Religious Character Internalization through Religious-Based School Activities

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine the process of internalizing students' religious character through activity-based programs at MI PAS Baitul Qur'an Gontor Ponorogo. The research employed a descriptive qualitative approach with data collected through observation, interviews, and documentation. The findings reveal that the internalization of students' religious character is carried out through several key stages: (1) discipline, by implementing "*teng komando*" rules, as well as a system of punishment and reward; (2) habituation, through daily routines such as congregational prayers, Qur'an memorization (*tahfidz*), and the 6S culture (smile, greet, salute, polite, and ready); (3) exemplary practice, by positioning teachers and all school stakeholders as role models who consistently demonstrate positive behavior; and (4) creation of a conducive environment, supported by adequate facilities and educational media such as "talking walls" and consistent enforcement of discipline among all school members. The novelty of this study lies in demonstrating that an activity-based internalization process significantly shapes students' religious character. The outcomes include improved discipline in daily life, enhanced independence in various activities, the development of politeness in behavior and communication, the practice of honesty in interactions, and a stronger sense of personal responsibility.

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Introduction

Education is one of the important elements in determining a country's category of progress (Muslimin & Cahyati, 2022). Therefore, various countries in the world are increasingly competing to improve the quality of their education so as not to fall into the lagging category (Rahim et al., 2018). Education can also be used as a means to improve the standard of living of the people in a country and can also be used as a means to realize the noble aspirations of the Indonesian nation (Sururun et al., 2024). As stated in a segment of the preamble to the Indonesian Constitution in the Fourth Paragraph, which reads: "...to advance general welfare, intellectualize the life of the nation, and participate in the implementation of world order..."(Rosidin, 2021).

Education in Indonesia is inseparable from various complex problems that are not easy to handle, such as those concerning human resources, the learning system, school infrastructure, and the core issue with a very high level of urgency, namely the crisis of character education among students (santri) (Hidayat & Syam, 2020). When discussing character education, it is inseparable from the morals, ethics, and good manners of the students. Whereas good education is education that doesn't stop only at transferring knowledge and skills, but also focuses on forming good morals in students (Nurkholis, 2013).

The research results of Ismail, Djamali at. al. (2022) state that character is a way of thinking and behaving that becomes the distinguishing trait of each individual for living and cooperating, whether within the scope of the family, community, nation, or state (Amin, 2022). The research results of Devianti, et. al. (2020) also show that character constitutes disposition, nature, innate quality, and habit. This means that people with character are those who possess a certain disposition, nature, innate quality, and habituation that distinguishes them from others and becomes the hallmark of the individual for interacting in a wider scope such as the family, nation, and state (Magdalena et al., 2020).

Character is not innate, cannot be inherited, cannot appear on its own, and cannot be measured, but rather is consciously shaped and built to form a good character, as repeatedly stated by Ir. Soekarno, the first president of the Republic of Indonesia, who said that "religion is an absolute element in national and character building (Mahmudah et al., 2023). This is also in line with the research results of Abdul Majid and Dian Andayani (2011) which state that character must have a clear foundation, and that foundation must be religion.

The process of internalizing the religious character of santri will be more optimal if the educational institution is capable of combining various methods of internalizing religious values in santri to develop good character within the santri so that they can become individuals with ethics and noble morals (Mahmudiyah & Mulyadi, 2021). By using

the right method in the process of internalizing religious character, it is hoped that the character intended to be formed in the santri can be deeply and optimally embedded (Ardiani et al., 2018).

Discussing character education in more depth, the Ministry of Education and Culture (Kemendikbud) states that the current Merdeka Curriculum includes 6 characters that need to be instilled in students (santri) in accordance with the Pancasila Student Profile: believing in, being devoted to God Almighty, and having noble morals; having global diversity; being independent; working together (mutual cooperation); being critically reasoning; and being creative (Aziz & Hasanah, 2022). Based on the six character values above, the religious character value is already covered, stemming from the value of believing in, being devoted to God Almighty, and having noble morals, which is certainly related to religion (Firdaus et al., 2022). Given the religious diversity in Indonesia, the context of this discussion refers to the Islamic religion (Syam et al., 2020). Forming good character in santri is very important, considering that santri are the young generation who will continue the nation, and the prestige of a country depends on the character of its youth (Puspitasari et al., 2022).

