speech; KMDD-style dialogue presupposes equality of voice.
Ethical decision-making	Choosing responsible actions	The responsibility of student leaders in communal conflicts	Final authority often remains with the kiai/ustadz, not with the santri's deliberation
Moral courage	Acting in accordance with values despite facing social pressure	Enjoining good and forbidding evil	Amar makruf is strictly regulated in fiqh; modern moral courage adds criticism of internal authority.
Reflection on actions	Evaluating decisions and their impact cognitively and spiritually	<i>Muhasabah</i>	Sufi <i>muhasabah</i> is a form of personal spiritual introspection; modern ethical reflection is more cognitive-pedagogical and can be collective.

Table 8 illustrates a *functional overlap* between ethical competencies and pesantren traditions, rather than a perfect equivalence. Each row contains both points of convergence and structural tensions. This careful mapping prevents oversimplified analogies and ensures that the ADK Model is applied in a way that respects the structure and internal logic of the underlying tradition.

RQ1 (the relationship between normative ethics and ethical competence). The two complement each other. Normative ethics provides a value orientation and a dispositional foundation; ethical competence enables its application in complex moral situations. Pesantren literature is strong in establishing an ethical foundation, but limited in formulating pedagogical mechanisms that explicitly foster sensitivity, reasoning, dialogue, decision-making, and reflection.

RQ2 (contextualization of dilemma discussions). The students' life experiences provide rich and authentic case studies: dormitory life, organizations, senior–junior relationships, digital media, community service, and cross-community interactions. Traditions such as *musyawarah*, *halaqah*, *bahtsul masail*, *nasihat*, and *muhasabah* provide a cultural space that can be utilized, provided that teachers consciously implement structural adaptations (discussed in the Discussion section).

RQ3 (integrative conceptual model). This review resulted in the Ethics–Dilemma–Ethical Competence (ADK) Model, formulated as an iterative cycle rather than a linear

sequence. The model consists of seven interrelated stages culminating in reflective feedback.

Figure 2.  
The Ethics–Dilemma–Ethical Competence (EDC) Model as an Iterative Cycle

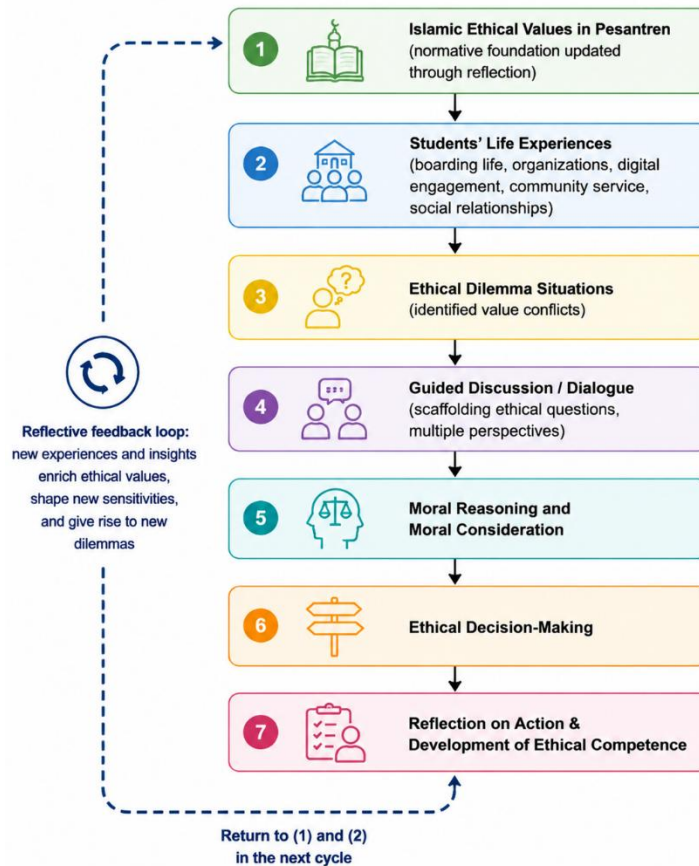


Figure 2 depicts seven stages (1–7) in a closed loop, with an arrow from Stage 7 (reflection) back to Stage 1 (moral values) to emphasize the model's iterative nature. This cyclical nature aligns with Kolb's experiential learning cycle.<sup>45</sup> and KMDD practices that occur repeatedly within a single class. This model does not depict moral education as a one-time procedure, but rather as the formation of a reflective habitus that grows through repeated experiences.

## Discussion

While the Results section presents the literature descriptively, this section focuses on its analytical implications: how the relationship between moral character and ethical competence is understood, how teachers can implement the ADK Model, and the

<sup>45</sup> D A Kolb, *Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and Development* (Prentice Hall, 1984).

conceptual and structural constraints that shape it. The main argument is that pesantren moral education can evolve into ethical competence education, but only if pedagogy explicitly trains deliberation and addresses the structural conditions that limit it. It should be emphasized from the outset that the following sections, particularly the tension between authority and deliberation, constitute theoretical elaborations derived from a review of the literature, not empirical findings synthesized directly from the 78 documents.

### **Normative Ethics as an Expandable Foundation**

The relationship between normative ethics and ethical competence is complementary, not competitive. Islamic boarding schools have a long tradition of shaping students through etiquette, exemplary behavior, habit formation, discipline, and respect for teachers. As demonstrated by Izfanna and Hisyam,<sup>46</sup> Purwanto et al.,<sup>47</sup> Sahid et al.,<sup>48</sup> and Hefner,<sup>49</sup> This moral formation takes place through the ecology of communal life, not merely through a written curriculum.

However, pesantren literature places greater emphasis on *instilling values than on how to train students to handle* value conflicts.<sup>50</sup> When ethics is presented solely as norms to be obeyed, moral education risks becoming mere behavioral conditioning, without adequate space for reflection.<sup>51</sup> Yet the lives of students are fraught with dilemmas: honesty versus solidarity, obedience versus empathy, respect for teachers versus the courage to voice opinions that cannot be resolved simply by reciting norms.<sup>52</sup> This

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<sup>46</sup> D Izfanna and N A Hisyam, "A Comprehensive Approach in Developing 'Akhlaq': A Case Study on the Implementation of Character Education at Pondok Pesantren Darunnajah," *Multicultural Education & Technology Journal* 6, no. 2 (2012): 77–86, <https://doi.org/10.1108/17504971211236254>.

<sup>47</sup> M R Purwanto et al., "Optimizing Student Character Education through the Pesantren Program at the Islamic Boarding School of the Universitas Islam Indonesia," *Review of International Geographical Education Online* 11, no. 5 (2021): 2829–37, <https://doi.org/10.48047/rigeo.11.05.179>.

<sup>48</sup> U Sahid et al., "Management of Student Characteristics through Extracurricular Activities in the School Environment Based on Islamic Boarding Schools," *Munaddhomah* 2, no. 2 (2021): 116–25, <https://doi.org/10.31538/munaddhomah.v2i2.97>.

<sup>49</sup> Hefner, "Moral Custodianship between Friends: Girlhood, Class, and Islamic Education in Indonesia."

<sup>50</sup> Hanif et al., "Pesantren's Resistance to Indonesia's National Curriculum in Defense of Its Curriculum Model."

<sup>51</sup> Irfani et al., "Moral Education in Malaysian Islamic Boarding Schools: Challenges Educators Face in Nurturing Ethical Imitation."

<sup>52</sup> Ratnawulan et al., "Integrating Islamic Values and Individual Characteristics to Overcome Learning Difficulties in Islamic Boarding Schools."

observation reinforces Kohlberg's classic critique<sup>53</sup> of the "bag of virtues": a list of virtues does not, by itself, equip individuals to resolve conflicts between values.