Religious is the belief or conviction in a natural force beyond human capability (Gunawan et al., 2022). Religiousness is a person's obedience to their religion by practicing it with surrender and accepting the existing rules sincerely and daring to sacrifice their soul, body, and thoughts for the sake of the religion (Hakim et al., 2019). The research results of Musbikin, I (2021). state that religious character is behaving and acting ethically in accordance with what is taught in education. Based on the description of religious character above, it can be concluded that religious character is a way of thinking and behaving that becomes the distinguishing trait of each individual in accordance with what is taught in religious education for living and cooperating in a wider scope (Huda et al., 2021).

This religious character education is taught to santri so that they can perform good deeds, show empathy, tolerance, and become responsible individuals who are grateful (Shinta & Ain, 2021). By strengthening the foundation of character education and instilling good manners from an early age, santri can be prevented from negative and deviant behavior (Sumaryanti et al., 2020). The impact of losing religious character is that santri will lose the moral foundation and spiritual values that serve as a guide for human life (Syam et al., 2018). Consequently, santri will be more likely to behave poorly, such as being: selfish, irresponsible, lying, not showing empathy towards others, and so on (Nadziroh, 2020). Moreover, the loss of religious character can make children easily swayed and prone to negative behavior such as drug abuse, violence, cyberbullying, and other criminal acts (Syam et al., 2021). Therefore, it is important for individuals to strengthen their religious character as a form of defense and a solid foundation for living life (Estiningsih et al., 2023).

Based on the researcher's observation at MI PAS Baitul Qur'an Gontor Ponorogo, the researcher found several unique aspects: that this madrasah (Islamic school) prioritizes religious character education based on the Qur'an and Hadith with a Gontori spirit, and there is a mandatory boarding program (mukim) for 6th-grade santri for 1 academic year, which is rarely found in other elementary schools (SD/MI). Generally, at the primary school level, there is no obligation for santri to stay or board (mondok).

Seeing these unique aspects, the researcher is interested in studying the process of internalizing the religious character of santri based on activities (case study: MI PAS Baitul Qur'an Gontor Ponorogo). The research location was chosen at MI PAS Baitul Qur'an Gontor Ponorogo because the school is based on character education, which aligns with what the researcher wants to examine regarding the formation of santri character.

Methods

This research uses a descriptive qualitative research method with a case study type of research. Zuchri Abdussamad (2021) states that the qualitative research method is a research method used to study natural objects, where the researcher acts as the key instrument, data collection techniques are carried out through triangulation, data analysis is inductive, and qualitative research results emphasize meaning rather than generalization. This research was conducted at MI PAS Baitul Qur'an Gontor Ponorogo with the consideration that the school actively implements various activities that prioritize character education based on the Qur'an and Hadith, and the school has a mandatory program rarely applied in other schools: the mandatory one-year boarding program (wajib mukim) for 6th-grade students. The subjects in this study are the school principal, the 6th-grade homeroom teacher, the *kepesantrenan* (boarding school affairs) supervisor, and 4 6th-grade santri (students) of MI PAS Baitul Qur'an Gontor Ponorogo.

The data collection techniques in this study are observation, interviews, and documentation. These data collection techniques were carried out to gather information related to the activity-based process of internalizing the religious character of santri at MI PAS Baitul Qur'an Gontor Ponorogo.

The data validity check in this research uses source triangulation and technique triangulation. Source triangulation is checking data validity from various sources and informants to ensure the consistency of information. Technique triangulation is comparing and checking the data obtained from the three data collection techniques—observation, interviews, and documentation—to ensure the data's validity and thereby produce credible data (Alfansyur, 2020).

Data analysis is the process of systematically searching for, arranging, and drawing conclusions from the results of observations, interviews, and other means. The data analysis technique in this research is descriptive analytical, with steps following the

suggestions of Miles, Huberman, and Saldana, namely data collection, data reduction, data display (presentation), and conclusion drawing (Thalib, 2022)

Results and Discussion

1. Activity-Based Process of Internalizing Religious Character

MI PAS Baitul Qur'an Gontor Ponorogo has implemented several methods for the internalization of religious character through various religious activities aimed at forming the students' character. The religious activities for shaping the santri's religious character can be seen in the following interview results table:

Table 1. Interview Results on the Process of Religious Character Internalization

Theme	Informant	Discussion Results
Internalization of activity-based religious character	1	The process of value internalization is carried out through guidance or direction, practice/training, assignments, and the habituation of religious activities.
	2	Habituation through welcoming santri in the morning, the 6S culture (Smile, Greet, Salute, Polite, Courteous, Patient), tahfidz al-Qur'an (Qur'an memorization), studies for righteous children (*kajian anak sholeh*), short religious lectures (*kultum*), congregational prayers (Fajr, Dhuhr, Asr, Maghrib, Isha, Dhuha prayer, and Friday prayer), and Islamic High Holy Day commemorations (PHBI).
	3	Implementation of character education: The Madrasah instills religious character through congregational prayer, daily monitoring of children via a diary book, and the teaching of five main subjects: fiqih (Islamic jurisprudence), aqidah (creed), ski (Islamic history), Qur'an, and Hadith. Islamic values are also instilled through dress code and politeness.
	4	The methods applied by the school are habituation, implementing discipline, role modeling, creating a conducive atmosphere, and having take-home study sheets during school holidays as a form of supervision for the santri.

Table 1 explains that the school emphasizes religious character education. Religious character, as a foundation, needs to be formed first as a defense for santri in facing future life. The internalization of religious character is applied through several methods as implemented at MI PAS Baitul Qur'an Gontor Ponorogo: habituation, role modeling, discipline, internalization, and the creation of a conducive atmosphere. This data is strengthened by the results of observations conducted by the researcher during the study at MI PAS Baitul Qur'an Gontor Ponorogo. Field observation results show that the process of internalizing santri's religious character is carried out through various activities such as welcoming santri upon arrival in the morning, Dhuha prayer and recitation of Asmaul Husna (99 names of Allah), tahfidz al-Qur'an, Qur'an recitation (mengaji), Dhuhr congregational prayer and kultum, Asr congregational prayer, Friday prayer, Maghrib prayer, Isha prayer, and Fajr congregational prayer for boarding 6th-grade santri, and additional activities for boarding santri such as Qur'an recitation after

Asr prayer and before Maghrib prayer, and tahfidz after Maghrib prayer. This is then reinforced with various religious activities such as PHBI and pre-scheduled weekly, monthly, and yearly activities.

2. Results of the Religious Character Internalization Process

Table 2. Results of the Religious Character Internalization Process

Theme	Informant	Discussion Results
Results of religious character internalization	1	Politeness when meeting elders by bowing, dressing modestly, and cultivating the 6S culture.
	2	The formation of santri independence by not relying on others, preparing all their own needs such as prayer equipment and others.
	3	The character of honesty is beginning to form, honesty in carrying out daily activities, honesty in doing assignments.
	4	The character of discipline is beginning to form, santri are starting to understand the pattern at school and the pesantren (boarding school), obeying school rules, immediately taking ablution water, and heading to the mosque when the time for prayer arrives.
	4	Responsibility for themselves and their worship is becoming visible.