Therefore, this study positions ethical competence as the operational language of ethics, not as a substitute for it. This position is based on the functional distinction between value orientation and the ability to apply it. Ethics guides what is good and right,<sup>54</sup> whereas ethical competence trains students to apply these principles in concrete situations that require deliberation, dialogue, and decision-making.<sup>55</sup> This position aligns with the call for pedagogical transformation toward critical thinking, moral reasoning, and participatory learning without abandoning fundamental Islamic values.<sup>56</sup>

### **From the Internalization of Values to Ethical Consideration**

Most of the pesantren literature analyzed still emphasizes the internalization of values, the shaping of behavior, and emulation; for example, Ma'arif et al.,<sup>57</sup> Miftahuddin et al.,<sup>58</sup> Purwanto et al.<sup>59</sup> This approach is not wrong; moral formation is indeed inseparable from repeated practice. However, amid complex social changes, internalization needs to be complemented by ethical deliberation. Santri not only know the values upheld,<sup>60</sup> but are also able to explain moral reasons, understand other perspectives, weigh consequences,<sup>61</sup> and make responsible decisions.<sup>62</sup>

This shift does not negate the tradition of acculturation, which provides an affective and dispositional foundation. Rather, acculturation needs to be enriched by reflection, so that students do not merely "get used to doing good," but understand how to weigh their

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<sup>53</sup> Lawrence Kohlberg, "The Philosophy of Moral Development: Moral Stages and the Idea of Justice," 1981.

<sup>54</sup> Sahin, "Critical Issues in Islamic Education Studies: Rethinking Islamic and Western Liberal Secular Values of Education."

<sup>55</sup> Falaqi et al., "Transformation of Islamic Education Curriculum Based on the Thoughts of Three Educational Philosophers: A Systematic Literature Review."

<sup>56</sup> S Sarwadi and N Raihan, "Reinforcing Islamic Moral Values through Contemporary Pesantren Education," *Edukasi Islami: J*, no. November (2025): 1137–48, <https://doi.org/10.30868/ei.v14i04.9041>.

<sup>57</sup> Arif, Aziz, and Ma'arif, "A Recent Study on Islamic Religious Education Teachers' Competencies in the Digital Age: A Systematic Literature Review."

<sup>58</sup> Miftahuddin, Aman, and Yuliantri, "Islamic Character Education Model: An in-Depth Analysis for Islamic Boarding Schools."

<sup>59</sup> Purwanto et al., "Optimizing Student Character Education through the Pesantren Program at the Islamic Boarding School of the Universitas Islam Indonesia."

<sup>60</sup> Ehrich et al., "Ethical Dilemmas: A Model to Understand Teacher Practice."

<sup>61</sup> Hartvigsen, "Discussions of Ethical Dilemmas: Developing Ethical Competence and Life Skills in Upper Secondary Religious Education in Norway."

<sup>62</sup> I Okkonen and T Takala, "Managers' Moral Struggle: A Case Study on Ethical Dilemmas and Ethical Decision-Making in the Context of Immigration," *Ethics and Social Welfare* 13, no. 4 (2019): 392–408, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17496535.2019.1604784>.

options when equally good values conflict, for example, between speaking the truth without causing harm and protecting a friend without covering up their mistakes. Studies by Steć et al.,<sup>63</sup> Hartvigsen,<sup>64</sup> Megregian et al.,<sup>65</sup> and Wen et al.,<sup>66</sup> on moral dilemmas show that such situations become powerful learning opportunities when teachers facilitate them through ethical questions and guided reflection. Scuotto et al. even found that interactive moral interventions are more effective than one-way normative instruction.<sup>67</sup>

### **The Life Experiences of Boarding School Students as a Pedagogical Resource**

Life in a pesantren offers a wealth of pedagogical material. Dormitories, student organizations, community service, senior–junior relationships, religious discipline, the use of digital media, and interactions with the wider community present moral situations that can serve as topics for discussion. In line with Nuryana et al.,<sup>68</sup> Hefner,<sup>69</sup> and Purwanto et al.,<sup>70</sup> Discussions of dilemmas in Islamic boarding schools do not need to rely on abstract case studies; the best sources are students’ own experiences.