The internalization process that has been carried out ultimately has a significantly good impact on the santri's religious character, which is embedded in the santri and is represented in the form of discipline, independence, honesty, politeness, and responsibility. Based on the results of the interviews and observations as described above, the santri's religious character is formed through religious activities and several internalizing educational methods applied by the school, such as habituation, role modeling, discipline, internalization, and the creation of a conducive environment. The religious aspect of the santri is seen in the change in the santri's personality to better, punctual worship, carrying out His commands and staying away from His prohibitions, modest dressing, having good politeness towards elders, and good manners toward peers. Changes in the aspect of discipline and responsibility can be seen in santri who obey school rules and carry out worship and other activities on time. The aspect of independence can be seen from santri who are able to prepare all their equipment, both for worship and other daily activities. The aspect of honesty can be seen from santri who carry out assignments, exams, and other activities independently and confidently without cheating or copying the thoughts of others. The aspect of politeness can be seen from santri who are able to cultivate the 6S culture in daily life, santri who have good morals, manners, and etiquette towards peers and elders, and santri who have a modest and covering dress style.

3. The Activity-Based Process of Internalizing Religious Character in Santri

Based on the research conducted by Hidayatullah, it was found that the process of internalizing santri's religious character involves several character education methods.

The method for internalizing religious character must be precise so that the santri and all school members can participate in the value internalization process, thereby forming santri with the desired religious character. The process of character internalization, according to Hidayatullah's (2010) research, includes: discipline, habituation, role modeling, and creating a conducive atmosphere.
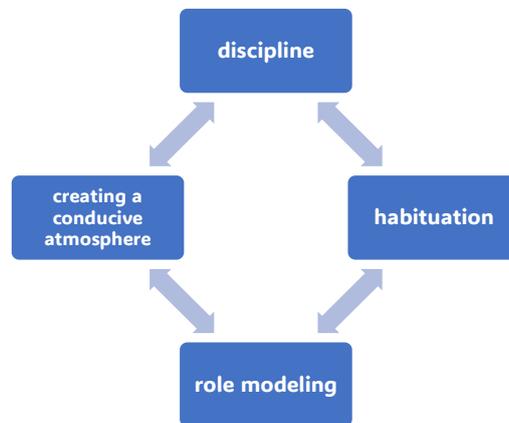
Figure 1. The Process of Religious Character Internalization

Based on the researcher's field findings, MI PAS Baitul Qur'an Gontor Ponorogo applies several methods in the process of internalizing santri's religious character, which align with Hidayatullah's theory.

First is discipline. In the internalization process at the school, there is the term teng komando (command structure) which contains discipline guidelines such as school rules, dress codes, how to socialize (*bermuamalah)*, how to worship, and so forth, which must be followed by all school members. There is a central information system used to mobilize santri when prayer times and other activities begin, and a punishment and reward system is applied: santri who make mistakes are given educational warnings or punishments, while those who do good are given rewards in the form of praise or gifts. This is consistent with Umi Baroroh's (2018) research, which states that the presence of punishment and reward in Islamic education aims to discipline santri.Second is the habituation method, which involves activities performed repeatedly until they become accustomed and turn into a routine. The habituation implemented at MI PAS Baitul Qur'an Gontor Ponorogo includes: welcoming santri in the morning, the 6S culture (senyum/smile, salam/salute, sapa/greet, sopan/polite, santun/courteous, siap/ready), tahfidz al-Qur'an, studies for righteous children (kajian anak sholeh), kultum, congregational prayers (Fajr, Dhuhr, Asr, Maghrib, Isha, Dhuha prayer, and Friday prayer), and Islamic High Holy Day commemorations (PHBI). At this habituation stage, santri are trained to normalize good deeds in their daily activities. With the routine and consistent implementation of habituation, disciplined santri will be formed, allowing them to become accustomed to doing good without coercion from others. It is the responsibility of those closest to them,

such as parents and educators at school, to create a healthy environment with good habituation that can strengthen the santri's religious character (Satuti et al., 2023)

Third is role modeling. At this stage, the role of the ustadz-ustadzah (teachers) as role models for the santri in the school is crucial. The tangible examples provided by the ustadz-ustadzah, whether in behavior, actions, attitudes, or speech, tend to be imitated by the santri (Muhammad, 2020). Role modeling in the school is not only applied by the ustadz-ustadzah but also by all stakeholders who must set an example for the santri, for instance, by showing good example in socializing with santri, arriving on time, dressing neatly, always maintaining cleanliness, speaking well, and behaving politely and courteously, etc. Through such role modeling, santri will emulate what is taught by their ustadz-ustadzah, allowing the process of internalizing religious character to be well embedded and forming santri who possess noble character (akhlakul karimah).

In Islam itself, Allah SWT has sent a messenger as an excellent role model (uswah hasanah) for all mankind, namely Prophet Muhammad SAW, to improve human morals. As stated in the word of Allah (Qur'an Surah Al-Ahzab 34:21):

$$\text{لَقَدْ كَانَ لَكُمْ فِيْ رَسُوْلِ اللّٰهِ أُسْوَةٌ حَسَنَةٌ لِّمَنْ كَانَ يَرْجُوا اللّٰهَ وَالْيَوْمَ الْأٰخِرَ وَذَكَرَ اللّٰهَ كَثِيْرًا}$$

Meaning: Indeed, in the Messenger of Allah, you have a good role model for anyone who hopes for [the meeting with] Allah and the Last Day and [who] remembers Allah often (*Al-Qur'an Dan Terjemahan*, 2007)

Fourth is creating a conducive milieu (environment). A conducive school environment plays an important role in the process of internalizing santri's religious character. A conducive milieu needs to be created so that the process of internalizing values and morals in santri can be well instilled, allowing the goal of forming religious character to be achieved (Fathurrahman & Putri Dewi, 2019). Creating a conducive milieu certainly needs to be supported by adequate facilities, as available at MI PAS Baitul Qur'an Gontor Ponorogo, including comfortable classrooms, a library, a laboratory, a sports field, a place of worship, and rooms for extracurricular activities, as well as "talking walls" that can be used as a means of religious value internalization. In addition to adequate facilities, the creation of a conducive milieu is also supported by the concrete actions of all school members who are disciplined, independent, friends who always encourage good deeds, and *ustadz-ustadzah* who provide positive examples, thereby creating a good milieu in the process of internalizing santri's religious character.

4. Results of the Activity-Based Religious Character Internalization Process

Religious character is the behavior or morals of a person in accordance with what is taught in the world of education (Musbikin, 2021). It can be said that religious character is a way of thinking and behaving that becomes the distinguishing trait of each individual

in accordance with what is taught in religious education so that they can live and cooperate in a wider scope. The religious character in santri is represented in daily life through the attitudes of discipline, independence, honesty, politeness, and responsibility. The positive character found in santri during its internalization is not influenced by only one internalization process but by several, such as role modeling, habituation, discipline, and the creation of a conducive milieu.

The religious character internalization process at MI PAS Baitul Qur'an Gontor Ponorogo ultimately results in a significantly good change in the santri's religious character. For instance, santri are beginning to show their disciplined attitude in daily life, which is inseparable from the consistency of the principal and educators in enforcing existing school rules. Consequently, the santri's awareness slowly grows, leading to disciplined santri who obey existing rules. This is in line with the Self-Regulation theory by Albert Bandura (2022) which emphasizes that a person can regulate their own behavior through 3 aspects: self-observation, self-judgment, and self-reaction. Thus, through this self-regulation process, santri will try to understand and realize the importance of rules, leading them to voluntarily follow them without coercion. The results of the implementation of discipline at MI PAS Baitul Qur'an Gontor Ponorogo can be seen from santri who are able to perform worship on time and immediately head to the mosque when the time for prayer arrives, santri who obey school regulations and rules, submit assignments on time, dispose of waste properly, arrive at school on time, and so forth.