However, experience does not automatically lead to learning. Experience becomes a source of ethical learning only when it is facilitated by reflection.<sup>71</sup> Without facilitation, the routines of the pesantren can slip into habits devoid of moral awareness.<sup>72</sup> Through reflection, daily experiences such as leading the organization, managing dormitory conflicts, carrying out communal tasks, or dealing with personality differences among

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<sup>63</sup> Steć, Kulik, and Wendołowska, “From Supporting Moral Competence to Fostering Spiritual Growth: The Psycho-Didactic Potential of the Konstanz Method of Dilemma Discussion (KMDD®).”

<sup>64</sup> K M Hartvigsen, “‘Life Skills Are Everything’: How Do Norwegian Secondary Religious Education Teachers Perceive the Concept of Life Skills?,” *Religious Education* 120, no. 4 (2025): 330–46, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00344087.2025.2510749>.

<sup>65</sup> Megregian et al., “Essential Components of Midwifery Ethics Education: Results of a Delphi Study.”

<sup>66</sup> Wen et al., “Enhancing Nursing Ethics Education: Comparing the PAD Model and Traditional Lecture-Based Learning.”

<sup>67</sup> Scuotto et al., “Digital Interventions to Support Morality: A Scoping Review.”

<sup>68</sup> Z Nuryana, E T Somae, and A M Nasih, “Success Story in Life-Based Learning: How Pesantren Transforms Real-Life Experiences into Educational Gold,” in *Lifelong Learning Book Series*, vol. 37, 2026, 317–29, [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-032-16731-6\\_21](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-032-16731-6_21).

<sup>69</sup> Hefner, “Moral Custodianship between Friends: Girlhood, Class, and Islamic Education in Indonesia.”

<sup>70</sup> Purwanto et al., “Optimizing Student Character Education through the Pesantren Program at the Islamic Boarding School of the Universitas Islam Indonesia.”

<sup>71</sup> Hartvigsen, “Discussions of Ethical Dilemmas: Developing Ethical Competence and Life Skills in Upper Secondary Religious Education in Norway.”

<sup>72</sup> I Font Jiménez et al., “Reflective-Based Learning for Nursing Ethical Competency during Clinical Practices,” *Nursing Ethics* 30, no. 4 (2023): 598–613, <https://doi.org/10.1177/09697330221140513>.

students help students understand the values at stake, the parties affected, the available options,<sup>73</sup> and how to justify decisions morally and religiously.<sup>74</sup>

### **The Tension Between Authority and Deliberation**

The implementation of the ADK Model faces serious structural challenges. This analysis of the tension represents a theoretical contribution derived from the literature, particularly Hanif et al.<sup>75</sup> and Sahin<sup>76</sup> Rather than a direct empirical synthesis, it is a hypothesis that still needs to be tested. Pesantren rely on the sacred authority of the kiai, a strict senior–junior hierarchy, and a culture of obedience that disciplines dissent. In contrast, discussions of ethical dilemmas within the KMDD tradition assume equality of voice, openness to differences, and psychological safety to take positions differing from authority. It is this tension that determines whether the ADK Model is truly realized or is quietly domesticated into a format that appears deliberative yet still reproduces authority.

*First*, the epistemic authority of the kiai. Religious and moral truth is often understood to flow from the kiai as the inheritor of the knowledge *of the salaf al-ṣāliḥ*. Deliberation that opens space for santri to take a position different from that of the kiai can therefore appear not merely disrespectful, but an epistemological issue. Sahin aptly highlights this challenge: how to foster reflective spirituality without undermining the structure of Islamic scholarly authority.<sup>77</sup>

*Second*, the dominant format *of bahtsul masail*. This tradition provides a space for deliberation, but it is more oriented toward classical text-based fiqh fatwas than toward open ethical deliberation; the final decision usually rests with the muṣaḥḥiḥ or a council of elders rather than with consensus among participants. Using it as a pedagogical analogy requires acknowledging this difference: students are invited to deliberate, but the structure of final authority needs to be modified so that the teacher or religious leader does not always become the provider of the “correct answer.”

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<sup>73</sup> Fino et al., “Implementing and Evaluating a Course in Professional Ethics for an Undergraduate Pharmacy Curriculum: A Feasibility Study.”

<sup>74</sup> Sahid et al., “Management of Student Characteristics through Extracurricular Activities in the School Environment Based on Islamic Boarding Schools.”

<sup>75</sup> Hanif et al., “Pesantren’s Resistance to Indonesia’s National Curriculum in Defense of Its Curriculum Model.”

<sup>76</sup> Sahin, “Critical Issues in Islamic Education Studies: Rethinking Islamic and Western Liberal Secular Values of Education.”

<sup>77</sup> Sahin, “Critical Issues in Islamic Education Studies: Rethinking Islamic and Western Liberal Secular Values of Education.”

*Third*, the risk of pedagogical co-optation. If adopted without critical awareness, dilemma discussions can become a tool for reproducing authority: they appear open, yet participants know that the “correct answer” has already been predetermined. Hanif et al. demonstrate that Islamic boarding schools actively resist the national curriculum to preserve their scholarly identity; pedagogical innovations may also be rejected or subtly modified to the point where they lose their deliberative power.<sup>78</sup> The implementation of the ADK Model, therefore, requires detection indicators: do students feel safe voicing minority positions, do facilitators refrain from giving premature answers, and are the cases raised truly dilemmatic, or do they already contain implied answers?

*Fourth*, differences in pesantren typologies. The suitability of the ADK Model varies across different types of pesantren. Modern pesantrens (such as Gontor and its affiliates), student pesantrens, and pesantrens integrated with formal schools tend to foster a culture of dialogue. Salafi pesantren, which emphasize the authoritative transmission of classical texts through *sorogan* and *bandongan* as well as strict hierarchies, require much more careful adaptation. A realistic entry point could be the strengthening of structured *muhasabah*, written reflections after study sessions, or discussions limited to cases with flexible fiqh precedents, rather than directly adopting the highly egalitarian KMDD format.

These tensions do not invalidate the ADK Model; by addressing them openly, its implementation actually becomes more realistic. This model should be treated as a general framework that requires contextual adaptation to pesantren typologies, local cultures, and institutional leadership. An implementation that is sensitive to the dynamics of authority will be more sustainable than one that mechanically imports deliberative formats from secular education.

### **Ethical Dilemmas with Structural Awareness**

If the santri’s life experiences serve as the raw material for moral learning, then discussing ethical dilemmas is the process of refining that material. Santri develop ethical competence when allowed to confront moral cases, identify value conflicts, formulate reasons, listen to other perspectives, and assess consequences. Thus, dilemmas function as structured pedagogical tools, not merely as stories about moral issues.

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<sup>78</sup> Hanif et al., “Pesantren’s Resistance to Indonesia’s National Curriculum in Defense of Its Curriculum Model.”

Teachers can link discussions of ethical dilemmas to traditions such as *musyawarah*, *halaqah*, *bahtsul masail*, *nasihat*, and *muhasabah*, while acknowledging the structural tensions identified. For these discussions to foster ethical competence rather than merely exchanging opinions or confirming predetermined answers, teachers must meet two conditions. *First*, explicit pedagogical *scaffolding*: students are guided to identify the values at stake, who is affected, the available actions, the potential consequences, relevant ethical principles, and the most responsible decision.<sup>79</sup> *Second*, a conscious exercise of authority: facilitators (*ustadz/musyrif*) are trained to refrain from premature answers, to respect minority positions, and to distinguish between cases with clear *fiqh* answers and truly dilemmatic cases. This strategy aligns with Hartvigsen's findings on ethical questions and case expansion, as well as the active-reflective learning approach in professional ethics education.<sup>80</sup>

Thus, the discussion of ethical dilemmas can avoid three shortcomings at once: moral education that is overly normative (focusing solely on right and wrong without understanding complexity), ethical education that is overly procedural (decisions made independently of religious values), and superficial simulations of deliberation (where a dialogic format is maintained while ultimate authority continues to reproduce a single message). In pesantren that meaningfully adopt the ADK Model, Islamic values remain the foundation. Students are trained to apply them through structured reasoning, dialogue, and reflection, while a space for civilized disagreement is maintained as part of the pedagogy.