Santri are able to apply an attitude of independence in various activities. Individual independence can be seen in their ability to meet their own needs without depending on others. Everyone certainly has different needs, such as physical needs (eating and drinking), the need for safety, the need for relationships, the need for social status, or the need for recognition of their abilities (Bari & Hidayat, 2022). With the mandatory boarding program (mukim) for 6th-grade santri at MI PAS Baitul Qur'an Gontor Ponorogo, santri are taught various life skills such as cooking, washing clothes, washing eating utensils, cleaning their rooms, tidying their cupboards, and so forth, which will strengthen their independence in daily life. The result of the internalization process toward the santri's independent character can be seen in santri who are beginning to master various life skills such as being able to meet their own needs independently without relying on others, santri who are able to adapt to new environments, santri who are able to tidy their own cupboards and clothes, santri who are able to wash their own clothes and eating utensils, and so forth. These abilities prove that the independent character is beginning to form within the santri.

Santri can behave with politeness and courtesy in behavior and interaction with others. Politeness is closely related to an individual's ethics and morals. In this matter, the role modeling of an educator is very important in providing a real example to santri on how to act and behave well and courteously. This is in line with Albert Bandura's opinion

(in Lesilolo, 2018) on the modeling concept in social learning theory, which explains that a person learns by observing behavior, attitudes, and the results of behavioral learning. In this context, it shows that the role of close individuals like ustadz-ustadzah at school is very important, for example, supervisors who show respect and courtesy, and speak in good and polite language. These are concrete examples that can be imitated by santri, so the santri's polite and courteous character will gradually be well formed. Based on this, the results of forming the character of politeness and courtesy at MI PAS Baitul Qur'an Ponorogo can be seen and proven by santri acting deferentially (*takdim*) towards their *ustadz-ustadzah* or elders, santri who are already able to apply the 6S culture in daily life, santri who wear clothing that covers their aurat (modesty), and so forth. These visible behaviors indicate that the santri's attitude of politeness and courtesy has begun to be instilled and well-formed, and the santri are starting to apply it in their daily lives.

Santri can habituate themselves to being honest in their dealings (bermuamalah). Honesty is a trait that reflects words and actions consistent with the facts on the ground without reducing or adding information (Sultonurohmah, 2017). As stated in the word of Allah (Qur'an Surah Al-Ahzab 33:70):

يَٰٓأَيُّهَا الَّذِيْنَ اٰمَنُوا اتَّقُوا اللهَ وَقُوْلُوْا قَوْلًا سَدِيْدًاۙ

Meaning: you who have believed, fear Allah and speak words of truth (Qur'an Surah Al Ahzab 33:70) (*Al-Qur'an Dan Terjemahan*, 2007).

The verse above explains that Allah commands the believers to fear Allah and always speak truthfully. In this matter, the role modeling of the *ustadz-ustadzah* is essential to provide an example and realize a positive environment. Enforcing santri discipline also needs to be applied, for example, with a reward and punishment system where *ustadz-ustadzah* will give praise to santri who are honest or educational punishment to santri who lie. Thus, santri will be inclined to do good and be honest rather than lie. Related to this, the santri's honest character at MI PAS Baitul Qur'an Gontor Ponorogo is proven by santri who are honest when taking exams, honest when doing assignments, honest and brave enough to take responsibility when they forget to do assignments or make other mistakes, and honest in both words and deeds. This indicates that santri are beginning to understand the essence of honesty and are starting to apply it in their daily lives.