### **Ethical Competence as a Moral Language Amid Religious Moderation and Digital Challenges**

As outlined in Table 8, the six dimensions of ethical competence share functional similarities with the pesantren tradition. However, the “tension” column underscores that ethical competence is not merely a rebranding of the tradition, but rather a pedagogical articulation that acknowledges both convergence and structural differences. Certain dimensions, such as moral courage, which involves internal critique, even demand new

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<sup>79</sup> E Kurt and A Özsaban, “Effectiveness of Active Learning Methods in Nursing Ethics Education: A Quasi-Experimental Study,” *Nursing Ethics* 33, no. 1 (2026): 67–83, <https://doi.org/10.1177/09697330251366602>.

<sup>80</sup> Hartvigsen, “Discussions of Ethical Dilemmas: Developing Ethical Competence and Life Skills in Upper Secondary Religious Education in Norway.”

spaces that traditional formats do not always provide.<sup>81</sup> The implications for evaluation are direct: while character education is typically measured through compliance and surface-level behavior, the ethical competency framework expands this to include students' ability to recognize dilemmas, construct moral arguments, engage in civilized dialogue, make responsible decisions, and critically reflect on them.<sup>82</sup>

This relevance is becoming increasingly urgent in the context of religious moderation and digital challenges. Islamic boarding schools are positioned as vital spaces for fostering moderation, tolerance, interfaith competence, and social literacy. Moderation cannot be taught merely as a concept; it must be cultivated as the ability to weigh differences, manage conflicts, and make fair decisions in concrete situations. This is where the discussion of ethical dilemmas connects directly to the ADK Model.

Students can discuss dilemmas surrounding the limits of tolerance, the ethics of preaching on social media, the dissemination of unverified religious information, relationships with followers of other religions, or criticism of differing opinions within the Muslim community. Such cases demonstrate that moderation is not a bland middle ground but an ethical capacity to uphold religious principles while respecting the dignity of others. The digital landscape intensifies this need. Today's santri face online religious authorities, sermon clips taken out of context, disinformation, and viral culture. Ethics education that merely imposes prohibitions is insufficient; it must train santri to evaluate, select, and take responsibility for what they consume and produce online.

### **Theoretical Contributions and Pedagogical Implications**

This study proposes three theoretical contributions that address the three research questions. *First*, it reinterprets moral education in pesantren as the foundation for the development of ethical competencies: akhlak is understood not merely as inherited norms, but as a source of values that can be operationalized through moral sensitivity, ethical reasoning, dialogue, decision-making, moral courage, and reflection (RQ1). *Second*, it bridges two streams of literature that have long run parallel: scholars of pesantren who emphasize akhlak, character, moderation, exemplary behavior, and pesantren culture, and

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<sup>81</sup> Sargeant and Trask-Kerr, "Character Education as Curriculum-Making in the Humanities: A Scoping Review."

<sup>82</sup> Villacís, Naval, and de la Fuente, "Character Strengths, Moral Motivation, and Vocational Identity in Adolescents and Young Adults: A Scoping Review."

scholars of dilemma-based discussions who emphasize the pedagogy of moral reasoning, ethical decision-making, and moral competence through the concept of ethical competence (RQ2). *Third*, formulating the Ethics–Dilemma–Ethical Competence Model as an iterative cycle that shares a structure with Kolb’s experiential learning cycle and the KMDD ( ) but differs at its starting point: The ADK model begins not with generic experiences or abstract cases, but with the moral values of the pesantren that interact with the students’ life experiences, making theological-cultural contextualization an intrinsic component (RQ3).

These findings suggest the need for a more reflective, dialogic, and experience-based moral education. Teachers, religious instructors, supervisors, and caregivers can use real-life situations students face as discussion topics, and these situations do not need to be dramatic. Everyday dilemmas such as conflicts with roommates, responsibility for tasks, rule violations, organizational trust, social media ethics, or attitudes toward differing opinions can serve as powerful material for ethical learning when effectively facilitated.

This learning process should be guided by the following questions: what values are at stake, who is affected, what options for action are available, what consequences might arise, which ethical principles are relevant, and how can decisions be morally and religiously justified. These questions guide students from spontaneous reactions toward more mature ethical reasoning. Facilitator training is crucial so that teachers can lead discussions without rushing to provide “the correct answer,” a skill distinct from the transmission methods used in *sorogan* and *bandongan* formats, and one that is not acquired automatically. In line with this, character education evaluation should go beyond memorization, compliance, and superficial behavior, for example, through reflective journals, case studies, group discussions, character portfolios, community service projects, or written reflections after activities.

### **Limitations of the Study and Future Research Directions**

The Methodology section outlines the methodological limitations of this study: reliance on two databases, exclusion of *gray literature*, screening by a single reviewer, and reliance on metadata. As a scoping review, this study maps and synthesizes the literature but does not empirically test the effectiveness of ethical dilemma discussions; therefore, causal claims cannot yet be made. Most of the literature on ethical dilemmas

originates from general religious education and professional education; its application in Islamic boarding schools requires theological, cultural, and pedagogical adaptations that cannot be assumed. The classifications of core, connecting, and supporting elements are analytical in nature and may be categorized differently by other researchers.

Future research should empirically test the ADK Model across various types of Islamic boarding schools (Salafi, modern, madrasah-based, and tahfiz). Qualitative studies could explore how students perceive moral dilemmas, how teachers facilitate ethical discussions, and, most importantly, how the authority of religious leaders shapes moral judgment. A mixed-methods study could develop instruments to measure moral sensitivity, ethical reasoning, moral courage, and reflection on actions before and after an intervention. At the same time, comparing Salafi and modern pesantren would test the model's applicability across typologies. An ethnography of authority in moral discussions would deepen our understanding of when ethical considerations become meaningful. These limitations do not diminish the value of this scoping review as a systematic initial mapping but rather highlight the need for further empirical and contextual research.

## **Conclusion**

This study reconceptualizes the framework of the relationship between akhlak and ethical competence in pesantren education, based on a scoping review of 78 documents from Scopus and ERIC. Four themes emerged from this review: the pesantren as a normative moral ecology; the expansion of its functions to include reflective education; the discussion of ethical dilemmas as a pedagogical bridge; and ethical competence as an operational form of akhlak.

Ethics and ethical competence are not mutually exclusive. Ethics provides a dispositional foundation, while ethical competence trains students to serve as a foundation when values conflict. The six identified dimensions, moral sensitivity, ethical reasoning, ethical dialogue, ethical decision-making, moral courage, and reflection on actions, share functional similarities with *musyawarah*, *bahtsul masail*, and *muhasabah*, although structural differences exist.

The Character, Dilemma, Ethical Competence (ADK) Model offers a seven-stage iterative cycle. Its starting point is Islamic values, not an experience-based learning framework labeled as Islamic. Theoretically, this model bridges the gap between pesantren studies and the ethics education literature, which have long operated separately.

In practice, it provides educators with more concrete evaluation indicators than simply measuring behavioral compliance.

One thing that needs to be emphasized: the tension between the authoritarian culture of Islamic boarding schools and deliberative pedagogy, particularly in Salafi boarding schools, is not an issue that can be circumvented or avoided when this model is implemented. It is a prerequisite that must be confronted head-on. The ADK model itself remains a general framework that requires adaptation to each pesantren's context. This study has limitations: its scope is limited to two databases and does not include *grey literature*.

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