Santri can be responsible for themselves. A school that actively involves santri in various activities will help santri develop their sense of responsibility. As explained in the Student Engagement theory by Fredricks Blumenfeld (Arifani, 2018), the student engagement theory includes 3 aspects, one of which is behavioral engagement, which is the form of active participation of santri in various activities such as teaching and learning activities, extracurricular activities, group work, and so forth. The active involvement of

santri in various school activities provides an opportunity for santri to develop leadership skills, cooperation with others, and responsibility for their duties. The responsibility of santri at MI PAS Baitul Qur'an Ponorogo has begun to be formed. This is proven by 6th-grade santri who are active in the OPAS (Student Organization/Boarding School Organization), showing responsibility for the tasks they undertake, such as the takmir (mosque committee) section, the kitchen section which is in charge of distributing food to every santri, the security section which ensures the safety and discipline of santri especially when prayer time arrives, and santri who are responsible for academic tasks, such as assignments from teachers that are done well and on time and are not plagiarized from the work of others.

From the researcher's analysis, the results of the activity-based process of internalizing santri's religious character at MI PAS Baitul Qur'an Gontor Ponorogo have met several indicators of religious character according to Marzuki: discipline, independence, politeness, honesty, and responsibility. This process of internalizing santri's religious character at MI PAS Baitul Qur'an Gontor Ponorogo ultimately provides a significant influence on the change in santri's religious character, making the santri more
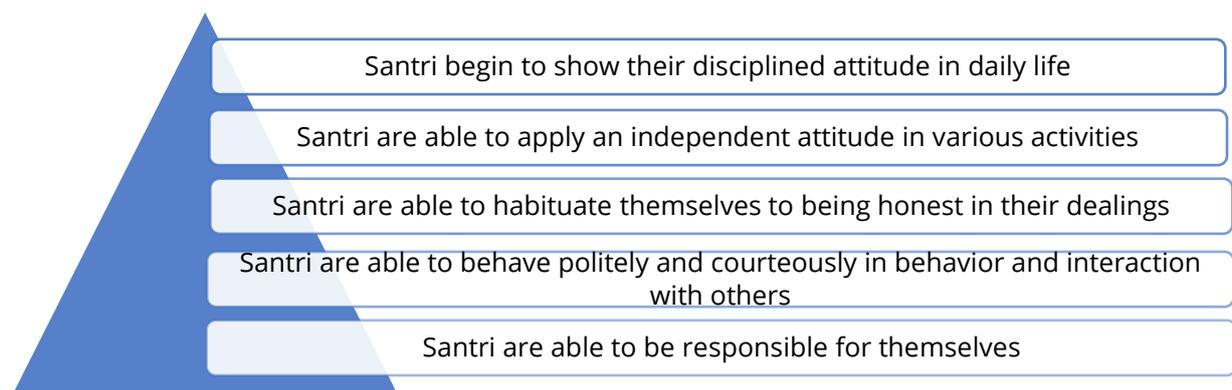
disciplined, independent, polite, honest, and responsible individuals as expected.

Figure 2. Results of the Religious Character Internalization Process

Conclusion

The activity-based process of internalizing religious character in santri at MI PAS Baitul Qur'an Gontor is implemented using several methods: namely, the discipline method, by applying strict rules such as *teng komando* (command structure), a punishment and reward system, and an information center to mobilize santri in various activities; second, the habituation method is carried out by repeatedly performing activities in order to familiarize the santri, such as the habituation of tahfidz (Qur'an memorization), the 6S culture (Smile, Greet, Salute, Polite, Courteous, Patient), congregational prayer, and PHBI (Islamic High Holy Day commemorations) to encourage santri to carry out activities consistently; third, the role modeling method, which is exemplified directly by *ustadz-ustadzah* (teachers) and all stakeholders as role models for

the santri by demonstrating positive attitudes and behavior; and fourth, creating a conducive milieu supported by adequate facilities, educational walls, and an environment that supports the process of internalizing religious values. With these methods, the process of internalizing santri's religious character can run effectively and ultimately results in the formation of santri who are able to be responsible for themselves, santri who are able to habituate themselves to being honest in their dealings (*bermuamalah*), santri who are able to behave politely and courteously in behavior and interaction with others, santri who are able to apply an independent attitude in various activities, and santri who begin to show their disciplined attitude in daily life.

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